

“This in-depth study carries the timeless truth of the incredible value God places on women and their significance in the message of the gospel. Within these pages Marina captivates the reader by highlighting the eternal truth that the Word of God is inspiring and alive. The rich theology will equip you with vital ‘information,’ while the reflection and meditation questions will take you on a journey of ‘transformation.’”

JULIE MULLINS, senior pastor, Christ Fellowship, Florida

“Marina Hofman, PhD, is a lover of God, of truth, of knowledge and understanding, and of people. She cares deeply about equipping people in their full identity available through God in Christ, and especially on behalf of women. Hofman is a gift to the world and to all who hunger for deeper knowledge of the truth that sets us free.”

COLONEL JANET MUNN, DMin, director of The Salvation Army International Social Justice Commission

“The Bible testifies that women have played, and will continue to play, an essential role in God’s loving plan of salvation. Marina Hofman’s Bible study makes accessible to Christians of all denominations, and indeed to all searchers after truth, a way of growing in appreciation of that important truth through an insightful small group Bible sharing format. As a Catholic priest and a Missionary of Mercy, I especially enjoy Marina’s engaging invitation to meditate on the role that Mary plays in God’s plan.”

FATHER BILL TRUSZ, parish priest and Missionary of Mercy

“Marina Hofman is the Bible teacher and spiritual mentor we all wish we had. *Women in the Bible* provides a fresh approach by this seasoned disciple-maker to unlock the scriptural truths of our spiritual mothers. I believe every woman who gathers a few friends and dives into this study will be encouraged, inspired, and transformed.”

KADI COLE, leadership consultant, executive coach, and author of *Developing Female Leaders and Find Your Leadership Voice in 90 Days* (www.kadicole.com)

“This much needed Bible study series opens up the stories of women in the Bible in new and life-giving ways. Hofman’s skills as a careful reader of Scripture stand behind her analysis of each character. Her probing questions push us to think about the significance of the stories of our biblical foremothers for our lives today. This book will be a very helpful resource for small group studies within the church.”

MARION TAYLOR, PhD, Old Testament professor, Wycliffe College, University of Toronto

“This beautifully written Bible study on women in the Bible is inspirational, insightful, and practical. Hofman begins each study by raising relevant and meaningful questions that aid the reader in making careful observations on the biblical text. These interpretive questions are followed by a well-crafted and thoughtful reflection section that is both insightful and practical. She concludes each study with meditative prayers as a heartfelt response to the story. Hofman does not shy away from raising challenging questions regarding ambiguities and ethical dilemmas seen in some of the narratives, regarding deception, oppression, and injustices, and how the women navigate such difficult challenges. Hofman’s perceptive conclusions about the women’s courage and faith in the face of incredible obstacles and suffering are profound and relevant. Her study demonstrates well how these biblical stories contain life-affirming and hope-filled messages for us today. Readers of this Bible study will discover many gems, inspiring hope, faith, and encouragement.”

REBECCA G. S. IDESTROM, PhD, associate professor of Old Testament, Tyndale Seminary of Tyndale University

“Hofman offers a Bible study for women that creates meaningful encounters with women in the Bible whom she presents as dynamic leaders. Through insightful questions, she creates a living experience of stories that encourage us and provide life patterns. We are encouraged by women seeing God coming through in the midst of challenging situations, overcoming obstacles and challenges, and experiencing blessing. We find models for taking risky or bold action, showing self-sacrificial love, waiting patiently for God to answer prayer, influencing and leading people, and being Christ to others.”

CYNTHIA LONG WESTFALL, PhD, associate professor of New Testament, McMaster Divinity College, and author of *Paul and Gender*

“I thank God for giving me the opportunity to meet a woman who has blessed and edified my life. Marina Hofman is a woman with firm convictions in God and has put forth her life, abilities, gifts, and talents for the edification of others.

She is a woman who, by her call to serve and share what has been entrusted to her, was the first professor to share at the A.B. Simpson Missionary Training Center, regardless of the language and conditions that were lacking at the early stages. She is a woman dedicated to the service of others to plant seeds that have grown into the life of the call of missionaries.

