

BIBLE STUDY: THE PATRIARCH, HIS WIFE, THE PHARAOH AND THE SLAVE



‘the glory of God is a human being fully alive’ IRENAEUS

The above quotation from the early church is one of my favourites. It speaks of a God who enjoys people and wants them to enjoy who they are and to ‘grow up’ into the people who God has made them to be. Anything less than a human being who has fulfilled their potential in God, is a human being ‘fallen short of the glory of God’. To be fully alive is to honour God, and is also to witness to the world, what kind of God the Christian God is.

The Christian God does not set out to constrain us, but to bring us to life, open us up: to each other and to God-self. And God does this by showing us ways of life which cause flourishing.

Faithfulness is not just about sex and marriage, it is firstly a *way of life* that is modelled by the God who wants us to be fully alive human beings.

The call to promote faithfulness and to make the bold statement that ‘faithfulness matters’, is important and necessary because faithfulness makes things flourish.....it flourishes people, it flourishes societies and it flourishes creation. And by definition then, *unfaithfulness diminishes* us. Therefore Christians are to be working for, and being examples of, what faithfulness as a *way of life* looks like.

Because ‘the glory of God is a human being fully alive’.

There are many scriptures which we could look at which we could use to defend a biblical stance for the importance of marriage: for example the creation stories of Genesis 1 and 2, or Jesus’ presence at the wedding of Cana in John 2, where he performed his first miracle, and which is directly mentioned in many of our Christian marriage ceremonies.

Whilst these are very important texts, it might be better for us to explore a story which gives us a wider picture of faithfulness as a *way of life*: a way of life which God models and which human beings are called to, for their own flourishing.

And so I suggest that we look at the story of Abram, Sarai and Hagar.

BEGINNING AT THE BEGINNING: so Abram went....

Read Genesis 12 (NRSV)

1. The first relationship we encounter in the text is the relationship between God and Abram. In the interaction between them, what might be described as 'faithfulness' in their relationship? Who is faithful to whom? How?
2. At what point does Abram become 'unfaithful' to what God has called him to do? (Think of his calling to a place and his relationship with Sarai)
3. What happens to each of Abram's relationships in the unfolding of the story?

4. How does Abram's unfaithfulness affect the other people involved? What are the flourishing and diminishing effects of his actions?
5. How does God respond to Abram's unfaithfulness to Sarai? What does God's faithfulness look like?
6. Abram is called to be a blessing to the whole world, but by his unfaithfulness, ends up being a curse to the first nation he encounters. Discuss how you might live faithfully to God's calling on your lives (individual and corporate), what effect might your faithful living have on your relationships and your community?

LET THE STORY UNFOLD: and Sarai said....

Read Genesis 16 (NRSV)



1. Sarai is rescued by God in Genesis 12, restored to her own calling alongside Abram. Despite this, we find in Genesis 16 that she lacks faithfulness just as Abram did. What causes her lack of faithfulness?
2. How does her unfaithfulness affect her 'community'?
3. Hagar runs away. What is her call to faithfulness in her encounter with the angel of the LORD? How do you understand God's request that she return to an abusive relationship?

4. How does God show faithfulness to her?
5. Hagar, a female, gentile slave, is the first person in scripture both to encounter God in this way, and to 'name' God. This is an outstanding example of what God's faithfulness looks like, and is echoed in Galatians 3:28. Share with each other experiences or stories of God's faithfulness to you.

As the story moves on, we are told that God is faithful to the covenant with Abram (and Sarai) spoken of in Genesis 12 and Isaac is born (cf Genesis 17). The story shows that when human beings are failing, falling, faithless....God remains faithful. Faithfulness is a way of being to which all are called. Where unfaithfulness is seen, we see broken relationships, communities in peril and the diminishing of people.

As people of God, we are to be living signs of the joy of a faithful life, catalysing faithfulness in those around us: faithfulness to God's call, faithfulness to our friends and loved ones and faithful to the person that God has called us to be.

ACTION

- ✿ Pray for those you know who are struggling with issues of faithfulness in their relationships.
- ✿ Pray that the  campaign will be understood as for the flourishing of people and communities.
- ✿ Sign up to the statement on the website campaign - faithfulnessmatters.net – this will ensure we can contact you with any news or actions you can participate in.
- ✿  ‘Like’ our Facebook page and share with others to spread the word about the campaign.
- ✿ Commit to a spiritual discipline, for example fasting or intentional prayer time for the campaign – email us on faithfulnessmatters@gmail.com to tell us what you’re doing.