

OPENING ILLUSTRATION

- › What do you remember what your pastor's sermon last week? Odds are you remember an illustration or a personal story. Human beings have always told stories. We remember stories like nothing else. They draw us in and engage our emotions. We try to imagine what it would be like to be in a particular story. The Bible is full of stories. We think of Adam and Eve, and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Moses, and David, and on it goes. The Bible itself is one unified story about Jesus. That's why passages in the New Testament often interpret and explain Old Testament stories based on events that happened before Jesus came. Think about this, too: your life is a story. But it is a story that's not just about you—it is also about God's larger story in which your story resides.

CONTEXT

- › At the end of Galatians 4, Paul gives the example of Hagar and Sarah, comparing Hagar's status as a slave to those who are enslaved to the law, and Sarah's status as a free woman to those who have received the promise of salvation through the coming Messiah, Jesus. Hagar's children—Ishmael and unbelieving Israel—are in bondage; Sarah's children—Isaac and those who have believed the promise—are free. Through this example, Paul is attempting to drive home the point once again that the only way to be right with God is to believe the gospel. Attempting to obtain righteousness in God's sight through obedience to the law only results in bondage. We should note, again, that his tone is very firm—legalism is not a small matter. He is rebuking the false teachers among the Galatian churches.

EXPOSITORY OUTLINE

The following are suggested sermon points for each verse or section of verses for a large group setting.

- › Galatians 4:21-23. *Christians are people of the promise.* Salvation is not a matter of our decisions or efforts, it's a matter of receiving and believing God's promise. The law is not the promise. Relying on it is taking matters into our own hands.
- › Galatians 4:24-27. *The old covenant produces slaves; the new covenant, sons.* The old covenant is based on obedience to the law, the new covenant on faith in Christ. Paul continues to emphasize the difference between law and gospel.
- › Galatians 4:28-31. *The freedom of the gospel is opposed by those trying to establish their own righteousness.* The gospel says that God has to do all the work in our salvation or it doesn't get done. Because this message is an affront to human pride, it is often rejected and opposed.

GROUP DISCUSSION

The following are suggested discussion questions on each verse or section of verses for leading a small group session are also useful in sermon deliveries that include discussion.

ASK A STUDENT TO READ GALATIANS 4:21-23.

- › **Why might someone want to be under the law? That is, why would a person prefer an external set of rules to follow in order to be right with God?**
- › **How are Hagar and Sarah different? How are their children different? Who are Hagar's children today and who are Sarah's children?**

ASK A STUDENT TO READ GALATIANS 4:24-27.

- › **Paul says the example of Hagar and Sarah is an illustration pointing to the two covenants. How do they do that?**
- › **Why did the old covenant produce slavery?**
- › **Paul contrasts the "Jerusalem above" with "present Jerusalem." What's the difference?**



ASK A STUDENT TO READ GALATIANS 4:28-31.

- › **Why does Paul refer to some in the Galatian churches as children of the promise like Isaac? How is Isaac a child of the promise?**
- › **Who is the child born according to the flesh that Paul refers to? And who was he persecuting?**
- › **Paul says that we're to drive out the slave woman. Who represented the "slave woman" in the Galatian churches?**

SESSION CONNECTION

- › In Session 9, students read the story of Deborah from Judges 4, showing God's unbroken record of faithfulness. We can trust that He will do what He says because He always has. Though we aren't always faithful, He is. And our unfaithfulness doesn't cause Him to abandon us. Instead, He delivers those who humbly cry out to Him. As Deborah famously asked Barak before battle: "Hasn't the LORD gone before you?" (Judg. 4:14). We see God's faithfulness in Galatians 4, too. God made Sarah a promise and He kept His promise in His timing. It appeared that Sarah was barren and that God had abandoned her, but she wasn't and He hadn't. Our God is always faithful. We can't rely on what we see; we have to trust in what He says.

OBJECT LESSON/APPLICATION

- › Think about how gardening or farming works. You plant seeds in the ground and then you have to wait. You trust that the nutrients in the soil, the sun, the rain, and proper care will eventually produce vegetables and fruits and flowers and whatever else you planted. There's not much you can do to speed up the process. You have to wait patiently. That's often how it is with God's promises. We have to trust in His faithfulness when it doesn't look like anything is happening. Elisabeth Elliot wisely wrote: "The work of God is done on God's timetable. His answers to our prayers come always in time—His time. His thoughts are far higher than ours, His wisdom past understanding."

Our God is faithful to deliver those who humbly cry out to Him.

- › <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/remember-his-goodness> – Ben Reaoch challenges us to be people who fight spiritual amnesia with God-given means of remembrance.
- › <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god/deeper-walk/blog/28395-life-on-gods-time> – Brittany Volpei encourages us to trust in God's timing.

* These websites are not affiliated with LifeWay. Consult with your church's leadership before including these in your session to be sure that your church's values allow their materials to be referenced in your session time.