As well, Marina was the first conference speaker at the first Impact of Women, giving the talk on ‘How to be a Woman of Influence and Transcendence,’ a sermon that left a mark on the lives of the women who had the privilege of attending and listening. That’s why I think God has called her and she has responded to the call to be an instrument in God’s hands and that has opened the way for others to be blessed. I thank Marina for her friendship and willingness to serve God and others.

I truly believe *Women in the Bible Small Group Bible Study* is an incredible resource for women all throughout the Americas and beyond! I can’t wait to see what’s to come as a result of this project! With love, gratitude, and admiration.”

SONIA SANCHEZ, senior pastor and director for female pastors, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Colombia, South America

WOMEN
IN THE BIBLE
Small group Bible study

MARINA HOFMAN PHD

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Connect with the Marina through the website

www.womeninthebible.info

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

I am so excited that you are about to embark on a journey into God’s word—and especially that you’ve chosen to study the women of the Bible! What a group of dynamic leaders, who have so much to teach us!

Here are eight Bible stories that can be studied in one setting or divided into two or three sessions each. Many women use this resource for personal devotional study; others journey through the chapters together in small groups. There is no homework or preparation required.

Free supplemental videos on each chapter are available at www.womeninthebible.info. These videos are short clips where I introduce the Bible passage and share how I personally connect to each woman’s story. You are invited to freely use these videos in your sessions!

Please visit www.womeninthebible.info to connect with me and for all resources and information related to this study.

Thank you so much for investing your time in studying women in the Bible and bringing alongside other women on your journey!

Yours in Christ,

Marina

**TO ACCESS THE FREE VIDEO SERIES
AND OTHER RESOURCES VISIT
WWW.WOMENINTHEBIBLE.INFO**

Sarah and Hagar

GENESIS 16

Share a time when God came through for you or you sensed God's presence in the midst of a difficult or challenging situation.

BACKGROUND

God promised Abraham that he would have a child. As years passed, there was increased pressure on his wife, Sarah, to conceive. In time, Abraham expressed doubt about God's promise: "Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus? ... You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

But the LORD renewed the promise of a child to Abraham: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir" (Gen 15:2-4).

Sometime after this promise was given to Abraham (then called Abram), Sarah (then called Sarai) came to accept her infertility. She then tried to have a child through a surrogate. So begins our story ...

GENESIS

16 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."

EXPLORE

16:1–2 Sarah and Abraham do not use Hagar's name; rather, we learn of her name from the narrator. Observe the titles used to refer to Hagar as the story progresses.

How does Sarah's statement show her faith?

16:3–4 It seems that there is a sense of resolution—a child for Sarah—but how do Hagar's actions indicate that things will not go as Sarah planned?

How does Hagar wrong Sarah?

16:5 Did Abraham indeed bear some responsibility?

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.”

16:6 “Mistreated” could be translated “abused,” as it means elsewhere in the Old Testament. How do Sarah’s actions correspond with Abraham’s instruction to do “whatever you think best”?

What does Hagar’s response to flee from Sarah tell us about how Hagar is feeling?

16:7–8 What do you make of this beautiful encounter with the angel so far?

Is it significant that the angel’s first word identifies Hagar by name?

Does Hagar’s response to the angel indicate that she is without a plan?

16:9–12 In her present situation, Hagar faces great danger—pregnant and alone in the wilderness with no provision or protection from wild animals and other travelers. Still, does the angel’s instruction seem jarring?

Observe how the rest of the passage provides further context for the angel’s words.

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."

16:13 Hagar realizes that the "angel" is the LORD, and she is the only character in the Old Testament to give a name to the LORD!

How do you think this encounter impacts Hagar's self-worth and identity?

Does Hagar return to Sarah as the "same" person?

Do you think the divine promise for her son changes Hagar's outlook on the future?

¹⁴ That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered.

16:14 The community commemorates Hagar's encounter by naming a well. How did they know Hagar's story?

Is there any indication that Hagar was further mistreated?

Is it possible that Hagar returns "seen" and protected by the community?

¹⁵ So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne.

¹⁶ Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

16:15–16 How does Abraham know to call the child Ishmael?

