



Sermon Transcription • Abbotsford

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An Ill-Advised Plan - (Genesis 16:1-16)

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

The last couple weeks I haven't been around, I've been involved in ministry in other locations. Last weekend, though, I finally had a chance to go back to the region of my childhood home, which is the east side of Seattle, so Bellevue, Issaquah, Redmond, whenever we go there, my wife gets sick and tired of me showing her all the places where I grew up. "Hey honey, look, that's where I grew up." "I know."

"Yeah, but, this time it's different." [Laughter] So we sometimes drive by old houses that I lived in and I tell her stories and things. One of the stories that I told her this last week was about my next door neighbour, when we first moved to the Seattle area I was two years old, I moved from Boston, Massachusetts, with my family to the Seattle area, and we lived in this house on the hillside, in Bellevue, a place called Somerset. My next door neighbour, his first name was Stan, that was the father of the family there. His last name I won't tell you, we'll just call him Stan Rogers. He was a real short guy. I remember when I was four years old, or whatever, I remember him being really, really small. My father was about 6'1" and this guy, he must have been 5'3", something like that. From when I was a kid, the joke around our house was that I used to not call him Mr. Rogers, I called him Stan everywhere, and I remember thinking to myself when I was a kid, why would I call him "Mr." anything? He's like my size, I was just a little guy. And so when we would get in the car, and he would be getting in his car next door, my father would say, "Hey Stan," and I would say, "Hey Stan." And my parents would giggle about it, and they'd tell me in the car, "You need to call him Mr. Rogers, it's respectful." I don't know why, I just couldn't bring myself to do it. I remember walking by the side of our house on one occasion, he was walking the other way, and I said, "Hey Stan." And he stopped me and he said, "Listen, here's the deal. I'll call you Jeff, and you call me Mr. Rogers." And I said, "Okay Stan." [Laughter] And I went to the back of the house.

Have you ever wondered why...my son in New Zealand, they had a school where all the teachers wanted to be called by their first names. We always thought that was a little bit weird. But as I got used to it, it's made my wife and I talk a little bit about why is it that we want to have formal names? I have a difficult time having my kids' friends call me anything other than Jeff, because it's not a big deal to me. Sometimes they feel like they should do something else, so they say "Mr. Bucknam," and then I correct them and I say, "Doctor." [Laughter] So some of them have just gotten used to "Hello Dr. Bucknam," it's awesome, right? The only people around who call me Dr. Bucknam. You know the reason we do that, we want formal titles though, quite honestly, is that yes, it's respectful and stuff, but it's respectful because it's honorable, right? If I make you call me Dr. Bucknam it's because I want



you to honor me. And there's a sense in which you don't like doing that, because it makes me sound like I'm on a different level than you. That's why we use formal titles, is to remind other people that, listen, we are...I'm not just Jeff, I am Dr. Bucknam. Back in the old days, pastors used to be called Honorable Right Reverend Doctor, just to remind you, it's not just one thing, it's like I'm five times better than you are.

We call this sermon series Abe. You will not find that name in the Bible. And you know who it's about, it's about this guy Abram, whose name is changed to Abraham, and then we changed it to Abe. And you might wonder why, why did you do that? Well mostly because we want you not to think about Abram, this guy that we're reading about, as Abram, Patriarch of Israel, father of faith, honorable righteous one, we want you to think of him as Stan. Because he is, he's a normal guy. He is like all normal guys, has his good days, his great faithful moments, and then other days he's not so much. This is one of those days. Genesis 16 is an example of him and his wife that'll make you shake your head and think, really? Father of faith? I don't know, I don't know. It's a great story, it's not very long, it's only 16 verses, Genesis 16, and there's two parts to it. The first part has to do with Abram and his scheming wife, and the second part has to do with Hagar and her seeing God. These will be the headings that we study this under, okay? The first part, Abram and his scheming wife, the second, Hagar and her seeing God.

