

STUDY GUIDE

FOUR SESSIONS

# HAGAR



In the Face of Rejection,  
God Says I'm

*Significant*



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STUDY GUIDE | FOUR SESSIONS

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Nicole Johnson

*With Karen Lee-Thorp*

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*Known by Name: Hagar*

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# How This Study Works

## Hagar: Overlooked? Not Invisible.

Hagar was manipulated and betrayed by people in authority over her. People she trusted to know what was best. How would you respond in that situation? Hagar first lashed out and then ran away. Her story invites us to look at our own lives and ask, “What hurts have propelled me into shame and hiding from others or from God? Where am I paralyzed by a fear of rejection? What experiences have led me to question whether I matter in this world? Do I recoil at the idea of forgiving certain people? When it feels like things will never be okay again, is God still there? Does he even see me?”

Hagar’s story doesn’t wrap up with a neat bow. We are left not knowing what happened to her. Her story teaches us that we don’t always get to see the happy ending, but the unresolved things in our lives compel us to trust the God who knows the ending and is at work for our good.

*Hagar: In the Face of Rejection, God Says I’m Significant* is a study for women who want to get into the real, messy parts of our lives that are usually under wraps. Through each video session, we

will engage with a Bible teacher, a Christian counselor, and an actor portraying present-day scenarios. These leaders will help us explore the human perspective of Hagar: how she felt, how she saw herself, and how others saw her, as well as how we see ourselves. We will also discover God's perspective: how God sees Hagar, and how God sees us. Through these perspectives, we will find our own stories in the pages of Scripture.

A session of this study will go like this:

*Check In.* In Session 1 you'll introduce yourselves. In later sessions you'll have a chance to share something you discovered about yourself in-between the sessions.

*At a Glance: Hagar.* This is a quick snapshot of an age-old problem we still deal with today, Hagar's age-old solution or mistake, and a taste of God's wisdom on the subject.

*Video Notes.* Each video segment is 18–28 minutes long. It opens with a drama and then moves into a fast-paced teaching. Session 1 begins with all three of the presenters together, talking about the theme of the series. This study guide contains space for you to take notes on what you see in the video.

*Group Discussion.* The heart of the study is your conversation with the other women in your group. You'll be talking mainly about the real experiences of your lives. However, because this isn't group therapy, we strongly recommend that you commit yourself to the group ground rules discussed below.

*Closing Prayer.* End with your group leader or a volunteer reading aloud the prayer suggested in this section. Of course, any offered prayer is acceptable.

*Keep This Close.* These are a few short, memorable lines from the video that you may want to copy into your phone to go back to during the week.

*On Your Own.* Finally, you'll find activities you can select from to carry your exploration of the topic deeper during the week. There is one verse of Scripture you can memorize and come back to over the four sessions of the study. There are journaling ideas. You can read Hagar's story in the Bible. You can pray with guided quiet time or reflect on the drama. Do whichever of these activities you find helpful. Don't feel pressure to do more than you have time for. You'll have a chance to share something you got out of these activities when your group gathers next time. You'll also have a chance to recite your memory verse together.

## Group Ground Rules

This study gives you more of an opportunity to open up about your real life than most studies. You won't be pushed, but you will be invited, to talk about how you see yourself and how you live. But your group is not a therapy session. It's not led by a counselor. If you need professional counseling or a forum to share the story of your past, ask your group leader or church officials to recommend resources.

The following ground rules will help you stay on track. You should go over them in your first meeting to be sure that everyone understands and agrees.

*Confidentiality.* Everything shared in the group must stay in the group. Don't repeat to outsiders what others share, even if you are all friends. If a group member misses a meeting, don't



bring her up to date by sharing what others said in her absence. If something happens in the group that upsets you, don't discuss it with someone outside your group. Go to your group leader.

*Disclosure.* This should be a safe place to tell the group the difficult truths of your past. However, the group does not need all the ugly details. Give your group the four-or five-sentence summary of your situation. If you need someone to hear the whole story, ask your group leader to help you get connected with a counselor. She can help you find the person in your church staff who has the names of counselors in your area.

