

Our Help in Hopeless Times

Quarter 11 | Lesson 1 | Spiritual Formation

1. **Connecting:** Do an activity about what it means to be known.
2. **Teaching:** Learn through the story of Hagar how God brings hope in hopeless times (Psalm 24:1; Genesis 16:7–11, 13; 21:16–20).
3. **Responding:** Ask God for help with difficult situations.

SUPPLIES

- Bibles
- Pebbles (2–3 per student)
- Leaves or small pieces of cloth (1 per student)
- Optional Supplies:*
 - *The NIV Action Study Bible*
 - Memory Verse Poster
 - *The Action Bible*, image of Hagar and the Angel of the Lord
 - Pencils
 - Student Pages

Teacher Devotion

[Hagar] 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."
Genesis 16:13

We often think of the desert as a barren place where nothing can grow. But for Hagar, the desert brought life. In the desert when she was alone and desperate, the Lord came to her. He saw her. When she was rejected and afraid, He knew her and called her by name. When she saw nothing but despair, the One who sees brought her hope. Twice Hagar fled to the desert to escape her desperate situation. And twice God met her there and promised a future for her and for her child. Though we do not know if Hagar chose to follow God, He still loved and protected her. In His sight, she was precious.

Think of a time you felt as though you were lost in a lifeless desert. Even there, God saw you—just as He sees you today in whatever circumstance you may face. You are known by the One who sees all, and He loves you! You are not rejected and alone. You are precious in God's sight! In the deserts of our lives, we can always find the God who sees us. He never fails to bring life and hope.

LESSON TIME

1. Connecting: Do an activity about what it means to be known.

As the teens arrive, greet them by name and ask, "What do you think it means to know someone?" Allow them to share their thoughts with you and with others in the class.

Teacher Tip: If there are new students, introduce yourself to them and ask for their names. As often as possible, use your students' names when you address them. This helps students to feel welcome and cared for.

Have the teens line up in 2 equal lines facing each other. If you have an uneven number of students, you can do this activity with them.

When we first meet people, we do not know much about them. Then, as we get to know them better, we learn things that help us to understand who they truly are. We may notice how they treat others or words they say. We learn what they like and do not like. We may know things about them that no one else does. When we grow close, we may begin to care about the things they care about. Getting to know others well makes our relationships deeper and more meaningful.

Have the students answer the following questions with the person standing across from them.

- Who are some people you know well?
- Who knows more about you than anyone else?

It is often our family and friends who know the most about us, but there may be others who know us well. Today we will do an activity to help us to know each other better.

Designate 1 of the lines to be Line 1. The other will be Line 2.

I will ask a question. You and the person standing across from you will each state your name and the answer to the question. You will have 30 seconds for both of you to answer. When I say, "Stop," the people in Line 1 will step to the right so they will now be facing new people. The person at the end of Line 1 will run to the other end of the line and stand across from the person at the end of Line 2. We will repeat the process for each question.

Use the questions below or make up your own questions. After the students answer each question, Line 1 will move so everyone is across from a new person.

- What is the funniest thing that has ever happened to you?
- What is the most exciting thing you have ever done?
- What do you like best about yourself?
- If you could meet anyone, who would it be?
- If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?
- What is your favourite memory?
- Whom do you admire most in the world?
- What is your biggest fear?
- What motivates you to work hard?
- What is your proudest accomplishment?
- What makes you laugh the most?
- What is your favourite song?
- If you could only eat 1 food for the rest of your life, what would it be?

- What do you complain about the most?
- If you could ask God a question, what would you ask?

Teacher Tip: If you have a very large class, form 2 sets of lines. This will allow all of the students to participate without using too much class time.

Have the teens sit down for discussion.

Activities like this can help us to get to know each other better. You shared some interesting facts about yourself. You probably also learned some things about your classmates that you never knew.

While we may know a lot about our friends and those who are close to us, there is someone who knows us completely—God. He created us, and He knows everything about us.

2. Teaching: Learn through the story of Hagar how God brings help in hopeless times (Psalm 24:1; Genesis 16:7–11, 13; 21:16–20).

