

# God is for the unseen & the marginalised

*“You are the God who sees me”*

## INTRODUCTION

“Consider those around us who may not be seen in society. There are many circumstances that can lead someone to feeling unseen or being marginalised. It could be social status, distance from family, friends, poverty, race, gender, physical ability and several other characteristics that would affect whether we feel unseen or marginalised. Perhaps you are currently feeling marginalised or unseen, or have done previously. Those who are unseen or marginalised have experienced and continue to encounter hurt, suffering and pain.

For some, the reality of being unseen or marginalised is more nuanced. It might be described as an experience of being hyper visible and invisible at the same time. One might feel hypervisible, feeling as if they stand out in a crowd that looks unlike them in race, status, gender, education status or ability. But at the same time, one might feel invisible, feeling as if he or she has no voice or representation in their context, or as if one’s voice ought to conform to the expectations of the larger environment perceiving him or her.

Despite this difficult reality, we can be assured of knowing a God who is for the unseen and the marginalised. Throughout scripture, God is at work in the lives of those at the margins, those society would have looked over or down upon. Knowing that those who suffer are seen is an assurance of God's loving-kindness. Jesus says in the beatitudes in Matthew 5 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." God is concerned for each of our hearts, even when we are poor in spirit, even when we are suffering. There is no bounds on whom God's favour rests. In today's passages we will discover that Hagar was vulnerable and unseen, and the Samaritan woman at the well was marginalised due to her past. We will explore how God is for the unseen and the marginalised through both of their narratives in scripture."

## ICE BREAKER

**Did you know?** In the NHS, Black and minority ethnic staff are 1.16 times more likely to enter the formal disciplinary process compared to white members of staff <sup>8</sup>

Who is 'unseen' and 'marginalised' in today's society, nationally and in Oxford?

## REFLECTION

***Read Genesis 16 aloud:***

Leading up to Genesis 16, we see that God called Abram and made a promise in Genesis 12:2: "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing" Sarai and Abram wait for over 10 years for this promise to be fulfilled. In this time of uncertainty, Sarai took things into her own hands by saying that Abram, her husband, should sleep with her maidservant, Hagar, in order to bear a child. Hagar is then abused by Sarai, after she finds out she is

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<sup>8</sup>NHS, [Workforce Race Equality Standard](#)



pregnant by Abram, and she is mistreated to the point that she flees and runs away. The angel of the Lord spoke to Sarai, and promises that she will have a son, as the Lord has “heard her misery”. Despite this promise having a challenging prophecy for her son’s life, Sarai responds saying “You are the God who sees me.”

Divide into groups of three or four and reflect on these questions:

- How do you respond to the Angel of the Lord’s interaction with Hagar?
- In verse 13, Hagar says “You are the God who sees me, I have seen the One who sees me”. What does this reveal about God’s character, and what does that mean for us?

### **RFJ Remarks**

The gift of a son in that time would have been a safety net and a way out for Hagar. Hagar was alone, away from her home and without her mistress she would have been left destitute. This perhaps could explain why the angel calls her to go back to Sarai, despite her previous experience of abuse. God still wanted to protect her, as her fate would most certainly have meant death if she wasn’t in the confines of Abram & Sarai’s home, and she would have had little or no means to provide for herself and her unborn son in the wilderness. Consider this quote from Dr. Wil Gafney “Ultimately Hagar escapes her slaveholders and abusers and receives her inheritance from God, and God fulfils all of God’s promises to her.”

### ***Read John 4:1-42 aloud:***

The Samaritan woman has been in five previous marriages, and this would have been looked down upon in society. At that time, as a woman she would have had no agency to choose to end a marriage and to remarry by choice. We don’t know if abuse, or death would have played a part. Despite what may have happened, she was ashamed to encounter others. Jesus doesn’t probe further or ask questions; but simply listens and speaks to her. What’s even more unexpected with this moment is that Jews would not associate with Samaritans, and would have avoided each other. Yet despite how others viewed her, including herself, Jesus spoke to her and spent time with her, in this remarkable encounter, in the middle of the day at a public place, by a well. The Samaritan woman then went on to become the first evangelist in Samaria,

with many following Christ. She was seen by Jesus, and this encounter led to the transformation of her community.

Divide into groups of three or four and reflect on these questions:

- Are there any particular things that stand out to you in this passage about the circumstances of the Samaritan woman or Jesus?
- How do you feel about Jesus' reaction to the Samaritan woman and what he has to say?
- What does it mean for us, and for others, that Jesus spends time with a potentially marginalised member of the community?

### **RFJ Remarks**

The elements of race playing its part, Hagar, an Egyptian slave, and later in scripture, the Israelites being owned by the Egyptians, shows the dynamics of power and oppression and the limited freedom these people have. God seeing those who are oppressed throughout history displays His love and character, and His desire for justice and reordering of where human power has led to the oppression of others. The Samaritan woman's difference in race and gender to Jesus meant she would normally be unseen by someone of His background. But, Jesus sought her despite their differences. Christ spoke into her life, and she was overfilled with joy to tell others of who He is, leading many in her community to follow Christ.

## **CURRENT ISSUE**

Communities and people are suffering, marginalised or unseen because of the way they have been treated due to their race, either structurally or interpersonally. Those who have been abused or hurt in the past have a God who advocates for them. Take some time to consider the impact of marginalisation and being unseen would have on an individual. In what ways have you seen this at play with regards to race in your life, either interpersonally or structurally?

# RESPONSE

Have you ever felt unseen or marginalised? How might God be calling you to walk or speak into this area?

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## PRAYER AND MINISTRY

- Pray that those who are suffering, marginalised or unseen will come to know the loving-kindness and comfort of God.
- Pray for healing, for those who have been marginalised or hurt because of their race, gender, social status or any other factor. If you've personally been affected, take time to consider praying for healing with your small group or small group leader. Invite those who have suffered abuse to extend forgiveness.
- Pray for repentance and a changed heart for when you've chosen to look down upon or over others due to their social status, character or identity.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to be at work in your heart, to consider your context, and how you can be an advocate for those who are marginalised or unseen, pray and for those who have power and influence in systems of change to prevent marginalisation.

## ACTION

This week:

- Set an alarm or reminder to pray at a certain time of each day in the coming week for something on the topic of God's heart for the unseen or the marginalised. It could be inspired by what you've read in scripture, seen or personally experienced.
- Pray into each day, and also pray for those where race plays a factor in being invisible, marginalised or unseen.
- Consider going for a prayer walk, and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal an aspect of marginalisation that you've not noticed before.