*Tears.* It's often good to cry when you share something hard. You're not embarrassing the group. If someone in your group cries, avoid words and actions that attempt to fix her sadness or solve her problem. Comfort is good; fixing is not. Don't let tears derail your time together. Keep going. The woman who has tears will be better sooner if the conversation carries on.

*Shared Airtime.* Everyone in the group needs an equal chance to talk. Avoid telling long stories, especially about your past or about what you are struggling with today. If you have a lot on your mind that needs to be said, ask your group leader to help you get connected with a counselor.

*Present Orientation.* Hagar's past will come up in the study, and you'll have some time to think about your past. But for group discussion, concentrate on talking about who you are today, shaped by your past, but not living in the past. Don't ask the group to sit through an account of what you went through. That's for counseling.

*Advice.* Avoid giving advice to other group members. If someone reveals a problem she is having and doesn't seem to know what to do about it, it can be tempting to suggest solutions. Avoid doing this. You can give her the gift of listening to her and accepting her as she is, and you can pray for her later on your own. Likewise, you should avoid asking the group to suggest solutions for situations you are facing. If you feel out of control and need help, ask your group leader to help you find a counselor.

## What Materials are Needed for a Successful Group?

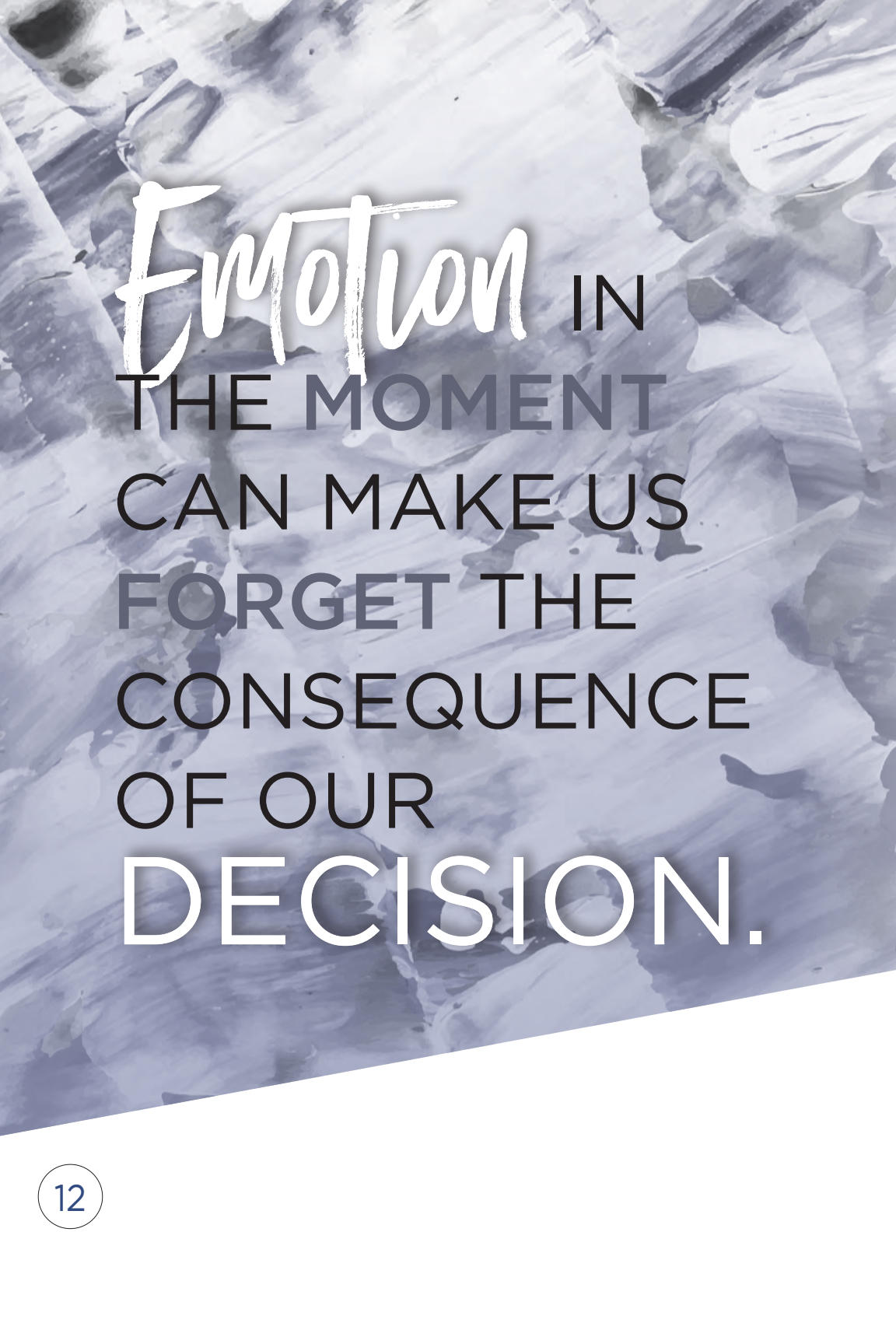
- Television monitor or screen
- DVD player
- Four-session DVD
- One study guide for each group member (you will be writing in the study guide, so you will each need a copy)
- Bible(s) (at least one for the group, but encourage all members to bring their Bibles)
- Pen or pencil for each person