[Abram and His Scheming Wife]

Here's the first of those in Genesis 16:1, Abram and his scheming wife:

“Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. [Probably should be an exclamation point there, because that's a big deal, as you'll see.] But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; so she said to Abram, 'The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.'”

Now if you've been around our church at any point in time, for any period of time, you've come to realize that there are lots of childless people in the Bible, and so I've had to rehearse with you what that means in ancient cultures. So let's do it again. Women had one job in the ancient world, only one: babies. Produce heirs. There was a pragmatic reason for this, by the way, in those days you had agricultural communities, and so the only way that you were going to be kept safe and healthy and warm and well-fed in your old age was if your kids looked after you. The government's not going to come along and provide some sort of resource for you in your old age. “They owe me, that's my entitlement.” No, your entitlement is to have kids, and they'll pay for you, you hope. But if you don't have children, that means that you're exposed in your old age. It's a very pragmatic reason why you would have -also, the Bible seems to say, in Jewish circles that children are a blessing from the Lord. I know that's shocking. There's actually a verse about it. Psalm 127:3:

“Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.”



And yes, it's because pragmatically, at the end of his life, he's going to have lots of kids to look after him in his age and take care of the farm, but it's more important to see that they are a reward from God. Kids are. If you have them, you are rewarded, you are blessed, if you don't have them, you are, well you're cursed. That's the way that the culture saw it. So what you need to understand is when this woman Sarah is old and doesn't have any children, in her culture she is not one of the cool ones. People aren't looking up to her, in fact they're looking down on her. "You are failing as a woman." And so she would have longed daily to have kids, daily longed.

And what makes it even more difficult for her is that God, this God who appeared out of nowhere and promised, if they were to go and leave their land, "Abram, I want you to leave Ur," he said, "And when you do, look up to the sky, see all those stars, you will have that many descendants." So God had promised to relieve her reproach. And then, this is now ten years on. Like they have followed, they've left Ur, they've gone across the land, and ten years. I know some of you have probably been in the throes of overcoming your own infertility, my wife and I have been in our lives, we didn't know if we were ever going to have kids. But if you're in the throes of that, you know this feeling that you have, that every month, right? Okay, did it work? Take the test, it didn't work. Pray some more. Take the test the next month, didn't work. Next month, next month, next...after a while you're just exhausted. It's hard work having these kids, and you start wondering if it's ever going to happen. You can imagine this woman's feelings. So listen, at this point in her life, she's saying, "Okay, so maybe there's another way that we're supposed to make this happen. I can't have kids. The Lord has stopped me from having kids, and yet the Lord has promised that we're going to have descendants. So we should choose other doors here."

And in the culture of the day there were different ways that you could do this. There's three, in fact, other options that you could choose. One of them was divorce. In fact, the second most leading cause of divorce in the ancient world was barrenness. The first was adultery, the second was barrenness. Listen, if you have a nonfunctioning wife, you trade her in for a newer, functioning model. It was the attitude of the day, that you need to have kids. And yes, it's harsh. So that was not always the choice. If you loved your wife, you didn't want to expose her to challenges in her old age, and so you often wouldn't choose that one. Another option, I said there were three, the second is polygamy, right? You just get a new one. You keep the old one, right, because you like it, you want her to be around, but you get a new one who could actually produce heirs. This was very common, right, you read about polygamy all throughout the Scriptures in the ancient world, lots and lots of polygamy. And the third option was that you get a concubine. The concubine is usually owned by you, you say to your wife, "You have some possessions, and those possessions are in the form of people in some cases, pick the best one with the best hips, and give her to me, and we'll accomplish it that way." So this is what Sarah's attitude is, "Listen, I've got this Hagar, we got her in Egypt, she's a slave, I'm going to give her to you, as my property to you, you'll have the child through her, but it'll be mine, because she's mine, and everything that comes from her is mine." Right? The culture of the day, everyone would have nodded and said, "Yes, it's a perfect plan." There's nobody that was going to stand up in the ancient world and say, "This is a horrible idea." It made all sorts of sense. So, choose that surrogacy option, they use the concubine to produce an heir, the handmaiden. Genesis 16, the end of verse 2,



“Abram agreed to what Sarai said.”