The Bible tells us that God created the earth and everything in it. Listen to what the Bible says about this:

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

Psalm 24:1

- What are some things in the world that you think belong to God? Why?
- Do you think all people belong to God? Why or why not?

The Bible tells us that we all belong to God. He created us, and we belong to Him. He knows us and loves us, even when we do not choose to love Him in return.

Optional: If possible, share the image from *The Action Bible*.

The Bible also tells us that God is the source of all hope. In the Old Testament, God brought hope to Hagar. She was an Egyptian maid in Abram's household. She did not worship God. Abram was a man of great faith. God made a promise to Abram that he would be the father of a great nation. This was an important promise—not just for Abram but for the whole world.

As part of this promise, God told Abram that he would have a child. For many years, Abram and his wife, Sarai, had wanted a child. But now she and Abram were very old, so it did not seem likely they would ever have children of their own. So Sarai suggested that Abram have sexual relations with Hagar, and Hagar became pregnant.

Optional: If you are using *The NIV Action Study Bible*, the teens can read more about God's covenant with Abram (Abraham) by reading the "Unlock It" section near Genesis 16.

- Do you think what Abram and Sarai did was right in God's eyes? Why or why not?
Allow 2–3 students to share their thoughts.
- Why do you think they made the choice they did?
- What effect did their choice have on Hagar?

The Bible does not tell us how Hagar felt about this arrangement. But it does tell us that Hagar grew proud when she became pregnant. She realized that she would have a child when her mistress could not. So she began to show contempt for Sarai. Sarai grew angry and treated Hagar harshly, so Hagar ran away. Pregnant and alone, Hagar wandered in the wilderness.

- **Think about what Hagar experienced. What do you think Hagar may have been feeling?**

She was alone in a foreign place. She was poor and pregnant. She had been mistreated by her mistress. She may have felt afraid, hopeless, and lonely. She might also have felt angry with Sarai and Abram.

- **What do you think happened to Hagar in the wilderness?**

You may be surprised by what happened next.

Have a student read Genesis 16:7–8 aloud from the Bible. If that is not possible, the verses are printed here for you.

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.
Genesis 16:7–8

- **What was the first word the angel said to Hagar?**

He called her by her name, Hagar. Explain to your students that "the angel of the LORD" was actually God's presence.

- **What does this reveal about God?**

God knew Hagar so well that He called her by name.

Listen to what happened next in the story.

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.
Genesis 16:9–11

- **What promise did the angel give to Hagar?**

She would have more descendants than she could count, and she would have a son.

The angel told Hagar to name her son Ishmael, which means "God hears." This name would serve as a reminder to Hagar that God had listened to her in her time of need.

Have the students find partners and share their answers with their partners.

- **What does this reveal about God?**

He cared deeply about Hagar. He had seen and heard her in her time of need.

- **Do you think God listens to us in our times of need? Why or why not?**

God knew Hagar. He knew her situation and how she felt. He showed Hagar that He cared for her. The name God told her to give to her son was a reminder that He is the God who hears. Listen to the way Hagar responded to God.

Invite a student to read Genesis 16:13 from a Bible. If that is not possible, the verse is printed here for you. If you are using the Memory Verse Poster, show it to the students.

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."

Genesis 16:13

- **What name did Hagar use for God?**

She called Him "the God who sees me."

In her time of distress, God saw Hagar. He brought her hope even when there seemed to be none. She responded by acknowledging that God was with her in the midst of her difficult situation.

- **How might knowing God sees and hears you in a difficult situation help you to have hope?**

Teacher Tip: Some of your students may be in difficult situations that seem to have no end. They may feel there is no hope. Encourage them with the knowledge that God sees and hears them in their difficult situations. If possible, pray with and for them. Knowing that someone cares about their situations can help to bring encouragement and hope.

Hagar returned to Abram's household and gave birth to a son just as God had said. God also fulfilled His promise to Abram and Sarai by giving them their own son. God changed their names to Abraham and Sarah. Later Sarah asked Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away.

