

Doing God's Will God's Way

Genesis 16

One of the greatest sports movies of all time is Hoosiers. It is the story of a small town Indiana high school basketball team who won the state championship in the 1950s. They overcame all the obstacles from within and from without to accomplish the improbable. One of the scenes portrays the coach trying to gel his boys into a cohesive team. He wanted them to learn to work with him and with each other. He told his team that they were not to shoot the ball until they had passed it four times.

They struggled as they learned to work as a team, and their opponent took advantage. So one of the talented young boys took matters into his own hands. Instead of passing the ball as the coach instructed, he began to shoot on his own. He made a few quick baskets. The coach however was quite upset, and took him out of the game and benched him. Sure he was accomplishing the goal the coach had in mind: winning, but he was not doing it the coach's way: working as a team. The coach knew that if they were to win in the long run they would need to work together. The young player had the right motive, but the wrong method.

We do the same thing in our relationship with God. It is not only important that we do God's will, but that we do it God's way. Abraham and Sarah make this mistake in Genesis 16. God has promised Abraham a son. But no son has come. They're getting up in years, and the possibility of children seems less likely with each passing year. If you have ever struggled to have children, or have close friends who have, you may understand the desperation, fear, and depression they struggled with. Add to this the fact, that in their culture, a man's status, value and importance depended on having a male child to carry on the family. And so Abraham and Sarah decide to take a shortcut and accomplish God's will their own way. Let's look at God's Word this morning in Genesis 16:

1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. 2 And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children[a] by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. 3 So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife.

Put yourself in Sarah's sandals for a minute. She evidently said something like this to

herself: “God has promised my husband a son, through whom he means to fulfill all his promises. Yet he has never said specifically that the son must come through me. Perhaps he means to fulfill this promise another way.” A word of caution here— we must never look at God's truth the way a lawyer looks at the law: looking for technicalities and loopholes. That path leads to legalism and hypocrisy.

So Sarah resolves (through what struggles we can only imagine) to give up a wife's most precious possession - her husband's sole affection and she offers her maid to Abraham that he might have a child by her and thus fulfill the will of God.

Abraham was a one-woman man. As far as we know, he was quite happy with that arrangement. But to give him the son of his heart's desire, Sarah was willing to sacrifice that relationship. I believe she was sincere in this offer. I think she really thought she was helping. This wasn't some game where she was hoping he would talk her out of it. She was quite prepared to go through with it. She took the initiative in proposing it.

Furthermore, it was a socially acceptable thing to do, strange as that may seem to us. There was nothing immoral about it in the eyes of their culture. This was common in the life of these nomadic people. Most of the Canaanite leaders would have had multiple wives, and neither Abraham nor Sarah would be looked down upon because of this.

Yet, as we see in this Scripture, it was an act of appalling folly and stupidity, which results in endless sorrow and heartache. The results are evident still, four thousand years later! Many of the Arab tribes originated in this act. They are descendants of Ishmael and the enmity which sprang up between Israel and the Arabs troubles the world to this day. If ever we have a picture of the long-lasting consequences of sin, it is here. No matter how right this seemed in Sarah's eyes, it was the worst thing she could have done. We continue in verse 4.

⁴ And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. ⁵ And Sarai said to Abram, “May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!” ⁶ But Abram said to Sarai, “Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please.” Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.

Instead of doing God's will God's way, they tried to bring it about their own way. They didn't seek God's leading in this. They didn't pray about it. It was all their own desire, their own scheming. It was their own way. Because of this, they don't get God's results. They don't get God's promise. They don't get Isaac. They get Ishmael

The apostle Paul uses this very incident in Galatians 4 and 5 to illustrate the difference between the old covenant of law and the new covenant of grace. Hagar represents life by the flesh. Don't things your own way, by your own strength. Isaac, who would be the son of God's promise represents life by the Spirit, doing God's will God's way by God's strength. Abraham and Sarah were trying to do it all by the strength of their own fleshly nature, and so they get the fruit of the flesh.

The fruit of the flesh always the same. We become petty and petulant, displaying enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, and other ugly emotions which lie ever near the surface of the fallen human heart. Wherever these appear, they are the thermometer which tells us we are being ruled by the self and not by the Spirit. Here they are in this account, as contemporary as today's banner headline at the top of your newsfeed.

