

Mixed Stories Through Scripture

4 WEEK BIBLE STUDY

Introduction

This study is designed with students of Mixed ethnic and racial backgrounds in mind. As we reflect on biblical stories, it helps us reflect on our own stories and how God is at work in us.

The four studies focus on different ways God interacts with our ethnic and racial stories:

- God sees us and loves us. (Hagar)
- God enters our stories. (Jesus)
- God blesses others through our stories. (Timothy)
- God empowers us to bless communities. (Moses)

Our Mixed stories can be “complicated,” but this study shows that everyone’s stories are complex, even (and especially) those in the Bible. The unique stories of Hagar, Jesus, Timothy, and Moses weren’t an accident—they were actually orchestrated by God!

As we seek to follow Jesus (who is also ethnically Mixed!), it’s helpful to learn more about the “great cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12:1) who have gone before us and are cheering us on.

Praise Jesus for our individual stories that God brings together into a beautiful community.

LEADERSHIP TIPS

Remember that as the leader, you set the tone for how group discussions go. Pay attention to who is in the room.

Some practical tips include:

- Individuals get to decide what their story is. Don’t tell other people how to feel.
- If you have a monoethnic person in your group, you may want to remind them to be slow to speak but quick to listen.
- See [5 Tips for Leading a Mixed Small Group](#) for more ideas and information.

Study of Hagar | God sees and loves us

WARM UP QUESTIONS

- When was a time when you didn't see someone? Or you did something that made someone feel unseen?
- Was there ever a time when you felt like God was the only one who understood your situation? What was it like to feel like God was with you?

CONTEXT

Up until this point, Abram has chosen to put his faith in God even though the people and nations around him are not following God. Because of Abram's faith, God has promised that he will build a family through Abram and make him into a great nation (Genesis 15:5). What God is pleased about in Abram is his faith. And in his old age, God promises to give him a son. Abram has believed God for that promise, but he and Sarai are getting impatient, so they take matters into their own hands.

PASSAGE: GENESIS 16:1-15

1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; 2 so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said. 3 So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. 4 He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. 5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me." 6 "Your slave is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her. 7 The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. 8 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. 9 Then the angel of the Lord told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." 10 The angel added, "I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count." 11 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. 12 He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers." 13 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." 14 That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered. 15 So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne.

DISCUSSION

- What is God's posture towards Hagar?
- What does God want Hagar to know? What does God think of Hagar in contrast to what Abram and Sarai think of her?
- What does God do for Hagar?
- God sees Hagar when she's in a place of loneliness. He knows she hasn't been treated as a woman of worth and value who's been made in God's image, rather she has been made to feel like she's not enough for the people around her. Have you ever felt similar as a Mixed person? How has God met you in that place?

RESPONSE

God wants to meet us in our pain and bring healing. If you've never invited God in your pain, would you like to make space for him today?

Pray and ask the Lord to enter into the places of pain around your ethnic identity and bring healing. (If you've already experienced that, offer thanks to God and consider praying for someone else.)

Study of Jesus | God enters our stories

WARM UP QUESTIONS

- What's an example of something that brings you joy (it could be small)?
- How has someone changed your story? How has someone helped you?
- Who is someone that has impacted your life? How?

CONTEXT

In Jewish culture at this time, to provide enough wine at a wedding was an essential part of showing hospitality. To run out of wine would be an embarrassment for a couple to endure for the rest of their lives. Jesus is aware of this, and in this passage he offers an extremely generous gift to remove shame and bring great joy for all present.

PASSAGE: JOHN 2:1-12

1 On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, 2 and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." 4 "Woman [this not a derogatory term in Jesus' time], why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. 8 Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, 9 and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside 10 and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." 11 What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. 12 After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

DISCUSSION

- What does this miracle convey about what Jesus values?
- Jesus came to remove all shame from us and exemplifies this by providing new wine for the bride and groom in abundance. He not only removes their shame, but he gives them a new reputation. In the same way, Jesus removes our shame and gives us a new identity in him; one that we can boast in. How might Jesus want to take away any shame you might have about your racial/ethnic identity, or just your identity in general?
- How has Jesus provided for you? Does his provision seem miraculous, mundane, or both?
- How do you feel about the areas that don't feel like you've been cared and provided for?

RESPONSE

Jesus deeply cares about the things we go through, even if they don't have a large impact on the world. Is there a need or area of weakness you want to ask Jesus to meet you in by pouring out his Holy Spirit?

Spend time in prayer asking the Lord for his abundant provision in your life. Would you like to invite Jesus to enter your life and bring healing to your shame?