You know those words are the identical words, regarding what God said about Adam, and how he handled Eve’s request for him to eat the apple. “Adam listened to the voice of his wife,” that’s the literal reading there. So Abram listened to the voice of Sarai, here. By the way, how did that turn out? Well, okay, we’ll get there. Genesis 16:3,

“So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.”

The question you’re supposed to ask right here at this point is, okay was this a good plan? Like I said, culturally speaking, everyone around would have said, “This is a great idea.” But, but, most of the language in this passage is identical to Genesis 3, where you have the serpent tricking Eve, who then gives the apple to her husband, who then takes of it. In this case, you have the woman taking her belongings and giving them to her husband, and he takes part of it. So what you’re supposed to be thinking in this moment is, okay, the last time we saw this sort of stuff happen, it didn’t really go well. In fact, even in Abram’s own life, if you go back a few chapters in Genesis, Genesis 12, God calls him out of his homeland Ur, you know, stars in the sky, “You’re going to have that many descendants, go out to this land I’m going to give you.” He goes out there, there’s a famine in the land, they end up in Egypt, and he realizes that all the men around are having a good look at his wife. And he’s like, well I don’t want to go to war over this woman. And they’re going to want to take her from me, so I don’t know, we’ll just call you my sister. That turn out well? The king actually ends up taking her for his harem, and God has to intervene. So he’s got his own experience with his stupid concoctions, ill-advised plans in the past have not gone well in this book, and here you have another one. So at this point you’re supposed to kind of be expecting...and sure enough, the end of Genesis 16:4,

“When she knew she was pregnant, [she being Hagar] she began to despise her mistress. [The word means look down on her. Diminish her.] Then Sarai said to Abram, ‘You are responsible [husband] for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me.’”

In fact that last line means, “God’s gonna get you for this.” It’s an interesting scene, isn’t it? I mean, Hagar, then, is taken in with Abram and she conceives, and as soon as she knows she’s pregnant, there’s a little, you know, skip in her step. Because as far as the scoreboard of womanhood goes, Hagar: one, Sarai: nil. And Hagar, now, says scoreboard all the time. Whenever she walks, you know. Sarai might ask her, she’s still a servant in the home, Sarai might ask her, “Hagar, can you go and pick up that tub of tools, or whatever it is that we need, just can you grab that, over there?” And Hagar would say, “Um, I’m pregnant. So I probably shouldn’t be lifting anything. But you could do it, because you’re not pregnant. I am, but you’re not pregnant.” So after a while, Sarai’s sick of it. She’s like, you know what, this is ridiculous. This was supposed to work out, but it’s not working out, and so she, you know, goes to the bedroom, closes the door. “Abram!”

“What? What?”

“This is all your fault!”



“It is?” You know, we should pause here and just go down a little cul-de-sac. You do know that when things go wrong, we often struggle to face up to the consequences. We like to think it’s the fault of everyone else around us. This is actually the first sin in the Bible, the first thing they did when they were confronted by God, was they started blaming everybody, didn’t they? I mean, God comes to Adam after he eats the apple and he says, “Hey, what’s going on here, hey Adam?” And Adam’s like, “What do you mean what’s going on here?”

“How do you know you’re naked?”

“Well, it’s the woman you put here with me. I am completely innocent of all that has happened here. I was just standing there, all of a sudden an apple’s in my mouth. And none of this would have happened, Lord, if you just didn’t take the part of me and made that.”