SESSION 1

Exposing  
The Lie of  
shame



Emotion IN  
THE MOMENT  
CAN MAKE US  
FORGET THE  
CONSEQUENCE  
OF OUR  
DECISION.



Many of us are on a never-ending quest to counter messages from our world that we are insignificant. Maybe the message of insignificance comes from comparing ourselves to those who have wealth and status, or maybe we compare our perception of beauty. Maybe our idea of insignificance stems from stories of “better” mothers, or others who seem to have a sense of purpose that we lack. We may put enormous effort into a social media presence that says we have life all together and are achieving what we “should” be achieving. Yet in one instant, social media can shatter our security and make us question, “Do I measure up? Should I be doing this the way *she* does?”

In this study we’ll be introduced to a woman of the Bible named Hagar, the slave of an insecure and impatient woman named Sarah. (We all have some Sarah in us.) We’ll see how both Hagar and Sarah were desperate for significance, mired in the feeling that the world saw them as deficient, and hiding their shame by mistreating others. We’ll also discover that we’re not doomed to be stuck in patterns like this, because God sees us, he knows us, and he can be the person we run to when the world tells us we don’t matter.

Welcome to the first session of *Hagar: In the Face of Rejection, God Says I'm Significant*. To get started, give everyone a chance to do the following:

- Say your name, unless everyone in the group knows you. Then take one minute to tell a little about what your life was like in junior high school.
- Take a minute on your own and write down your response to this question (you won't have to share your answer): on a scale of 0 to 5, how confident are you that you totally belong to God despite your popularity or platform in the world? Mark where you are on the measuring line below.





*At a Glance:* **HAGAR**

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**Age-old problem:** Shame over feeling deficient in some way

**Age-old mistake:** Trying to hide shame by treating someone else like she's deficient

**God's timeless wisdom:** Run to God for refuge and acceptance. *"But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me"*

*(2 Timothy 1:12 ESV)*. It is difficult to feel less than or deficient when you first consider Jesus. Think of him first and your whole perspective of self will be righted, the shame the world may be throwing at you will suddenly seem irrational and irrelevant. Jesus stands guard on our behalf and defends our worth.



Play the video segment for Session 1. It's about 20 minutes long, and you will be introduced to three speakers. As you watch, use the following outline to record thoughts that stand out to you.

## DRAMA: *Nicole*

Feeling insignificant can lead to feeling like you don't matter.