Compare the characters listed at the end of the story with those in verse 1. Which character is this passage ultimately about?

REFLECTIONS

1. What does this story tell us about God's blessing?

Abraham and Sarah are blessed by God (as Genesis 12:2–3 indicates). But even though they are blessed, Abraham and Sarah face many trials. They endure years of infertility and surely wonder if they had heard correctly from God and if God is *able* to fulfill the promise of a child. Their lives exemplify that God's chosen ones are not exempt from suffering; a blessed person still experiences hardship. Some might say that there is a form of blessing in suffering—that suffering can cultivate a closeness to God, a deep commitment to faith. But it is not easy.

This passage demonstrates that God requires those who are blessed to act rightly toward others and to promote justice. God expects faithfulness and goodness. Sarah failed to treat Hagar as God expected, and Abraham failed to intervene on Hagar's behalf. As followers of Christ and as people blessed by God, we are called to be examples of Christlikeness to others. And when we see injustice, we are called to defend the cause of those who are disadvantaged.

The consequences of acting unjustly may be weighty. The events in this story present the beginning of a conflict between the lineages of Sarah (Israelites) and Hagar (Ishmaelites) that continued throughout the Old Testament. It can serve as a challenge to all of us to be peacemakers and to bear with one another in kindness and patience. How good to know that the Holy Spirit is present within us to guide us and help us.

2. What does Hagar's encounter with the angel reveal about God?

God sees every person. The promise God gives to Hagar about her son is much like the promise God gave to Abraham about his future offspring—this connection greatly elevates Hagar's standing in Genesis and reminds us that in God's kingdom, there is no "lowly" person unworthy of God's special blessing. There is no social status in God's kingdom; we are all children of God on equal standing. No person is undeserving of God's personal attention.

Whatever we are going through, God sees us in the midst of our situations and God is with us. Hagar surely faced hardships when she returned to Sarah; Genesis 21 confirms that the tension in the family was great and continued. When we face hardship, we can find encouragement in the story of Hagar. Just like the angel of the LORD finds Hagar in her darkest moment, on the run, so the LORD will come to us in our darkest moments.

We may actually sense God's presence strongest as we walk through our most difficult situations. As with Hagar, the LORD cares greatly for us, the LORD gives us a powerful sense of worth and identity, and the LORD bestows worth, value, and identity upon us.

3. How can this story encourage those who are suffering?

Sarah struggles with infertility despite God's promise of a child. Sarah's situation is further exacerbated by Hagar's response. As for Hagar, we are not told much about her. Was she forced to be with Abraham, or was she willing? Did she run away in complete desperation, or did she leave in confidence that she could start a new life on her own? One thing is for certain—Hagar was not in control over many aspects of her life.

We can relate to the trials of Sarah and Hagar. Many of us are familiar with the heartache of wanting a child and the agony associated with infertility. We have been in a position where we could not induce change or control the outcome of events.

So, we pray hard. But it becomes difficult to keep hopeful when it seems that God is not answering our prayer. How long do we keep believing that God will do the seemingly impossible?

Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33). No matter how much faith we have, the human experience includes suffering. Can we face the troubles of the world and still keep trusting God?

Hagar's declaration "You are the God who sees me" is a beautiful truth to hold on to. God's presence is with us in every difficulty and challenge we encounter. We are never alone. And we can recall that the LORD appeared to Hagar when she was most desperate. Perhaps, like Hagar, in our darkest moments God will be revealed most powerfully to us. Perhaps through suffering we become most like Christ and are best positioned to encounter God personally.

Do you know someone who is suffering? As people of faith, we have so much to offer those who are hurting! Our gracious response can be life-giving to those who feel alone in their journey. We can listen with compassion and pray; we can share our wisdom and experiences; we can inspire, encourage, and support.

4. What can we learn about how to respond to relationship tension and conflict?

All of us can relate to tension in families and breakdown in relationships. We have had to respond. Maybe we lashed out in anger and frustration like Sarah. Maybe we felt desperate and "ran away" from the conflict like Hagar. Maybe we didn't know how to respond and tried to cast the responsibility of responding to someone else, as Abraham appears to do.

