

*First Things – Genesis*

**Genesis 21:14-21**

**“Support for the Single Parent”**

**I. GOD CAN SEE THE HARDSHIP FOR A SINGLE PARENT**

- A. He knows your story
- B. He knows your struggle

**II. GOD CAN SUPPLY THE HELP FOR A SINGLE PARENT**

- A. He heard her cry
- B. He handled her crisis

**III. GOD CAN SUSTAIN THE HOPE FOR A SINGLE PARENT**

- A. Instruction for the parenting of the child
- B. Inspiration for the prospects of the child

1. Actress Reese Witherspoon recently remarried after being divorced since 2008. In an upcoming interview with a magazine, Witherspoon said of her new marriage, “I feel so much relief. I don’t think I realized how stressed I was being a single parent. It was really, really stressful. It’s not easy on anybody.”<sup>i</sup>
2. Multi-millionaire Hollywood starlets are certainly not the only ones who understand the stress of being a single parent.
3. According to a U.S. Census Bureau report issued a couple of years ago, there are an estimated 13.7 million single parents in America with custody of 21.8 million children.
4. Almost 25% of those single parents live with incomes below the poverty level.<sup>ii</sup>
5. While single parenting may seem like a more contemporary problem, it is certainly not a new phenomenon. Neither are the stresses of it.
6. We realize this when in Genesis chapter 21, we meet again the figure of Hagar - the servant girl turned surrogate mother for Abraham and Sarah.
7. With the birth of the promised son, Isaac, to Sarah, tensions in the household escalated, leading to Sarah’s demand that Abraham “cast out” the slave woman and her son, Ishmael.
8. Following an assurance from God, Abraham complied with Sarah’s demands, and with that Hagar became a single parent.
9. Though there is sadness in her story, yet we see the gracious and merciful support of God for Hagar. Though her situation was in many ways the product of sin and disobedience, yet God nonetheless proved Himself faithful to her.

10. Whether you are a single parent or not, the truth of this text encourages all of us when we find ourselves in a position of heartbreak and need.

11. While the truths of this text do speak uniquely to the single parent, I believe they also speak to us all about the faithfulness and goodness of our God.

12. Notice with me what we see here about God's support of the single parent. First of all, this text reminds us that:

### **I. GOD CAN SEE THE HARDSHIP FOR A SINGLE PARENT**

1. Verse 14 of our text says that after Hagar was forced from the family's home, she, "*...wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.*"

2. Hagar's situation was about as bad as it could be. She was homeless, wandering through the desert, and surely wondering how she would care for herself and her son.

3. Though Hagar probably felt abandoned and alone, we know that someone was watching over her. This text has come down to us from the Holy Spirit of God.

4. He watched over Hagar as she left from Abraham's home and wandered in the desert. He knew where she was and what she had experienced.

5. Many people, single parents especially, can relate to Hagar's experience. They wonder if anyone knows the hardship and the heartache of their life.

6. This text encourages us that God knows the hardship you are facing, and the fact that He knows ought to comfort your heart. Take comfort in the fact that:

#### **A. God knows your story**

1. Hagar's story is a strange and sordid one, especially viewed from a modern perspective.

2. She was a slave girl, probably picked up in Egypt, forced into a polygamous marriage, and made into a surrogate mother.

3. After submitting to all of this, and carrying the baby her master's wife so badly wanted, Hagar soon found that she was *persona non grata* in the household of Abraham.

4. Back in chapter 16, while Hagar was still pregnant with Ishmael, we read that, "*...Sarai dealt hardly with her, [and] she fled from her face.*"

5. Hagar's experience as a mother had been hard from the very beginning. Yet, even back in chapter 16, the Lord found her out in the wilderness.
6. In every chapter of Hagar's oft-sad story, God was there. He knew all the circumstances that led her to her pregnancy, and the animosity that eventually forced her from her home.
7. He knew where she was and how she had got there, and He was there with her every step of the way.
8. Everyone has a story. Most of our stories have twists and turns that include times of joy and times of great pain.
9. While some of you may feel that your story is unusually hard and dark, as Hagar's seemed to be, you can rest assured that your story is not news to God. He knows your biography from beginning to end.
10. Your life may not turn out as you once dreamed it would, but it has not played out without the sovereign knowledge and work of God.
11. Take comfort in the fact that God knows your story. Furthermore, when it comes to God's understanding of your hardship, take comfort in the fact that:

### **B. God knows your struggles**

1. Hagar the single parent was wandering through the desert with her son. Verses 15 and 16 describe her terrible struggle.
2. It says, *"And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast [or put] the child under one of the shrubs. And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept."*
3. What we read here was surely the lowest moment of Hagar's life. Her supplies were gone, her boy was sick, and she had nowhere to turn and no one to trust.
4. At least that is how it must have seemed to her. She felt utterly abandoned in that desert, but the loving, all-seeing eye of God was watching over her life.
5. Not only was He watching, but He was preparing to intervene and to meet Hagar and Ishmael's need.
6. You and I may never reach a point as low as Hagar did in that desert, but we can take comfort in the fact that in our lowest points, God sees fully the struggles of our lives.