Being treated like you are insignificant can lead to feeling like you are invisible.

## TEACHING: *Jada*

Sometimes we are a victim of someone else's choices (parents' addiction, bad relationships, etc.).

Sometimes the emotion of the moment can make us forget the consequences of our decision.

You can love Jesus and still feel like your life is heading in the wrong direction.

**TEACHING:** *fasey*

Shame is a feeling that starts with embarrassment, can quickly move to anger, and then to pride.

Shame will always look like hiding.

Remember the question: Does this reinforce, or does this release my shame?

**GOD'S** not just  
your hope, he's  
your *purpose.*

Leader, read each numbered prompt to the group.

**1** What stood out to you most from the video?

**2** Hagar was in part a victim of Sarah's and Abraham's choices. *They* chose to stop waiting for God to give them a child. *They* chose to make Hagar the surrogate mother for a child Abraham would have with her, a child they would adopt as their legal heir. She didn't have a say in the matter. What are some ways we today can be victims of someone else's choices?

**3** What do you think we can do about being victims of someone else's choices? What can God do?

4 Jada talked about hope. How strong are you in hope right now? What motivates you to have hope? What gets in the way?

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5 How do you define shame? What can move us to feel shame today?

### *Select a volunteer*

to read the following:

Shame always leads to hiding in some way. For example, Sarah felt shame over being unable to bear a child. In her culture, bearing children was the number one way women proved their worth to society. Without children, women were often seen as useless. Sarah decided she would hide behind her servant Hagar. Hagar would have a child with Abraham, and society would count it as Sarah's.

Unfortunately for Sarah, Hagar felt shame too. So, when Hagar got pregnant, she decided to hide her shame by tossing words, facial expressions, and body language of contempt at Sarah. Shame and hiding don't always move a person to become a wilting wallflower; they often move a person to lash out at others.

6 What does hiding from shame look like in our behavior today? Give some examples. Think of examples that involve attacking others as well as examples that look meek.

7 Read Hebrews 6:17-20. Instead of hiding in shame, we can flee for refuge to God's inner sanctuary, where Jesus has gone before us. How do you think fleeing for refuge in God is different from hiding in shame behind church or Bible study or spiritual practices?



*In preparation* for the coming week, write one thing you want to gain from your study time:

*(ex: hope for my future, a better understanding of who I am...)*

# Closing Prayer

Ask for a volunteer to read this prayer aloud over the group:

Creator God, thank you that you can bring good out of our suffering when we have been the victims of other people's choices. Thank you that you can even bring good out of our suffering when we have made choices that have landed us in places of forced servitude. We put into your hands all our shame, and all of the ways we hide from you and other people. Please come to us in our places of hiding and lead us out. We want to choose to take refuge in you. Thank you that you fully accept us as we are, in all our messiness. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Keep This Close

As you go on your way this week, here are some thoughts from the video that you may want to save in your phone or write on a sticky note so you can refer back to them:

- Even when we feel like victims, in God we are vindicated.
- God fully accepts us. He has set us free from condemnation and shame.
- Instead of hiding from people, we can run to God for refuge.





## SESSION 1

# *On Your Own*

**E**ach session of this study also includes activities you can do each day between group meetings. These will help you work through and into a deeper understanding of both the Bible and how it relates to your personal life. **Don't feel you need to do all of these activities. Choose those that are helpful to you. The goal is to grow and develop a stronger relationship with God.** There will be time at the beginning of your next meeting to share whatever you've learned from these activities.