There’s an old story in baseball lore, okay, so this is years and years ago. They used to have a deal where the manager of a baseball team would be, could also play. So, years and years ago, the story goes that there was an outfielder, centre fielder, for one of the teams, and, you know, the ball was hit to him, fly ball, and the centre fielder puts his glove up and it just goes right through and it drops to the ground. And the next time, the ball is hit, it goes right to him and it dribbles right between his legs. And the manager’s just, he’s so angry, he’s standing on the top of the stairs of the dugout, screaming, and so when the inning is over, the outfielder runs in, the manager says, “What is wrong with you? You have one single job, it’s not that hard! Give me that!” He takes his glove and he takes his hat. Puts the glove on his hand, puts the hat on his head. And the next inning he runs out to centre field. First ball that comes to him flies to him, he drops it on the ground. Next ball comes to him, goes right through his legs. The ending of the inning, the manager’s running back, trotting back, and the centre fielder’s on the top step, ready to hear what he has to say. Manager gets within the distance where the centre fielder and the dugout can hear him and he says, “You messed up centre field so bad, even I can’t fix it!”

We were upstairs this week, and we have an open office, right, and Kyle Meeker, dear friend of mine, he’s our discipleship pastor, had coffee on his desk, and all of a sudden, I hear this crash. And there’s coffee all over everything. Six or seven of us are staring at him, having seen the coffee on his desk, and now on the floor. And he looks up immediately, he’s shaking, and he looks up and he goes, “I didn’t do that!” You know, “It was the gremlins Kyle, they came, and they took it...” This is what we do, isn’t it? Listen, you do know that most of the relational challenges that you and I have in our lives are due to our unwillingness to admit that we are part of making the mess. Like, most of the marriage difficulties that I’ve had to deal with in counseling situations could largely be solved by people just owning their own stuff. There’s more to it than that, usually, but that’s a great start.

Sarai doesn’t want to though, so back to the main route of the story here, Abram’s there in that bedroom, you know, feeling like, uh, what just happened here? And he chooses the path that many husbands since have chosen. Happy wife, happy life. He says to her in Genesis 16:6,

“‘Your slave is in your hands,’ Abram said. ‘Do with her whatever you think best.’ [I’m happy with whatever you choose.] Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.”



She mistreated her. Now to be fair to Sarai and Abram at this particular moment, we need to realize that there was a law in their region at the time that addressed this very issue. It's in the Hammurabi Code, which is, you know what the Hammurabi Code is, yeah? Yeah, you guys been reading it? It's good, it's good stuff. The Hammurabi Code is a 1754 BC Babylonian law. So it's a law book from a Babylonian Empire, 1754 BC. In it, they address this very issue, and what one ought to do in such a situation. Here's how it reads:

“When a free man married a woman of high standing and she gave a female slave to her husband, and she has then borne children [which is exactly what's happened here with Sarai taking Hagar and giving her to her husband.] If later that female slave [that Hagar] has claimed equality with her mistress, because she has borne children, her mistress may not sell her.[It's against the law for you to get rid of her out of your house and expose her that way] She may though mark her with the slave-mark and count her among the slaves.”

So she's got to stay in your house, Sarai, but you can treat her as badly as you want. And she does. Listen, if you're going to be here, this is going to be hard. The word “mistreat” that's used in this passage, about Sarai mistreating Hagar, it's the same word that's used for the Egyptians, in Exodus, mistreating the Israelites. You know, “Make more bricks!”

“We can't make anymore.”

“I don't care. Pull out the whips, beat them.” So when you read the word “mistreat,” you need to...we use the word “abuse” now. Verbally, probably physically, all of the abuse laid on this woman.

Have you ever been in a job before where you just feel like you're overwhelmed? You have a horrible boss, you can imagine that? Some of you are like, “Yes. Tomorrow I will be.” He's just beating down on you, and constantly after you. You never do anything right. The word “abuse” sometimes comes to your mind. After a while, what do you do? You have rage fantasies late at night, “Oh, if I get him in a room one day, I'm gonna tell him...” But eventually, you just, you've had so much you just run away, you quit, “I'm done with this thing.” That's what she does, it's what Hagar does. She runs off. Gordon Wenham, he's a commentator on this passage, he summarizes the first part of the passage this way. He says, “Thus the first scene ends in total disaster for all concerned. Hagar has lost her home, Sarai her maid, Abram his second wife, and the newborn child.” Everything that they had determined was going to work out, by fulfilling God's promises their way, has not happened. They've walked down a path that has led them to disaster, not to joy.

