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**Children of the Promise – A Walk of Faith**  
**Galatians 4:21-31**  
**January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Jeff Germs**

How many of you have heard of Spencer West? For those of you who haven't, he was born with a rare spinal defect and had to have both his legs completely amputated when he was six years old. His mother worked very hard to make sure he lived as normal a life as possible and didn't let his "short-comings" get in the way of his future aspirations.

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His motto for life is "Redefine Possible," and he lives it. He wrote a book called, *Standing Tall: My Journey*. A couple years ago Spencer climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania to raise money to help provide clean water for Kenya. There was an article about Spencer in the June, 2012 issue of *Canadian Living Magazine*. In it, *Free the Children* cofounder, Craig Kielburger responded to Spencer's motivation for climbing the mountain. He said, "**There are some people who climb mountains to be the first, to say they put the flag at the top. But for Spencer, the reason is love. The only reason he would put his body through that is for there to be an outcome that would serve others.**"

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Spencer climbed the mountain mostly on his own steam, on his hands. In an interview in the *Vancouver Sun*, after the climb, he said there were times when he was "walking" across difficult terrain and lagged behind his climbing partners.

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"**As the summit neared,**" the *Sun* columnist wrote, "**the precipitous slope and sharp, slippery stones called scree made walking harder for West. He occasionally fell behind as his friends forged ahead. He admitted to us it was one of the few times in his life he wished he had legs so he could keep up.**"

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He quoted Spencer, "**In my mind it was, 'Ok, right hand forward, left hand forward, breathe.' Literally concentrating on every step.**"

The columnist asked Spencer what he took away from the experience.

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"**What I learned**", he said, "**is that on any journey there are parts where you have to do it yourself, and times when you do it together.**"

There were times when Spencer had to be literally carried by another climber. They made a special backpack, much like something a mother or father would wear to carry their baby, and for terrain that was impossible for him to navigate, he would have to humble himself and let someone carry him in that backpack. He joked that he looked like a swaddling baby. It was humbling for him, but if he was going to complete the journey and reach the summit he would have to be okay with his limitations and trust himself fully to another climber to get him to the top.

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In the passage we are going to look at today, Paul compares two kinds of journeys. One journey is a journey of self-effort, and the other is one of faith in which the traveler has to humble himself and place his full weight on Jesus to make the journey. The journey of self-effort is actually a treadmill that gets you nowhere. The journey of faith is an exciting walk of faith with Jesus leading the way.

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**Galatians 4:21–31 (ESV)**

**<sup>21</sup> Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? <sup>22</sup> For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. <sup>23</sup> But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.**

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**<sup>24</sup> Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. <sup>25</sup> Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup> But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.**

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***27 For it is written, “Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.” 28 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.***

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***30 But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.” 31 So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.***

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Now, I would imagine that many, if not most of you, do not exactly find this passage easy to follow. I don't blame you. If we are going to understand it we will need to go back again to the book of Genesis in the Old Testament and take a look at the situation Paul refers to. Now, we have taken a bit of a look at Abraham a couple times in the last few weeks, but we need to zero in on this situation with Hagar and Sarah.

We don't have time to read the entire narrative this morning so I'll just paraphrase most of what happened.

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Let's go back again to when Abraham (or Abram, as he was called then) entered the stage of history. God called him out of paganism. Abraham initially believed in a plurality of gods until Yahweh, the one true, living God who made the heavens and the earth, called him and said he was going to make Abraham into a great nation. Abraham and Sarah were 75 and 65 respectively. They had no children, and yet God told them their descendants would be too many to count.

He told them to walk out in faith to a land he would show them. So they started walking, not knowing where they were going, with all their possessions, in anticipation that God would be good for his promise. He would open Sarah's womb and give them children in their old age.

Well, as we already noted a few weeks ago, things did not happen as speedily as Abraham and Sarah would have liked, to say the least. Their goal of many children actually didn't have its start until twenty-five years after God gave them the promise. Can you imagine waiting for twenty-five years for God to come through on something he promised you? I wonder how you would do trusting God in a situation like this. I know from experience that I would have a hard time keeping the faith. Waiting is not something I am very good at.

Abraham, though, for the most part, walked forward in faith, in spite of the obstacles and the impossibility of the task, believing that God could and would do what he said.

There were times, however, when his faith faltered and he took matters into his own hands. We are going to take a look at one such time this morning. Now, remember Abraham is 85 years old when this takes place and Sarah is 75. It's ten years since God promised them, not only a child, but descendants too numerous to count. So far, they have received nothing. They are desperate. God had promised they would have their own children and now they have gotten impatient.

Remember, in those days, if you didn't have children, you were nothing. The most important thing to people, in that time, was that their name would be carried on to the next generation. There was nothing more important than that. So, without a child, Abraham and Sarah had no future.

In her desperation, Sarah has a bright idea. Since God is not coming through in their timing they need to make it happen. ***“Abraham, go and have sex with my servant, Hagar and we can have children through her.”***

I wonder what Abraham's reaction was to his wife's request. He was probably minding his own business, sitting on his easy chair, in his tent, watching Monday night football when Sarah comes up with this brilliant plan. ***“God's not fulfilling his part of the plan, Abe, so we gotta do something. If we don't take matters into our own hands we are going to be laughing stocks of the whole neighbourhood. We told everyone that God said we were going to have our own children — lots of them. We gotta do something, Abe. Get your lazy butt off that chair and go have sex with Hagar.”***

*“Okay, if I have to.”* So, Abraham obediently went into the tent and had sex with Hagar, and Ishmael was conceived. Let’s pick it up from there.