The first fruit of the flesh we see here is **contempt**. When Abraham placed Hagar into rivalry with his wife, Sarah, Hagar become insolent and impertinent and held her mistress in utter contempt, taunting her about her barrenness. Our Scripture says, "*she looked with contempt on her mistress.*"

This leads to another bitter fruit of the flesh— **unreasonableness**. If you have had any doubts that Sarah was a regular woman, this will convince you! This was her idea; she was the one who suggested it. But when he went along with it, she threw it back in his face, crying, "*May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!*" Let me translate this for you. "Abraham, this is all your fault." It was Sarah's idea, but now it's his fault. Sarah is being completely unreasonable. Her flesh is in control at this point.

The next fruit of the flesh is **irresponsibility**. Abraham said to Sarah, "*Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please.*" If you had any doubts that Abraham was a

regular man, this should convince you! He is dodging his responsibility, passing the buck. "Don't bother me with this," he says, "it's your problem, you deal with it."

The final result is the fruit of **harshness**. "*Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.*" Do you know this pattern? Do you know how many family fights and broken friendships have the same pattern? The whole household is in an uproar by now. Yet every person involved could have justified themselves, "We were only trying to do the right thing." Each one is sure the others are wholly to blame; no one is willing to face the sin in their own heart. There is a strong implication at the beginning of the next chapter that this unhappy state of affairs went on for thirteen long years. All this is a result of trying to do God's will their own way, instead of God's way.

But thankfully we see God's grace rise to meet the need once again. Look at vs. 7.

⁷ *The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur.* ⁸ *And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?"* She said, *"I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai."* ⁹ *The angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress and submit to her."* ¹⁰ *The angel of the Lord also said to her, "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude."* ¹¹ *And the angel of the Lord said to her,*

*"Behold, you are pregnant
and shall bear a son.*

*You shall call his name Ishmael,
because the Lord has listened to your affliction.*

¹² *He shall be a wild donkey of a man,
his hand against everyone
and everyone's hand against him,
and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen."*

It is "the angel of the LORD" who finds Hagar. We find many angels in Scripture, but this is the first appearance of "the angel of the LORD." The angel of the Lord shows up at some of the most significant points in God's story. He is identified with God, he is all-knowing, he receives worship and forgives sin. He seems to be a physical appearance of God himself, and many Scholars believe that the angel of the LORD is none other than the preincarnate Jesus. In verse 13, Hagar even calls Him, "*The God who sees me.*"

The angel of the Lord tells her four things. First, "*Where do you come from and where are you going?*" These are always arresting questions. Hagar answers the first, but she has nothing to say to the last. She does not know where she is going. Where can she go? The

question draws her helplessness sharply to her attention.

Then the angel says, "Return and submit." This is the only way to experience the grace and blessing of God. Had she gone on wandering into the wilderness, disaster awaited. Both she and the child in her womb would have died. When God finds us wandering, this is always what he says: "Return and submit." So Hagar returns.

With the command to return comes the promise of blessing. Blessing always follows obedience. *"I will multiply your descendants so that they cannot be numbered for multitude."* And then follows the prophecy of Ishmael's nature. *"He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against every man and every man's hand against him."* So even though there is forgiveness and healing, there are still consequences. He will be a trouble maker, a Missouri mule - a man whom no one can get along with. Has this prophecy ever proven true.

Hagar, glimpsing here something of God's omniscience and power, calls him, *"The God Who Sees,"* for she says, *'Have I even here seen him who sees me?'* This event gripped her. "Here is a God who sees me and knows me just as I am." So she named the well, "The well of One who lives and sees." Have you found the One who lives and sees, the One who knows all about your life and your circumstances? The One who knows your past and the future, and says to you as he said to Hagar, "Return and submit"? That is where you will find your blessing.

We need to constantly reaffirm our utter dependence upon the God who knows us, knows our circumstances, knows our problems, and who is completely able to work through us to accomplish all that he desires.

How do we guard against doing God's will our own way? Let me give you four principles that will help you do God's will God's way. These are safeguards we should keep in place when deciding what to do, or how to do something, especially in matters where the Word of God is doesn't offer specific direction.

Principle 1. We must be cautious about making quick decisions and snap Judgements without thinking through what the end results may be.

This was part of Abraham's problem. He was not sensitive to God's timing. He got in a hurry. He was only hearing what he wanted to hear. He made a snap decision without thinking things all the way through. There are times, of course, when we must act quickly. But there are also times when we should wait to take action. It's much better to gain a

godly perspective than to rush in and make a serious mistake. Remember too that different problems create an opportunity for God to display His power and guidance. In some situations, this is why He wants us to wait.