What was their problem? What did they do wrong? I mean, listen, culturally speaking, nothing. The answer's nothing. In their culture they chose exactly the way the culture said you should go about these things. Mistreat her, yes, that's the Hammurabi Code. Choose door number three, this is acceptable. This is all the way you should be doing it. And yet it ends up in a mess. What was the problem? Well, I think that if you take the links from this passage and see how they are linked to Genesis 3, the problem that Abram and Sarai have are the same problems that Adam and Eve have. Well what was that problem? Here it is: they believed that trusting their culturally-informed wisdom would lead to a better outcome than trusting the wisdom of God. They believed that trusting their culturally-informed wisdom would lead to a better outcome than trusting the wisdom of God.



My wife and I, years ago, we lived in New Zealand, we decided to take a trip. She was pregnant with our first child. Jeanne was a really sick pregnant person. Right? I mean, we'd drive around and the roads in New Zealand are like this <shows a winding path> and so she has lots of experiences at the side of the road. So when we drove up to Northland, which is the area, we wanted to go to this town called Russell, because it was the place in New Zealand, in the history of New Zealand, when the Maori people were living there, when the Pākehā, which is the white people, came to the island, the first thing that the Maori people did is they used to cook them and boil them in pots. You could actually go to Russell and see the pots where they used to boil the Pākehā, the white man. I pictured my wife, actually, in a pot. Now we wanted to go there because that's great, I mean, not, I actually met a lady one time in New Zealand that remembers what Pākehā tastes like. Like, she's an older Maori lady, she remembers what Pākehā tastes like. So what does it taste like? She said, "Chicken." Which, I don't...that's a good joke. It's true, though. Anyway, we're going up to this place in Russell. We have a map, and a map tells us, listen, you need to go on the ferry, this little ferry that goes across this channel, you can see Russell from where you are. Everybody's lined up for the ferry. But when I get to the ferry, I'm like, I don't want to sit and wait in the line, and I look over to the side and there's this sign that says "Russell" with an arrow straight up, and it's like down this road, and the road looks great. How bad can that be? I don't want to wait here for the next hour, we can drive down the road, it's probably beautiful. Well, my sick wife, I say, "Is that okay?" She's like, "I just don't...we're going to have to pull over soon, it'll be fine, we'll probably be there in ten minutes." Honestly, an hour later, I'm stopping along the way for Jeanne to throw up and throw up and throw up, we're driving through these Maori villages, where people are looking up and saying, "We used to cook you." [Laughter] And then we're driving through...I decided to stop at one point and ask directions, and the guy goes, "Man, you're crazy. You should have gone on the ferry." Finally ended up in the place, and all the people who had been lined up for the ferry had been there for an hour and had already got their pictures taken with the pot.

It's a good image though, not the pot picture, but the image of standing at the ferry. You have two directions you get to go. You have a map that tells you that the wise way is this way. Go this way. And yet, in your mind you're thinking, "Yeah but, no, I think I'd rather do this because of all these reasons," that you can justify. Listen to me, you have a map, Christian. You have a moral code in a book. God has revealed this to you, about what he wants out of your life. And yet, you and I have so many pressures from our culture, saying, "No no no, that's crazy. Do it this other way. I know God has promised that stuff, but you can mingle that with your own wisdom and it'll be way better." Will it? Well, okay, but what do you mean, practically speaking?