# Memory Verse

*There are many good techniques that may help you memorize Bible verses. Here are some of them:*

- 1. Write out the verse by hand on paper, along with its reference (Genesis 16:13). We remember as much as 80% more of what we write by hand than what we type electronically. That's because handwriting stimulates a more helpful part of the brain than typing does.*
- 2. Even better, hand write the verse and reference five times.*
- 3. Read the verse aloud and act it out in an exaggerated way. Proclaim it dramatically. Actors have learned that the dramatic use of your body and voice will create associations in your brain.*
- 4. Go for a walk and recite the verse and reference aloud. Walking increases memory formation.*
- 5. Copy the verse and reference into your phone or onto a card you can keep with you.*
- 6. Return to the verse three times a day to rehearse it. Say it aloud. Do this for the whole four weeks of this study.*

*Learning the verse with its reference will help you find it in the Bible if you want to read the larger story around the verse.*



One thing we really hope you'll do is memorize a verse of the Bible. Committing verses to memory enables you to deeply internalize their truth and to have them with you when you need them. Here is the memory verse for this study:

*She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her:  
"You are the God who sees me."*

(GENESIS 16:13 NIV)

In this verse, Hagar is coming to multiple conclusions about her past, her present, and ultimately her future. She claims or names God *El Roi*, which means "God sees me." Think about that for a moment. In an instant, Hagar is made aware that she is not only seen, her life mattered and was recognized. Her pain, struggle, insecurity—vindicated at once because God declared that he saw her, he was paying attention, he had her.

## *In Real Life:*

### **DRAMA ACTIVITY:** Enough, Part 1

A former waitress becomes the manager of the diner where she works. She accepts the position because she needs the extra money to support herself and her young daughter. But the job begins to take over her life so that she scarcely sees her daughter anymore. This would be hard enough, but she feels the owners misled her and now treat her as if she doesn't matter.



1 Do you think the character in the story was correct in her assessment of her situation? What informs your belief?

2 What features of your life (if any) send you the message that you don't matter?

3 Are there roles or responsibilities in your life that tell you that you do matter? What are those things? Are there people to whom you matter who let you know this?

4 How would getting the message that you don't matter affect your behavior? For example, if you got that message, what might you do to compensate or to make yourself feel better? How might you try to protect yourself from people? Or how could you hide from them?



5 Read 1 Peter 2:9-10. The apostle Peter wrote to some scattered groups of people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. He wrote to them about being a chosen race and a royal priesthood. Do you believe deep down that you are part of a group that God has set apart? Would it change anything if you believed this? What would change?

6 What might it take for you to be convinced that God has chosen you?

7 When God picked Abraham to be the head of a chosen family, he didn't do it in order to form an exclusive club for people who could feel like they were better than everybody else. He did it to show Abraham's family what it was like to be blessed *in order that they could then be* a blessing to all the families of the world (Genesis 12:3). Likewise, today when God chooses people from all over the world to be part of his family, he doesn't do it for them to feel like they are better than those around them. He does it to make them a blessing to the world. How does this affect the way you view the idea of being chosen?

# Hagar in The Bible

## SCRIPTURE ACTIVITY

Look up Genesis 16:1-6 in your Bible and read the story.

God had a long-range plan to rescue human beings from the consequences of their attempts to run their own lives apart from him. He planned to rescue all families by first focusing on one family. That family was going to be the descendants of a Middle Eastern man named Abraham. God had promised Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him. There was just one problem: Abraham and his wife, Sarah, kept getting older and older, and Sarah never got pregnant.

