

**Growth Group Study - Hope in hopelessness**  
**29/11/20 – John Malcolm**

*This study focuses on family violence and infertility  
please be pastorally sensitive to those in the group who may have experienced these.*

**The shine website notes:**

In 2017, NZ Police attend 118,923 family violence incidents - an average of one every four minutes (NZ Police, 2017 statistics)

1 in 3 women experience physical and/or sexual abuse from a male (ex)partner in their lifetime. Most of these women also had dependent children.

A child is killed every 5 1/2 weeks by a member of their own family.

Why do you think family violence is more prevalent than we might like to admit?

**Read Genesis 15.2-6**

What was Abram's problem and what was God's promise?

Why might this society have placed such importance on having a male heir?

**Read Genesis 16.3**

How much time had elapsed since the promise of a child had been given?

How do you think Abram and Sarai might have felt as the years went by with no sign of the promise being fulfilled?

**Surrogate motherhood in the ancient middle east. In ancient texts we find:**

Marriage contracts from the town of Nuzi stipulate that if a wife is unable to bear children, she should provide her husband with a surrogate child-bearer, and that she, the wife will have authority over the child.

A wedding contract from Assyria states, if the wife does not bear a child within two years, she may buy a maid-servant, and later after the wife procures an infant for her husband she can sell the slave wherever she pleases.

Another says, ... if she gives a slave woman to her husband and the slave then bears children, after which the slave woman aspires to equal status with her mistress, because she bore a child, her mistress will not sell her, but mark her as a slave and count her among the slave women.

Do these ancient rules surprise you – why/why not?

It appears that a wife who could not conceive herself was obligated to and in charge of the arrangements to provide a surrogate to bear a child for her – what pressures or hopes might have lain behind this ancient practice?

What similarities/contrasts are there behind modern desires for fertility treatment or the use of surrogate mothers?

**Read Genesis 16.1-6** (Human relationships are complex, fraught – the phrase *What could possibly go wrong comes to mind*. It seems no one looks good here – even by ancient standards)

How does Sarai's solution align to the customs of the day?

Did Hagar have any rights in the arrangement, anything to benefit?

Why do you think Abram goes along with the idea, but distances himself from the problems that arise? Why does he not offer protection to the mother of the son he desired?

What has gone wrong between Hagar, Sarai and Abram – how has this relationship turned abusive?

Given Sarai had made this arrangement and longed for a child, why did she treat Hagar so harshly? Do you think she intended to drive Hagar away?

When it becomes so bad that Hagar runs away, why do you think neither Sarai nor Abraham go looking for her?

What state might their “hopes” be in given these circumstances?

### **Read Genesis 16.7-10 & 22.17**

Where can you go when your home is not safe and those who should care for you are abusive?

What do we learn about God from these verses and what do they reveal about his care for Hagar?

What is God’s promise to Hagar and how is this like God’s promise to Abraham? What might such a promise have meant for her future?

What difference in status or self-worth, do you think it would have made for Hagar, that the God who made promises to Abram, also spoke to and made promises to an outcast like her?

### **Read Genesis 16.11-15 & 1 Samuel 16.7**

Hagar is to name her son Ishmael, meaning God hears and she calls God *El Roi* meaning God who sees me – what does this reveal to us about God?

How might Sarai and Abram’s treatment of Hagar changed when she went back saying *Guess who I met along the road – God who sees, who hears and who has promised me descendants too numerous to count?*

Ishmael grew up in Abram’s home and Abram grew so close to him that he said to God, *‘If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!’ (Genesis 17:18)* Why do you suppose Abram’s attitude had changed so much?

### **Where do we find hope in Hagar’s story?**

Advent is a season of hope and longing. How might we share our Advent hope with those who feel hopeless?

If God cares for the outcast, what should our attitude be to those fleeing from abuse?

How can we as a church be aware of, and help those who are in need of care and shelter?

### **For reflection:** Read Genesis 21.8-21

If you are suffering from family violence we encourage you to seek help from *Shine*. <https://www.2shine.org.nz/>