Hagar again found herself in the wilderness. With only a little food and a skin filled with water, Hagar believed she and her son would soon die. So she put Ishmael under a bush and sat a distance away. She did not want to watch him die.

Have the students answer the following questions with a partner.

- **How do you think Hagar felt?**
- **What do you think happened to Hagar next?**

Listen to what the Bible tells us happened next.

Then [Hagar] went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there, she began to sob. God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand,

for I will make him into a great nation.” Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. God was with the boy as he grew up.

Genesis 21:16–20

- **How did God respond to Hagar?**

He again called her by name. He knew her love for her son, and He protected her son. He also provided for their needs. He opened her eyes to see what she had missed before.

- **What does this reveal about God?**

God cared for Hagar in her time of need. He saw her needs, and He heard her cries and those of her son. God was with her even in the wilderness when there seemed to be no hope. When Hagar was expecting death, God blessed her with life and a future for her and her son. He brought hope where she had none.

This does not mean that life was not difficult for Hagar. She lived in the desert with her son until he grew up. She may have struggled for food or water at times. She may have felt lonely. But she found hope in knowing that God knew her, heard her, and saw her. He was with her.

God cares for you in the same way He cared for Hagar whether or not you have chosen to follow God. As your Creator, He is with you always. You are never alone. God knows your needs and your emotions. He sees and hears you when you are in a hopeless desert and feel pain, discouragement, or anger. He can bring help in even in desperate situations. His help does not always come in the ways we want or expect it. But He always sees our needs and does what He knows is right and good.

Teacher Tip: Some of your students may have been betrayed and mistreated, so they may have difficulty believing that God is worthy of their trust. If it is appropriate, share personal experiences with God’s trustworthiness in your own life and highlight the parts of the story of Hagar and Abram that show that God is always worthy of our trust. This may help them to be more willing to trust God.

3. Responding: Ask for God’s help with difficult situations.

We have learned a lot of things about God. We learned that He sees us and hears us. He knows us by name. We learned that He is with us always, including in our times of great need.

Place the leaves and pebbles where the students can easily take them.

There may have been times in your life when you felt like Hagar. You may have wondered if God could see what was happening in your life. You may have wondered if He could hear your cries. If you have ever felt rejected, discouraged, afraid, or lonely, pick up a pebble. If you have felt this way many times, pick up a few more pebbles. Ask God to show you that He is with you and that He sees and hears you. Place a leaf over the pebbles to show His presence with you.

Maybe you have not felt these things but know others who have. If you know someone who has experienced a difficult situation or emotion, pick up a pebble and commit to pray for that person. Ask God to bring hope to that person’s situation. Place a leaf over the pebbles to show His presence with that person.

Teacher Tip: It is important to create opportunities for students to relate to the lesson in a personal way. Having them use the pebbles and leaves allows them to connect on an emotional level without forcing them to talk about their difficult feelings.

We can have great hope in knowing that God cares for us. Listen to this psalm that tells about how well He knows us.

You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

Psalm 139:1–6

- How does it make you feel to know that God has searched and known you? That He knows every thought you will think, every word you will say, and every breath you will take. Think quietly about your answer.
- How does it feel to know that God hems you in, behind and before, and that He lays His hand upon you? Think quietly about your answer.

Optional: If you are using the Student Pages, give the teens time to read and write about Psalm 139.

We can find great hope in the fact that God always sees us and always hears us. Even when we feel desperate and alone, God is with us. Even when we do not see a way out of our circumstances, God is there. He loves us completely, and He walks with us always even in desperate times.

Have students stand as you pray a blessing over them based on Psalm 139:

Blessing: May you always know that the God who created you truly sees you. May you find comfort in knowing that He understands every thought and every need you have, and He is with you always.

Family Connection: Encourage the students to ask their family members, “Who in your life is always present when you need him?” They can share that God is always with us and He knows our needs.

Lead the teens in singing this quarter’s song, if possible. “Holy Forever” by Chris Tomlin
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IkHgxCemCRk>