

Balancing Position and Power

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Genesis 21:17 “What aileth thee, Hagar? Fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad.”

I've worked with families for almost 20 years as I write this. One universal truth about every family is each member has a role to play. Each role is unique in its offering to the overall functioning of the family. Each role is unique in its offering to the overall functioning of the family. It is the design of our Creator. It is how families work. The same is true in the family of God.

These roles provide for each of us a way of contributing to the family. They are how we belong. Roles define how we are unique. And, there are many times, that our role both helps and hurts those around us as well as ourselves.

Hagar's story reveals both sides of this phenomenon. She was in a role that was helpful and hurtful; given a place of prominence and at the same time rejected. As often happens in families to those in less powerful positions, she set herself up to be treated unfairly by her mistress. Plus, she ends up with the additional responsibilities of having a son to care for.

Hagar's position entailed doing what she was told. It was her job to come along side and assist Sarah. We don't know if she had compassion on Sarah's situation or was just doing what she was told to do, however, Hagar responded with obedience to one in authority over her.

The flip-side of the scenario is the possibility Hagar seeing her opportunity to gain position. We've all been there. Most children in families want to feel like they are helpful and make life better for their parents. That is the avenue of belonging and position. Hagar was not Sarah's child but she was a faithful handmaiden. I do not believe she fully saw the potential pitfalls of the situation. Depending on how young she was, all she may have seen was the benefits of her position. Anyway you look at it, it is the classic double bind. In a double-binding situation, no matter what you do or say, there is the danger of failure or punishment. Had Hagar refused she would have been punished. In responding to her new position of prominence with pride she set herself up to be punished.

We don't know if that would have happened regardless of her position. However, this is often what happens with those lower down in the family hierarchy when they are raised to positions that are not theirs to have. The result is an imbalance in handling position and power. True to this fact, she began to use her newfound importance inappropriately. She “lorded” herself over her mistress. As most wives I know, Sarah became resentful, demanding her husband ‘do something’ that would affirm his allegiance to her. Hagar was prideful and wrong. The end result of her behavior was to

be banished from the home.

Hagar's decision to cry out to Jehovah was the most appropriate behavior she exhibited. At this point, Jehovah was the only source she knew could help her. When any of us are faced with the seeming impossibilities of our position and/or what our choices have created, do what is best for you! That means consulting the Almighty. Interestingly enough, the Lord asks her what is wrong. God knew what was wrong but part of being in relationship with Him means telling Him everything that is on our hearts. He tells her He has heard the voice of her son. I found that fact just as intriguing. You see, her son represented her future and God responded to her need for comfort about the future. She is not asking for forgiveness. God reassures her of His listening ear and that she has nothing to be afraid of. Lastly, he asks her to return. In doing so, she becomes the mother of a nation. When we respond by crying out to God He always goes into action on our behalf.

I have often wished Hagar could have seen the depth of her sin and allowed the Lord to heal her more completely, yet, God obviously used it all for the furtherance of His Kingdom plan. Double bind or not, God has so much for us – more than we know. Why do we fear?

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