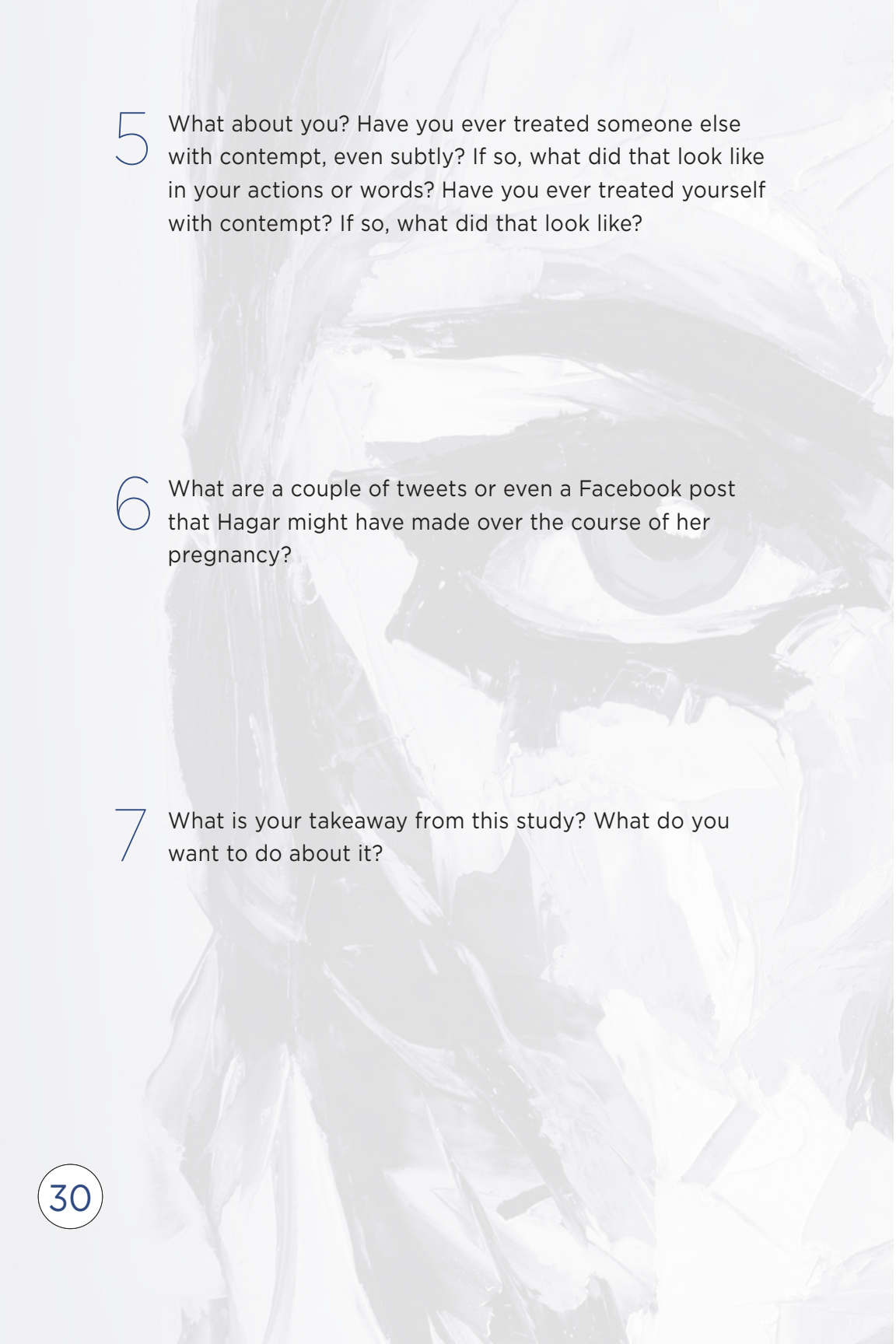
Our story picks up when Sarah was far past menopause. (At this point, Sarah is called Sarai and Abraham is called Abram. God would change their names later.)

- 1 In the group discussion, you talked about how Hagar was the victim of other people's choices. On the other hand, what choices did she make herself in verse 4? In verse 6?

2 What do these choices reflect about Hagar?

3 Shame is a feeling of being seen and found deficient. Sarah felt deficient because she was childless. Hagar felt deficient too. Have you ever felt deficient in some way? Do you still feel deficient in any area? If so, why?

4 Shame leads to the desire to hide and not be seen. There are a number of common hiding behaviors. When we hide, we may treat other people with contempt, as if they are worthless or deserve scorn. Or we may treat ourselves with contempt. Would you say Sarah is more inclined to treat herself or other people with contempt? How does she show that? How does Hagar show contempt?



5 What about you? Have you ever treated someone else with contempt, even subtly? If so, what did that look like in your actions or words? Have you ever treated yourself with contempt? If so, what did that look like?