WEEK THREE

Study of Timothy | God blesses others through our stories

WARM UP QUESTIONS

- Do you have a favorite family story that you like to share? How do you feel when you talk about your family with other people?
- What is something you have done to culturally fit in with part of your family? Was it something you wanted to do or felt obligated to do?

CONTEXT

At this point in the biblical story, Jesus has died, risen again, and ascended into heaven. His disciples have been testifying that Jesus is the Messiah and the church is growing. Even a Pharisee, Saul, who used to persecute the church, has become one of its biggest advocates. God has made clear to the growing church that faith in Jesus and the power of the Spirit is not just for those of Jewish descent, but Jews and Gentiles alike.

In the chapter before this (ch. 15), the church leaders met in Jerusalem to discuss if Gentile converts needed to adhere to Jewish laws—specifically circumcision—for some had been teaching that “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1b). The decision was “No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved” (v. 11). There were a few items that the Gentile believers were asked to abstain from because they were commonly associated with idol worship.

The uniqueness of Timothy’s ethnicity (Christ-following Jewish mother, Greek father) meant that he understood Jewish and Greek culture, and could adapt to the needs of different ministry fields. When we pick up the story, Paul is traveling with Silas through “Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches (Acts 14:41).”

PASSAGE: ACTS 16:1-5

1 Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. 2 The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. 3 Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. 4 As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

DISCUSSION

- What do we learn about Timothy from this passage, including his ethnic heritage?
- In chapter 15, we learn that the decision at the Council of Jerusalem was that Gentile converts did not need to be circumcised to be saved. Why then did Paul have Timothy circumcised?
- How would you imagine Timothy felt?
- What was the result of Timothy joining Paul and Silas?

RESPONSE

God used Timothy’s unique background and story to bless many! As you reflect on your own story and background, what do you sense God might want to use to bless others?

Take 2 min to be silent and listen for what God might bring to mind. Would you like to share with others in the group?

Study of Moses | God empowers us to bless communities

WARM UP QUESTIONS

- What's something you've been in charge of?
- What was that like for you? Did you feel nervous? Confident? A little of both?

CONTEXT

Moses was a Levite, Hebrew man born in Egypt under the rule of Pharaoh. His parents were under Pharaoh's order that every Hebrew boy must be thrown into the Nile. His mother placed him in a basket and put him along the bank of the Nile as a baby. He was found by Pharaoh's daughter who had sympathy on him and decided to keep him. Moses had a complex upbringing given that he was ethnically a part of the group (Israelites) that was enslaved to the Egyptians but received some of the privileges of those with higher status (see Ex 2:1-10). Although Moses was not a slave, he had a righteous anger upon seeing the injustice inflicted upon his people. Moses was justified in his anger, even though he didn't act righteously in killing the Egyptian. He later becomes the person God chooses to deliver his people from slavery in Egypt (see Ex 3:5-10).

PASSAGE: EXODUS 2:11-3:4

11 One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. 12 Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. 13 The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, "Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?" 14 The man said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must have become known." 15 When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well. 16 Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father's flock. 17 Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock. 18 When the girls returned to Reuel their father, he asked them, "Why have you returned so early today?" 19 They answered, "An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock." 20 "And where is he?" Reuel asked his daughters. "Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat." 21 Moses agreed to stay with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. 22 Zipporah gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom [Gershom means a stranger there], saying, "I have become a foreigner in a foreign land." 23 During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. 24 God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. 25 So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

PASSAGE: EXODUS 2:11-3:4 (CONTINUED)

1 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. 3 So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up." 4 When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." 5 "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." 6 Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. 7 The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. 9 And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

DISCUSSION

- What feelings arise for you as you read this passage?
- Moses had many different experiences, from his Egyptian upbringing to his time in Midian. Where can we see God's intentionality over Moses's life?
- God calls Moses to deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Moses is an Israelite but also experiences life very differently from his fellow Israelites.
- How does Moses' relationship with his identity change? How does God empower Moses to use his status as a means of bringing justice to his people, in this passage and others?

RESPONSE

God desires to bring healing and restoration in the most broken of situations. God has intentionality and purpose for everyone he has created. He desires to reconcile all things back to himself, especially in the face of injustice. God has not forgotten about anyone because he has made all of us. God is present with and sovereign over all creation. God is in the business of empowering people to bless their communities.

Have you ever felt like your Mixed identity is a burden to those around you? Take time to consider how God made you purposefully as you are. How can he use you to bless others?

MOVING FORWARD

- Think back over the last four weeks. Where have I seen God use my story to bless others? Are there ways God has used my unique cultural background to be a blessing to others?
- And as a group: Is God inviting us to use our experiences to be agents of justice to those who aren't receiving it? What's one specific next step? Could it be meeting again to brainstorm? Reaching out to other leaders?