



**Nov 19: God, where were You? Genesis 28:10-19a**

This morning is going to be very special time of sharing for us as a church family. I am so excited!

We have been in a sermon series about Telling Your Story. And we brainstormed some ways, to somehow hear your stories.

And so, we put out a little half-sheet of paper on a table in the entry way. Inviting people to share a little story. To write about a time when God helped them out of a difficulty, brought them through a hard time. Didn't know if anyone would even respond.

Well, I was reminded this is a very special church, such a good church family. Proven to me once again.

Because not just 1 or 2 people responded, or just 3 or 4, but 6 people wrote something down. AND each of them said they'd be willing to share their story with us, today.

WOW! That is so wonderful! So proud to be a part of this church. We are going to have the great privilege, sacred opportunity, to hear their stories of God's goodness in their lives.

Many stories, different words, but repeating that same theme...God watches over our life in love, hears our prayers, and guides our lives back home, back to God and a good life.

Okay...a little bit more from my story.

30 plus years ago now, I had just graduated from college and just moved down to the cities. I had visited one church for awhile. Nope. Not working for me.

And then I started attending another church, but then stopped going there too. Truth is I didn't really enjoy church, much at all. I really didn't like church.

I was still connecting to God in prayer and scripture reading. And came across this story of Hagar. It stood out to me.

She had gone through a hard time and experienced God helping her. She learned God was the "God who sees me, the God who hears me." I thought that was pretty cool!

Well, then I hit a difficult time. Things just got really hard for me, struggling. Kinda lost and confused. And I started to reflect on Hagar's experience.

Well, she went thru a difficult situation and God met her. Maybe if I pray, God will meet me in my difficult situation?

I started praying, **“God, why is my life so difficult and hard right now?”** Prayed that for a little while.

And then I felt like God was doing what he did to Hagar, redirecting my life, giving me guidance. That God was directing me to....go back to church?

What?! No! That can't be God.

Church is so lame, boring, not for me. What difference does it make if I don't go to church, thousands and thousands of Your children are NOT going to church? What's the big deal if I don't go to church?!

I resisted.

Life got harder.

Finally, I thought to myself, **“Well, just try it. Test if it is God speaking/guiding me or not. Do it and see what fruit it produces in your life.”**

And so, I went back to church. And almost immediately the heaviness and struggle lifted. Peace flooded my life. I felt so much closer to God.

Discovered church was a place God wanted me to be. Why? I didn't know. Now it seems kind of funny. But not then.

All in all, God had been really good to me.

One day, I was out shopping and when my eyes fell upon that BIG GORGEOUS GORILLA, I just knew I needed him. I needed something big and outrageous to remind me of God's goodness.

Just like Hagar, I named him Ishmael. Just like Hagar, I needed a way...needed something that I could look at and it would remind me of how God had been watching over my life in love, listening to my prayers, and guiding me back to God...back to church.

Leading me through rebellion/disobedience on my part actually. God was so gracious to me.

I have carried that gorilla around with me for more than 30 years, to 7 churches. Hanging out in all my offices...reminding me that God listens to my prayers.

And this might one of the first times I have shared this story of God's goodness in my life. Thank you for being such a good church, safe place, and letting me share.

And now for more stories of God being good and helping us thru a difficult time. Traci Lay would you start us off?

1. Traci Lay
2. Sheryl Lehman

3. Marcia Wilson
4. Christy Merkl
5. Gail Hurley
6. Brenda Roberts

Thank you for sharing! Round of applause, show our appreciation! So, good to hear these wonderful stories of God's involvement in our lives. Thank you!

It occurred to me that maybe some of you might be in your own difficult time right now. You may be in a hard season, wondering where God is in your life?

I encourage you to be open to God, open to God's work in your life. To trust God sees you, knows all about your current situation, all the difficulties. God sees you. And God cares about you deeply.

And God wants to extend compassion, mercy and grace to you. God hears your prayers and wants to guide your life. And give you peace and give you God's love for you.

God wants to guide you through your difficult time and bring you through to a spacious place of rest, peace, and deeper trust in God.

Hang in there.

Remember this comforting scripture from Matthew 11:28-30. <sup>28</sup> **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."**

Turn to Jesus, spend time with Jesus. And Jesus will give you rest. Watch what the Lord can do to lighten your load, be at work in your life, bringing rest to your soul.

God will bring you through, in God's timing. Maybe you just needed to hear some words of encouragement this morning.

Well, let's wrap up our time with prayer. Can't beat God's timing on this. See God at work in our midst in this...

As we close in thanking God for his goodness to all of us, what a nice way for us to head into the Thanksgiving holiday. Remembering God's goodness to us and giving thanks!

Let's pray.

Dear God, we are so thankful for these brave women who shared of Your goodness in their lives. Bless them for their testimonies. And thank you for proving yourself good over and over again to us through their stories.

Thank you for reminding us that You do watch over our lives in love, You do hear our prayers, and guide us. You guide us back on track, guide us back to You, even guiding us back to church. We are so grateful. Thank you, God.

Bless us this Thanksgiving, give us safe travels and good times with family and friends. Help us to be thankful and have eyes to see the many ways You have been good to us. Amen!

**Time of Reflection:** To remember a time when God has been good to you, a time when God showed you love, answered your prayers, guided you, helped you through a difficult situation in life.

And then simply say in our hearts...THANK YOU, GOD!