Well, I'll give you a couple of examples, easy ones. The Scriptures say, "This is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality." So I take that as saying, the Lord's saying, "Take that ferry, that way." That means that if you are not married, you ought to remain abstinent, and if you are married, you ought to be monogamous. Yes, that's a hard road sometimes. Sometimes the ferry in that road's going to rock back and forth, and it feels awkward. But the culture around us, ultimately, our culturally-informed is saying to you, "No, that's crazy. Come on guys, when you go out and you test drive a car, you do it because you want to know whether or not you're compatible with



that car. A wife, a husband, they're way more important than a stupid car. Test drive it! Don't be a fool! The Bible's old-fashioned and stupid and all that kind of stuff. If you just follow this other path, it's going to end in much happier ways. Cohabit." You do know, of course, that if you choose to cohabit, the divorce rates are exceedingly higher. There's a way that seems right to a man, but it's way ends in death. You have a choice to make though, don't you? You're going to follow God's wisdom or yours. Okay, so another example, say you're a business person, and you make widgets, and you're in your factory, maybe you sell them, maybe you buy the parts for the widgets, maybe you, whatever. You have this widget factory, and you can sell more widgets if you do it a particular way. You know the Bible has to say some stuff about the way you ought to have integrity and truth telling and that sort of stuff, even if in your business dealings, you know. Unequal scales, it has language like that. But you live in a business setting where there's certain ways, industry standards that we keep, and those standards sometimes require you to fudge the truth a little bit, here and there, you know, maybe you make bread in Canada. And you elevate the price a little bit. So here you are, if you choose to go God's way here, and be a truth teller, have integrity, it's probably cost you something. Probably will cost you something. Or you could choose to go the way the culture is saying, "Yes, absolutely, that's the right way to go." Only one of these roads is going to lead to life though. Just ask Abram and his scheming wife. What roads are in front of you? Look, everybody in the room has got roads. We're faced with decisions about how we're supposed to employ the wisdom God's given us, the map he's given us, morally. Or the wisdom that we're receiving from outside. My prayer is that you'll be more Hagar than Sarai. Now you should be saying, "What do you mean? More Hagar than Sarai?"

[Hagar and Her Seeing God]

Okay, here's the second part. First part, Abram and his scheming wife, second part, Hagar and her seeing God. Here's Genesis 16:7:

"The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. And he said, 'Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?' 'I'm running away from my mistress Sarai,' she answered."

This road, this road to Shur is basically the road that borders Egypt. And so the Egyptian, Hagar, has basically hopped the first Greyhound home. Probably got in a caravan along the way, and it stopped at a watering hole at the side of the road to Shur, this bus. So she's got her slurpee in her hands, standing outside the 7-Eleven. Dreaming of Cairo. Thankful that she's not with Sarai anymore. And then the Lord send his angel, and he interrupts her, and he asks her a question, "Where are you coming from, and where are you going?" So, theological question. When the almighty, omniscient God asks questions in the Bible, is he seeking knowledge he does not currently have? So when he comes to Adam in the garden and he says, "Adam, where are you?" Is the Lord like, "I was looking everywhere for you, and you're not anywhere." There's a story, actually, about Elijah, who is so angry with how things are going in his life and with the kingdom of Israel, that he starts running south, he just runs away from everyone. He thinks that it's only him and God. He runs so far, he eventually ends on Mount Sinai, where God delivered the law, and God appeared in Exodus 19 over the mountain. He climbs the mountain, he's in the middle of this cave, and he's thinking, it's just me and God left. And



the Lord comes to him and he says to Elijah, “What are you doing here Elijah?” I mean, is this the Lord asking him, “Wha...look why are you in my living room? This is odd. How did you get in?”

Listen, when the Lord asks questions in the Bible, he does it because it’s an interrupting grace. You guys know what I mean by an interrupting grace? Like, so my little daughter, she used to climb, she would create the tower of Babel to go and get the cookies or whatever, on the top shelf, you know? It’s teetering back and forth, and you’d walk into the kitchen and you’d say, “What are you doing?” I’m not saying that because I’m like, “Hmm, that’s an interesting architectural design.” I’m saying that because I’m asking her to explain herself, and I’m interrupting with a question because I love her. I don’t want you to keep going down this path. This is going to end in a mess. So when he comes to Hagar, he’s stepping in. Listen, your part to play in this Hagar, you despise Sarai. You’re walking around with your belly, I mean, come on. And here you are now. Yes, mistreated, and all these things, but where are you coming from? Where are you going? “Well I’m running away,” she says. Genesis 16:9:

“Then the angel of the LORD told her, ‘Go back to your mistress and submit to her.’ The angel added, ‘I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count.’ The angel of the LORD also said to her: ‘You are now pregnant and you will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers.’”