7. God sees when the bottle is empty. He sees when the child is sick. He sees with the parent is emotionally broken. He sees your struggles!

8. We often sing the song here:

*Jesus knows all about our struggles,  
He will guide till the day is done  
There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus,  
No not one, no not one!*

9. Even when Hagar could not see God, God could still see her. He knows the hardship for the single parent, just as He knows the hardship in the lives of all His children!

10. Consider not only that *God can see the hardship for a single parent*, but consider also secondly that:

## **II. GOD CAN SUPPLY THE HELP FOR A SINGLE PARENT**

1. What looked like the end for Hagar and Ishmael turned out to be an opportunity for God to show His grace and power.

2. Hagar had no water left and Ishmael was near death. Yet, at that point of desperation, God supplied exactly what this single mother needed.

3. No matter what your situation, when your resources run low or even out, you can rest assured that God has no shortage of supply.

4. Notice how God supplied the needs of Hagar in this text. First of all, notice that:

### **A. He heard her cry**

1. In verse 16, after Hagar had left her son under the bush, presumably to die, the text says, "*...she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept.*"

2. Hagar is in the middle of the wilderness, and at this point she is not crying to anyone in particular. This is just the weeping of a woman who sees her life falling apart.

3. While she was not crying to anyone specifically, someone was still listening. In verse 17, it says, "*And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is.*"

4. The text says that it was the crying of the boy that reached God's ears, but we know that Hagar's cry was because of her son's cries. In hearing Ishmael, God was also hearing Ishmael's mother.
5. You and I can take comfort in the fact that when no one else hears our cries, there is a God in heaven who can and does listen!
6. In Psalm 3:4, the Psalmist said, *"I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah."*
7. Though we walk on this earth, and our Lord Jesus sits by the Father in Heaven, the distance is never so great that He cannot hear us when we cry!
8. When the sinner cries for salvation, Jesus hears. When the saint cries for help, Jesus hears. When the weary cry for rest, Jesus hears. When the thirsty cry for living water, Jesus hears!
9. Someone once said that prayer is the lifelong chance of a lifetime. Thankfully, whenever we need to cry out, we have a Savior whose ear is attentive to our cries.
10. In supplying Hagar's need, we notice not only that He heard her cry, but notice also that:

#### **B. He handled her crisis**

1. Verse 19 of this text says, *"And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink."*
2. Hagar wept because she saw no way out of her desperate situation. But when she wept, her cries reached the ears of Him who makes a way when there seems to be no way.
3. He opened her eyes and pointed her to the resources she needed for herself and her son.
4. Many times we are not able to see how we will meet the demands of our lives. It is then that God must open our eyes and show us how *He* will meet those demands.
5. George Mueller lived through most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in that time built a remarkable orphan ministry in England. Mueller said he started the orphanages as a way of demonstrating that God could continually and miraculously provide for His people.

6. God honored Mueller's ministry, and there are many stories of how the Lord sustained that work. One of my favorite such stories involves a particular morning when the children awoke to find there was nothing for breakfast.

7. In the dining room were long tables set with empty plates and empty cups. Mueller gathered the children around, lifted his voice, and prayed, "Dear Father, we thank thee for what Thou art going to give us to eat."

8. Suddenly, the story goes, there was a knock at the door. It was the local baker. He said the Lord had awoken him in the night and told him to bake bread for the orphanage.

9. That's not all, while the baker was delivering the bread there was another knock at the door. It was the milk man. His cart had broken down in front of the orphanage. He wanted to give the milk to them, rather than letting it go to waste.

10. Some might question a story so fantastic, but it is certainly within the ability of a God who feeds the birds every morning to see to it that breakfast arrives at the orphanage on time.

11. When Hagar wept, God worked! He supplied her needs and opened her eyes to His provision!

12. In this passage we find that *God can see the hardship for a single parent*, and *God can supply the help for a single parent*. Notice with me finally that:

### **III. GOD CAN SUSTAIN THE HOPE FOR A SINGLE PARENT**

1. There were two concerns that Hagar had in this particular passage. Both of them are likely shared by all parents, including and especially single parents.

2. First of all, Hagar did not know how she would provide for her son. Her bottle was empty. Her resources were gone.

3. Secondly, Hagar feared for the future of her son. She felt as if he was not going to make it. She felt she was going to lose him in that wilderness.

4. While single parents may not be wandering through a literal wilderness, no doubt many of them are wondering how they will provide for their children, and how those children are going to make it in the future.