This story challenges us to think deeply about how we respond and the impact of our actions—or inactions—on others. We are reminded not to mistreat others in the midst of our own trials but to bring our pain to God directly and pray for the grace to reflect Christ in our actions even when we are hurting.

For some of us, passivity is the preferred way of dealing with conflict—or *not* dealing with conflict. But this may not be what God calls us to. We can pray for courage when it is hard to stand up for what is right, especially with those closest to us.

Just like the community acknowledged Hagar's value and worth by naming a local well to commemorate her experience, we too can respond to those who are hurting by listening to and commemorating their stories. This simple act has profound effects on victims and is vital to the healing process and their ability to move forward to find meaning in suffering.

MARINA HOFMAN

PRAYER

LORD,

You are the God who sees

In the midst of our pain, come and meet us

When we run away, bring us home

When we are desperate, speak to us

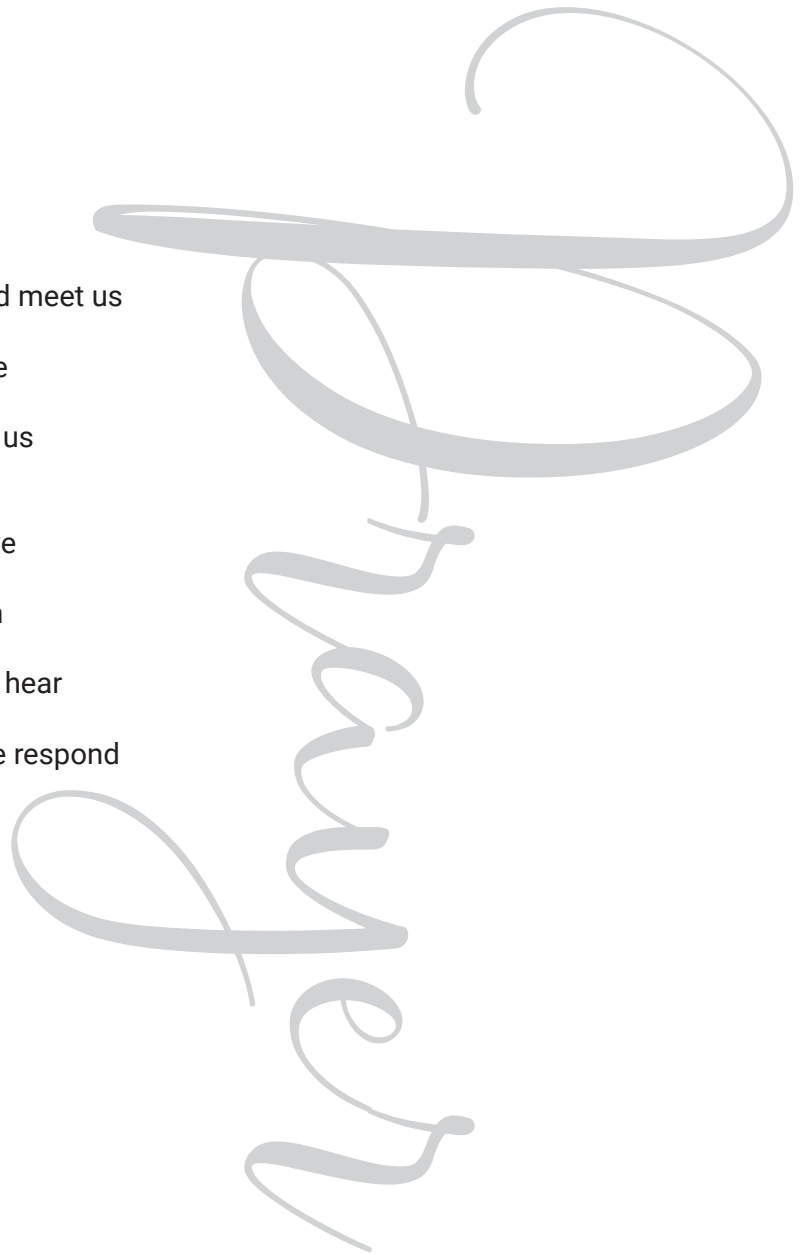
There is none unworthy of our love

There is no lowly in Your kingdom

Give us compassion to listen and hear

So Christ will be known in how we respond

Amen.