Can I just, I need to pause here. You do realize, of course, that this is God’s word to Hagar, it’s not God’s word to everyone. He is saying to Hagar, “I want you to go back and submit yourself to the abusive relationship.” This is not God’s word for everyone, unless your name is Hagar, and you’re at the 7-Eleven on Shur. We counsel against this sort of thing. You know why? Because it’s dangerous to go back under the hand of an abuser. But I don’t want you to lose the sense of what God is calling this woman to. “I’m going to bless you with descendants you cannot count, you are gonna be such a success, but I need you to go back.”

I used to teach P.E., for one month, in a school for ADHD and ADD kids only. They hired me and said, “Listen, we have all these kids in the school, and they really struggle sitting still, and so we want to give you a half hour with each one of them for the P.E. time, we’re going to throw them all together in the gym, and you’ve just got to let them burn off the steam.” Well, burning off the steam, I learned very quickly, was a radical idea, because I went down to the office on one occasion at the beginning of the class, I came back, and there was one of these kids who had ADHD, ADHD affects some kids so they’re super hyperactive, that’s a hyperactive disorder. But other kids, ADD affects them so that they get really quiet and demure. Some of them have so much ritalin that they just get really quiet. This guy, this hyperactive kid, who’s kind of, he was bigger than everyone else, had lined up every other little kid on the wall, and he’s hitting hockey pucks at them. [Laughter] He had all the hockey pucks lined up. Pow! Pow! I came in and went, “Woah, what are you doing?” This was happening everyday, this kind of thing. Crazy things. I could tell you stories. I would go home and say to my wife, “I cannot do this job!” I would wake up in the middle of the night in cold sweats. Someone’s gonna die! I went to the, after a week of it, I said, “I cannot do this,” you know I was in training for three weeks, got there for



one week and went to the principle, “I cannot do this, this is horrible.” If you had told me that after I left there, “Listen, Jeff,” if you stopped me at the 7-Eleven while I’m drinking my celebration slurpee and said, “Jeff, you need to go back there,” I would have lined you up and been hitting the hockey pucks, no way I’m going back there.

And yet this is what the Lord calls Hagar to do. “I want you to go back into that situation, this horrible situation that you ran from, and I want you to submit to this woman.” You know what’s crazy about this scene? She does it. Egypt, her home, is just over the hill! Safety! The road, the wise, culturally-accepted road is just there, but the Lord is saying, “No, I want you to go here, and I know you can’t see what’s around the corner, and I know that there’s danger there, but I want you to go there. Can you trust me, Hagar?” And she does. Amazing woman. Genesis 16:3 then, she sums the whole thing up. Like what is it that’s going to drive this woman to go back? And here’s what she tells you, why it is that she decides to go back, I think:

“She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: ‘You are the God who sees me,’ for she said, ‘I have now seen the One who sees me.’ That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered. So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.”

Her whole summation of this scene, is you know what I’ve learned about you, God? You and your interrupting grace? You and your questions on the side of this road, in the midst of all of this, you know what I’ve learned about you? You’re the God who sees. What does that mean? Well, if you go and you watch a basketball game today, and the kid’s hitting three-pointers and three-pointers and three-pointers, and every time he hits one he turns to the crowd and goes, “Ah!” You know what you say? “I see you!” What do you mean? “I am noticing all that you’re doing, man, I can’t take my eyes off of you. I’m enraptured with how good you are. I see you.” *Lord of the Rings*, the Eye of Sauron, is the thing that everyone’s trying to avoid. Avoid his gaze, his notice! Why? Because to have him gaze is to have him pay attention to what you’re doing. What does it mean to be seen by the Lord? Well, it means that he’s taking note. That he’s present. He’s watching, and he’s there. And that’s what she says. Like, all of this, you’re the God who understands. You see me.