Principle 2. We must remember that even those closest to us can lead us astray

Sarah's perspective, although it appeared unselfish, was paganistic, humanistic, and ego-centered. Furthermore, she was very emotionally involved with Abraham. She knew how much he wanted to have a son.

A godly spouse should serve as a good sounding board for decision-making. I have learned to lean heavily upon Teresa's wisdom. God often speaks to me through her counsel. That doesn't mean our wives or husbands or close friends are perfect. They can become so emotionally involved they cannot be objective. Be careful of seeking advice only from those who tell you what you want to hear. Wise counsel is also objective counsel. Get advice from those who aren't emotionally tied up in the decision. Be careful not to seek out wisdom only from people you think will agree with you. Consult those who will be totally honest with you.

I'm not saying don't listen to your spouse. The point that here is that in some instances, we need, not only the perspective of a godly spouse, but wisdom from other mature believers.

Principle 3. When attempting to determine the will of God, we must be alert to influences from our previous lives.

We are bombarded by our culture's values constantly. In music, television, movies, Facebook, Twitter, websites, friends, neighbors and coworkers. Cultural values have a way of permeating and molding our thinking without our even realizing it. These values often linger in our hearts and minds, even when we become Christians.

This happened to Abraham and Sarah. They made their decision to have Abraham father a child through Hagar because of customs that were commonplace in their pagan culture. It seemed logical and rational. It also fit how they used to live their lives. It fit how they made decisions before they followed God.

We must beware of the custom-made rose-colored glasses we all have as a part of our cultural worldview. When we become Christians, we need to check our spiritual and psychological eyesight with the direct teachings of Scripture. This will help us to eliminate the influences of cultural contamination and echoes of our pre-Christian lives.

Principle 4. We must always select methods and strategies that are in harmony with the direct teachings and principles of Scripture.

Many times God's Word does not outline specific ways for doing things. Rather, He has given us principles and guidelines for making wise decisions. But God has given us general principles to guide in making intelligent decisions. There's a lot of freedom in areas where Scripture is silent. If we are careful to observe and obey those areas where Scripture is clear, that will help keep us on the right path where things aren't so clear. We have a whole lot more to go on than Abraham did at this point. There was no law, no Ten Commandments, or prophets. He didn't have a single scroll of Scripture as a guide. We've got God's complete Word.

I'll give you an example from my own life. When my children were born there was a popular feeding technique called demand feeding. The idea was that you fed the child whenever the child wanted to eat. It didn't matter when the rest of the family ate, or when the child ate, if the baby wanted food, you gave him food. There is no need to get the child on some sort of schedule or routine when it comes to eating or bedtime.

This was reflective of an entire philosophy of parenting. Call it demand parenting. You give the child what she wants when she wants it. The idea is that our children are born perfect little angels and will blossom to be wonderful flowers if we just get out of the way. They enter the world perfect and we mess them up. We just need to encourage whatever natural inclinations they may have. There were all sorts of so-called experts that filled talk shows and books with this stuff. And it seemed to make lots of sense.

However, when we went to God's Word, and we sought some godly advice we found that what Scripture says about parenting begins with a whole different set of assumptions. According to the Bible we're born with a sinful nature, and our natural tendency is to be sinful and selfish. My job as a parent is to raise my child in the discipline and instruction of the lord. I am to train her in the way she should go, so that when she is old she will not depart from it. My job is not to give her what she wants when she wants it, but to give her what she needs when she needs it, whether she wants it or not.

I'll put my girls up against demand parenting any day of the week. I'll tell you what you get with demand parenting. You get selfish, entitled little hellions. That's what you get. That's the difference between doing it our way verses God's way.

If you could see a roadmap of your spiritual journey, what would it show? What sort of shortcuts have you taken that have become detours from God's will? What would your GPS show? No, not your Global Positioning System, but your God Positioning System?

Any good GPS needs to know the same two things that the Angel of the LORD wanted to know from Hagar— where do you come from and where are you going? It needs to know your starting point and your destination. If it knows those two things, they are really good at giving you the best route. It might not look like the shortest route, but maybe there's some road construction, or there's been an accident. These things have gotten really good at giving you information in real time. My wife's Google maps even has a feature that will send her a notification if there's a problem on I-44 and she needs to find another way to work or to get home. Google has access to so much data. They watch everything you do, they're able to give you this information in real-time.

Let me tell you something. God has more data than Google. He knows everything. So, when God says there's a right way and a wrong way to go about something, He knows what He's talking about. Proverbs 4:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." What shortcuts have you taken?