

El Roi

All of us have experienced rejection in various degrees, to be sure some to a greater extent than others. And certainly, as a result we have all experienced what it is to feel all alone. When I was 16, a beloved uncle, who would often include me in his family outdoor adventures, committed suicide. I was not allowed to attend the funeral and there were no clarifying or instructive family conversations afterward. He was just gone, and I was left alone with my memories and many questions. One which was, why? For an introspective insecure adolescent, I couldn't help but feel the sting of death as some kind of rejection. The one who takes his life, intentionally or unintentionally is rejecting life and with it those relationships that are left behind. After my parent's separation and eventual divorce, the very next year, that "all alone" feeling began to rear its ugly head in earnest. As it turns out, it had always been there; it was just that this latest disparaging circumstance brought it to my attention. This inner emotion that had been buried finally was birthed. It is not unusual for kids from divorced families to feel rejection in the loss of the known family structure, no matter how unhealthy the parent's marriage had been. For me it only increased my negative response of hiding deep within a world of my own creation. Oh, I was also in touch with reality, but too often reality was far too painful and escape into other worlds, where I could be more in control, at least gave a temporary sense of security. Whether I found that world in the books I read, the nature I observed, or the fantasies I created, it took that "all alone" edge off for a while. These safe places were always populated with "others" that I could observe from a safe distance, yet feel vicariously involved. It was in the next few years that I discovered *El Roi*, the God who sees. Often it takes the painful circumstances of life to open our blind eyes to another kind of reality, the one that is unseen, at least by darkened human vision. God was there all along! He saw and heard. I was not alone!

In Genesis 16 we read of Hagar and her destructive circumstance. Apparently, due to no fault of her own, she had gotten embroiled in Abram's and Sarai's attempt to orchestrate the conception and birth of God's promised child, whose offspring would eventually inherit Canaan. God had promised after all, but evidentially He needed some good ol' human intervention. They were both old, and Sarai apparently wasn't getting pregnant any time soon (at least according to their understanding). As the story unfolds and with the window of opportunity seemingly closing, Sarai decided to take matters in her own hands

and came up with the idea of offering Hagar, her Egyptian maid, as a possible solution: Abram could take Hagar as his surrogate wife. In those days Hagar would have been viewed as an extension of Sarai as her bondservant. Therefore, any child from the union could be claimed by Abram and Sarai. So, this blessed couple, both still learning to trust in God's ways, exchanged God's plan A with their plan B. The result? There was conception, all right, but with it came Sarai's jealousy and humiliation. Although Hagar was a servant, the fact that she had conceived and Sarai had not gave her cause to hold her mistress in disapproval. In the ancient world childbearing was the source of a woman's value, and Hagar's bareness turned to bitterness, with Hagar receiving the brunt of Sarai's disappointment. Sarai's harsh treatment soon proved too much for Hagar and instead of living with the contentious Sarai she fled to the wilderness.

Now put yourself in Hagar's shoes. She had traveled far away from home and family for this position and had no intention of jeopardizing her job by messing up. Hagar had become Abraham's mistress, though she started out innocently enough as Sarai's servant. Now by cooperating with her mistress she found herself alone and pregnant, with no work, no hope of getting ahead, and no chance for marriage or family. Now what? The Angel of the Lord appears and speaks words that reveal that not only is God paying attention to Sarai and Abraham but also to her and her child. He tells her where to go and what to do next. He even speaks of the child's future and gives the unborn boy a name for her to remember this day by, Ishmael: God hears. In response Hagar, gives this God a most personal name at His revelation to her, *El Roi*; God who sees. While the truth of this name is seen throughout Scripture this is the only place that it is uttered. And it is voiced by a rejected Egyptian concubine!

Do you really realize that God sees **you**? There are two sides to this coin. One side announces His presence, which is there for all who call upon His name for deliverance. The other side is that He sees **you**, the real **you**! And He doesn't look away! He loves you. Paul said, *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."* (Romans 5:8–10). Have you responded to *El Roi*? Have you trusted in His deliverance from sin and judgment? If not, He sees you, and He will hear your

call for mercy. If you have already experienced *El Roi's* loving gaze, thank Him now for His great gift of mercy and grace.

Assignment

1. Read Genesis 16. What are your first impressions? Can you imagine yourself in Hagar's shoes? What would you have felt?
2. List all that you learn about Hagar from this chapter?
3. Whose idea was it that Abram and Hagar have relations? Why?
4. What provoked Sarai and how did she respond?
5. Was Hagar totally innocent in all this?
6. Do you relate to Hagar or her situation? How?
7. What were God's instructions to Hagar?

8. What did Hagar learn about God?

9. Knowing what you do about God, how would it help to also know Him as El Roi? Does this story of God's revealing address any misconceptions that you have had about Him? If so what are they?

10. How did you feel about what was done to Hagar? Does it parallel anything that ever happened in your life? Would it have helped you to know God as El Roi? How is El Roi a name to run to and be safe?

11. In what situations would it help to know God as El Roi? Be specific and practical.