I struggle with depression every January. Like, I’m getting to the point where I can actually put it on the clock. Because it’s stinking January, it’s cold, and I don’t know why, I just struggle. I get really, really down, I’ve struggled with melancholy my whole life. And every year these days I have this. And a few weeks ago, I was having a hard time, again. And this time I was feeling sorry for myself, because, you know what it’s like, if you get down, and you just don’t think right, and you start thinking, you know what, none of what I’m doing is actually making any difference to anybody. All I get is criticism, all I get is complaining. Which is not true. But in the moment, you know, in the dark of the night, it feels that way. And I had to go speak at this conference in Vancouver. And I didn’t want to speak at the conference, right? They’re all cooler than me, right, they wear their pants right, and have shoes from, like, less than ten years ago. So, I’m like, I don’t want to do this. I go and speak at the conference, really upset and sad. And I go and speak at this conference and at the end of my time I go out into the



lobby, and the Lord in his providence, he starts bringing people who used to be a part of Northview, like staff members or interns or teaching associates, or whoever, and they're all lining up, kind of in front of me. Not on purpose, but they're all standing there. And this one is working in Whistler, and he's a pastor in Whistler, and this one's a pastor in Chilliwack, and this one is the children's pastor in Chilliwack, and they just keep going, over and over and over and over again. I didn't have to move. It was like the Lord was passing the animals in front of me. And honestly, have you ever been in a moment like this where it just felt like the Lord had his hand on my shoulder saying, "Listen Jeff, this is the fruit of your labour. I see you."

I talk about John Paton a lot, he's this missionary who's running for his life on the island of Tanna in the South Pacific. At the end of his life, at the end of his time there, four years, no converts, everyone on the island wants to kill him. And I mean everyone. Except for three guys who are trying to keep him alive. They're running down this path trying to get him in a boat so he can escape the island, in this little rowboat. Just get in the boat and paddle! But they can't get there because they're surrounded. They pull him close and they say, "Listen Missy," they called him Missy, for missionary, "You need to climb this tree right here, and you need to pray to your God that you don't die today. Pray that they don't see you. I don't know how that's going to go, but we can't be seen with you, they'll kill us." So he does, he climbs this tree. And he's sitting there in the branches, on the edge of death. In his autobiography later he wrote these words about that, he said, "I climbed into the tree and was left there alone in the bush. And the hours I spent there live before me as if it were yesterday. I heard the frequent discharging of muskets and the yells of my enemies, yet, as I sat there in the branches, I was safe in the arms of Jesus. Never in all my sorrows did my Lord draw nearer to me and speak more soothingly in my soul, than when the moonlight flickered among those chestnut leaves, and the night air played on my throbbing brow. As I told all my heart to Jesus, alone, yet not alone. If thus thrown back upon your own soul, alone, all alone, in the midnight, in the bush, in the very embrace of death itself, have you a friend that will not fail you then?" Hagar did. Christian, you do, you know that, right? I don't care what's going on in your life, you're going to walk out the doors today and you have a God who puts his hand on your shoulder, whether you feel it or not, and he says, "I see you. I will always see you." Let me pray for us,

Lord, I'm thankful for this text, this passage, these ideas, and I pray Lord that you would take your Spirit now, and take those things, and you would apply them to our hearts in ways, Lord, that go beyond just the cognitive acceptance of them Lord. In the moments to come, not just here in the days ahead, in the months ahead Lord, where we find our own chestnut tree experience, Lord, that you would remind us you're the God who sees us. And help us, because of that, Father, to always choose the path, your path. You have a future for us that is better than ours for ourselves, Lord. Convince us of that we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.