BIOGRAPHY AND TESTIMONY

Marina Hofman, PhD, is an interdisciplinary scholar who writes and speaks on biblical studies, trauma, education, ministry, and ethics. Female characters in the Bible is her favorite field! She has taught in Canada, the United States, Colombia (South America), and The Gambia (West Africa). Presently, Marina is a faculty member at Palm Beach Atlantic University in South Florida.

Her national awards include the Emerging Old Testament Scholar award by the Institute of Biblical Research at the Society of Biblical Literature and Best Paper by the Canadian-American Evangelical Theological Association. A native of Canada, she earned a PhD in theology at the University of Toronto, along with a post-doctorate certificate in teaching higher education, as well as an MA from McMaster University and a BA from Tyndale University College.

Marina has shared her testimony to people around the world. She is grateful every day for God's miraculous healing, her family, and the hope she has in Christ!

In 2014, my husband and I were in a head-on vehicle collision north of Toronto, Ontario, on Highway 69. The impact was equal to a total speed of about 125 miles per hour. It was a fatal crash for the driver who hit us, and in that moment, we did not know if we would survive.

I incurred four lacerations to my bowels and was nearly dead by the time I reached the hospital. But God preserved my life. At the crash site, within seconds, I was surrounded by emergency workers who prevented me from moving, thus saving my life. A top surgeon was waiting for me at the hospital when I arrived and realized that there was no time for tests to determine my injuries. She immediately administered life-saving surgery by examining all of my organs by hand, and then another top surgeon repaired the damaged areas. Again, my life was saved.

The next urgent need was to make sure I did not lose hope and give up on life as the horror of what had happened gradually dawned on me. When I woke up after surgery, my husband's fate was still unsure, and I felt completely disoriented—hardly able to communicate and suffering chronic memory loss. Again, God was present. For the whole first week of my recovery, a team of truly tender-hearted ICU nurses did not leave my side, even for a moment.

Eventually, I was told I had experienced significant physical injuries and suffered a minor brain injury. In the days that followed, I was diagnosed with severe posttraumatic stress disorder, among other emotional and mental incapacities.

Although my mental state was poor and I was constantly anxious, we discovered that it could have been much worse. In the effort to reconstruct how the crash occurred, a detective interviewed my husband. The detective shared that the computer program his department uses could not produce a scenario where my husband survived. My husband responded that at the last moment, when the brakes disengaged and all was lost, he threw his body over the caddy and leaned over the passenger's side as far as he could so that his body would protect me from any projectile or broken glass. He had held my head back against the headrest to minimize my whiplash. This act not only saved me from a much worse brain injury but also saved his own life from being crushed by the engine that was pushed upward into his driver's seat.

Our road to recovery has been long. I needed to learn how to overcome depression, anxiety, and hyper attentiveness. Regaining my cognitive functions was a slow process and required me to completely reorder my life. I had to accept that the memories of my past might never return.

Most painful of all was the diagnosis that I would not be able to have children. If I did get pregnant, I was told, it would be very painful and risky.

But God's ways are beyond our imagination. God takes the most impossible situation and turns it for good. God takes the broken pieces of our lives and puts us back together. God picks us up when we can't walk any further. When all seems lost, God redeems our life and fills us with joy.

Today, my life is a testimony that with God all things are possible.

My husband and I live in South Florida, where our injuries continue to heal. By God's grace, we have a wonderful little daughter, Willow Grace Hannah, who is the daily delight of our lives. Despite aches and pains—ongoing reminders of how far God has brought us and what could have happened that fateful day—we have a joyful life, with many laughs and daily dance parties in our living room, often to Christmas music.

We worship and serve at Christ Fellowship Gardens Campus, where we are blessed with genuine community and rest for our souls.

To connect with Marina, book a speaking engagement, and learn more about Marina's upcoming publications, visit:

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Visit www.WomenInTheBible.info
to access the video series for this book and to connect with Marina Hofman.

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