5. In this text, God not only met the immediate needs of Hagar and Ishmael, but He also gave to them the intangible element hope; something she needed as desperately as water.

6. Notice how God sustained the hope of this single mother, and how He can do the same for others like her. First of all, notice that He gave her:

#### **A. Instruction for the parenting of the child**

1. Look at verse 18. Hagar had all but given up on Ishmael. Yet God said to her, "*Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.*"
2. Hagar didn't know what else to do for Ishmael, yet God gave her instructions. He said, "Lift up the lad..." He was saying, "Don't give up! Keep mothering that boy!"
3. I've spoken with parents, both married and single, whose children are struggling in school, or causing problems at home.
4. I've seen in their eyes the look of exhaustion and desperation. They say, "I don't know what else to do. I've almost given up!"
5. For those parents who don't know what else to do there is a God who knows exactly what to do!
6. His Word offers instruction and guidance for raising your child. His fatherhood in your life is a wonderful example of what to do with your own children.
7. I read about a high school math teacher who sent a note home with his students requesting that the parents *not* do any of the homework for their children.
8. The next day, one of the parents sent a note back that said, "Dear Mr. Wood, we are flattered that you think we could."
9. When we can't do anything else for our children, our Father can do something for us and them!
10. Notice that God not only gave Hagar instruction for the parenting of the child, but notice also that He gave to her:

#### **B. Inspiration for the prospects of the child**

1. Look again at verse 18. God said to Hagar, "*Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.*"
2. Notice that last phrase: "I will make him a great nation." Just minutes before, Hagar was waiting for Ishmael's death. Now, God has given her the hope that her son would not only survive, but would make her a grandmother one day.

3. As parents, especially single parents, when you drop your kids off at school each morning and head off to work, you can't help but wonder what is going to happen with them in the future.
4. The reality is; there are no guarantees. Children become adults who make their own decisions, and even the best parents have children that go astray.
5. While there are no guarantees; there is a God! *All* parents must look to Him in earnest prayer for their children.
6. We must carry our concerns for our children to Jesus, knowing that He is as concerned for them as we are.
7. God is able to overcome the trials of the wilderness, and whatever setbacks your child may face. He is able to inspire you with the prospects for your child!
8. Mary Mullen was a widow and a single mother to seventeen children. Her youngest son, Willie, became a terrible alcoholic and the shame of his family.
9. Night after night, Willie would come home drunk, pass out, and awake to find his mother praying over him. She cried out, "Dear Lord, he's in the grip of this thing! Oh, won't you set him free?"<sup>iii</sup>
10. Mary Mullen died before her prayers were answered, but eventually her youngest son was miraculously saved, and ended up becoming one of the greatest preachers Northern Ireland has ever seen.
11. As a single mother, Mary Mullen turned the prospects for her son over to the God who can transform lives and turn wayward sons and daughters into trophies of His grace!
12. Don't give up hope! Let the God of all grace inspire you with renewed hope for your children.

1. Though Hagar did not know it, the God who found her in that wilderness was a parent Himself. He has a Son too.
2. One day that Heavenly Father would give up His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for the sins of people like Hagar and Ishmael, Abraham and Sarah, you and me.
3. Through His only begotten Son we can be adopted into His family.

4. Once in His family, we can rest assured that the same grace and provision He showed to Hagar and her son, will be shown to us as well.

5. Let us all, whether we be single parents or not, give thanks the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit who support us when we cannot support ourselves.

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<sup>i</sup> “Reese Witherspoon Talks Divorce Then Marriage In Marie Claire”, 9/7/11, [www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com), accessed 9/14/11, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/07/reese-witherspoon-ryan-philippe-marie-claire-divorce-jim-toth-photos\\_n\\_952335.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/07/reese-witherspoon-ryan-philippe-marie-claire-divorce-jim-toth-photos_n_952335.html)

<sup>ii</sup> Grall, Timothy S., Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2007, issued 2009, accessed at [singleparents.about.com](http://singleparents.about.com), accessed 7/26/10, [http://singleparents.about.com/gi/o.htm?zi=1/XJ&zTi=1&sdn=singleparents&cdn=parenting&tm=14&f=00&su=p284.9.336.ip\\_p504.3.336.ip\\_&tt=11&bt=1&bts=1&zu=http://www.census.gov/prod/2009pubs/p60-237.pdf](http://singleparents.about.com/gi/o.htm?zi=1/XJ&zTi=1&sdn=singleparents&cdn=parenting&tm=14&f=00&su=p284.9.336.ip_p504.3.336.ip_&tt=11&bt=1&bts=1&zu=http://www.census.gov/prod/2009pubs/p60-237.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> Mullan, Willie, Tramp after God, (Lakeland, London, 1979), p. 18