6 What are a couple of tweets or even a Facebook post that Hagar might have made over the course of her pregnancy?

7 What is your takeaway from this study? What do you want to do about it?

# Shame and Hiding

## TEACHING ACTIVITY

Shame leads to hiding. We can hide behind:

- Our husband, children, or another relationship
- Our status—being considered influential, smart, honorable, respectable, successful, or spiritual
- A job
- Popularity or approval by a certain group
- Our looks or our smile
- Bible knowledge, church volunteering
- Busyness
- Social media

Use your answers to these questions to journal on your own and process through your prayer time.

- 1 Are you hiding? If so, what are you hiding behind? That is, what do you use to distract people from looking directly at you as you really are?
  
- 2 When do you hide? Are there certain people or situations you hide from, or do you hide from everybody all the time?
  
- 3 Think of your behaviors and relationships. Which ones reinforce your shame? Which ones make you more aware of your inadequacies? Which ones lead to feelings of condemnation?



4 Think of your behaviors and relationships again. Which ones restore confidence and help to release your shame? Which ones draw you closer, especially on your bad days? Which ones lead you to the truth? Which ones cause in you a longing to change? Which ones convict you without condemning you?

5 What do you want to do differently in your day-to-day life as a result of this reflection?

As a believer, we  
get to **HIDE**.  
We just have to  
**HIDE** in the  
*right place.*

Choose one of the following topics to journal about:

- ➔ Have you ever been the victim of someone else's choices? If so, what was that person's choice? How did it affect you? (For instance, how did it hurt you, cause you shame, help you grow, isolate you, cause you anxiety or fear or some other emotion, or increase your understanding of something?) How did you respond (or how are you responding)? What results came from your response? What do you think would be the best available response to that situation?
- ➔ Are you currently in a situation that makes you question if God knows what he's doing? If so, what's going on that prompts that thought? What feelings are you having about your situation? (Get them all out in an uncensored way. Use colored pens if that inspires you.) How did you get here? How have you been trying to manage your feelings and the situation? How is that working? What do you think would be the best way to respond to your situation?
- ➔ Have you been mistreated by anyone in authority over you? If so, what happened? What feelings have you had about that? How have you responded in actions and attitudes? What have been the results? Colossians 3:23 says, *"Whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for man" (ESV)*. If God is your purpose, and not success or achievement or fairness, you will be better equipped to deal with mistreatment. How helpful is it for you to think about that? Why? What do you think God wants us to do if we have been abused or if someone at work has crossed the line of harassment?



## PRAYER ACTIVITY

In our insanely busy world, it's enormously valuable to set aside even a few minutes away from the distractions to think about what God might be trying to get through to you. God speaks to the heart—the core of you, where your thoughts, emotions, desires, motives, and choices come from. He speaks above all through the Bible. He also speaks in other ways, such as through his people. He can speak through circumstances, using them to highlight something he has said in his Word. He doesn't give “new revelation” that contradicts what has been written, but he does guide you in how his words apply to your unique life. Sometimes he is trying to get through to us about a blind spot that others see or about a hard decision we are facing, but we can't hear him over the noise in our lives.

Find a quiet place where you can be alone. Maybe take a walk, sit on the porch, head to the nearest park bench, or simply sit in your car alone for a few minutes. Turn off your phone—or better still, leave it somewhere else so it doesn't draw your eye and your thoughts. Lay before God whatever you have read or heard recently from the Bible. Lay before him any shame you have and any tendency to hide. Offer him your worries. Think of at least three things you have to be thankful for and thank him for those. If there are things people have said to you, or said in your group meeting, that stick in your mind, ask God what he might be saying to you through those. Invite him to put together the pieces of what you need to hear from him. Then see if you can rest in the silence for a few minutes. If you get distracted, gently turn your mind back to your memory verse or one of the things you're thankful for. Don't be discouraged if you don't hear an audible message from God. Just being more open to him is the important thing.