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Genesis 16 (ESV)

*<sup>4</sup> ...And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. <sup>5</sup> And Sarai said to Abram, “May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!” <sup>6</sup> But Abram said to Sarai, “Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please.” Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.*

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*<sup>7</sup> The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. <sup>8</sup> And he said, “Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?” She said, “I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai.” <sup>9</sup> The angel of the Lord said to her, “Return to your mistress and submit to her.” <sup>10</sup> The angel of the Lord also said to her, “I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude.”*

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*<sup>11</sup> And the angel of the Lord said to her, “Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has listened to your affliction. <sup>12</sup> He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone’s hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen.”*

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*<sup>13</sup> So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, “You are a God of seeing,” for she said, “Truly here I have seen him who looks after me.” <sup>14</sup> Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered. <sup>15</sup> And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. <sup>16</sup> Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.*

So, Ishmael was conceived and born out of a distrust of God. Sarah and Abraham, in a time of deep despair, doubted God and decided that if they were going to receive the promise of God they would have to help him out. Hagar was young, and well within the age of childbearing. They wouldn’t need God to make this happen. They could just let nature takes its course. So, Ishmael was born out of self-effort and a distrust of God, which Paul said represents Mount Sinai, where the law was given to Moses.

What happened here was Sarah and Abraham took a look at the promise God gave them. Then they took their eyes off God and looked down at their own resources and circumstances and realized they had come up short. If this was going to actually happen they thought they would have to do it themselves so they budgeted God out of their lives.

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**How often do we budget God out of our lives?** We only do what we think we can handle without him. We do that in our own private lives and we can do it in the church. How is God supposed to get glory if we only do things for which we don’t need him? God wants to do something bigger through us that we can do on our own. He doesn’t want us to be stupid and come up with our own wild ideas. But, he will always give us a vision that is bigger than we are. That only makes sense. Otherwise we don’t need God.

In our Campbell River ministerial meetings we have started to take the first part of the meeting to let one of the pastors share their walk with God. A couple months ago, Pastor Art Van Holst from Radiant Life Church shared his story. And many of you know Radiant Life works in the inner city of Campbell River and they reach out to the poorest of the poor. CRBC has three teams that serve there, two on Sunday mornings, and one on Monday night. Twice a month on Sunday mornings you will see people getting up part way through my sermon. Some of them are going to serve at the community meal that Radiant Life hosts. The others are those I have offended by my sermon.

The congregation at Radiant Life is very small, less than a tenth the size of ours. They operate on a shoe string budget, but God does some very big things through them. The resources he provides for them would astound us. One of the things Pastor Art said in his story reverberated in my mind. He said, “No matter how big a project, we never ask if we have the money to do it. Instead we ask if God is in it. Because if God is in

it he will provide everything we need to get it done. If he's not in it we would be stupid to do it."

If we take a look at our own resources and limit ourselves accordingly, we won't see God work. Paul said, Ishmael represents this way of living. It's a journey of self-effort, law, and a living according to the flesh. It's doing life without God. It budgets God out of the picture.

Isaac, on the other hand, was born out of the promise of God. Abraham and Sarah believed God for the impossible. It wasn't their pipe dream to build an empire or make a name for themselves. This was a promise of God. Isaac was a miracle. They could not take any credit for him at all. Even their belief was hard to come by and had to be sustained by God. But, Abraham did believe, and God credited righteousness to him.

Let's walk through the Galatians passage and see if we can make sense of it.

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**Galatians 4:21-31 (ESV)**

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***24 Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. 25 Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. 27 For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband."***

[21]

Like we noted earlier, Paul is juxtaposing two journeys. One is a walk of faith, trusting in God to provide what he promised. The other is a walk of self-effort, trusting only in what one can do for oneself.

**Abraham + Hagar -> Ishmael = Mount Sinai, law, earthly Jerusalem, self-effort, slavery**

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**Abraham + Sarah -> Isaac = promise, faith, heavenly Jerusalem, trust in God's provision, freedom**

If you seriously looked at these two journeys, which walk are you on? Are you trusting God, through the work of Jesus on the cross, or are you trusting in your own self-effort in hopes that when you get to heaven you will have been good enough? These are the only two options. One leads to a life of slavery and an eternal destiny of death and destruction. The other leads to freedom and eternal life with God in heaven.

And sometimes, even if we are trusting in what Jesus did on the cross to secure our place in heaven we can still be practically living a life of slavery down here on earth trying, striving, and hoping against all hope that our efforts are enough to please God.

Have I read my Bible enough? Have I been to church enough? Have I given enough? Have I been living up to the standard of good that those religious people in my church have imposed on me? If you always have nagging feelings of guilt or shame in your heart that you have to do more, like it's never enough, and that you need to live up to somebody else's standard instead of God's, then it likely means you need to be released from slavery to the law.

That kind of life misses God completely. It's a life that says, "I'm gonna try to do it without him," even though you know it's a treadmill.

We need to do what Spencer West did, humble ourselves and realize that we don't actually have what it takes to do the journey on our own. We need to place our full weight on Jesus, not just to get us to heaven, but to live life down here, now.

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***28 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 But just as at that time he who was born***

**according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.**

Paul is referring to the Judaizers here. They have infiltrated the church with their legalism and are persecuting young believers who have trusted Christ.

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**<sup>30</sup> But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.”**

Paul says, just like Sarah got rid of Hagar, the church in Galatia needs to get rid of the Judaizers. Do not listen to them. Don't give them the time of day. They are causing you to turn away from Christ. They are manipulating you to chain yourselves to the law. They are persuading young vulnerable Christ-followers to live without faith. Do not let them sway you or lay their heavy burdens on you. They are dangerous. Those who live their lives by self-effort, Paul says will not inherit the kingdom. They are walking their journey on a treadmill without God.

Paul shows no compromise here. Why is Paul so harsh? Because people with lots of truth and no grace cannot grow, anymore than people with lots of grace and no truth can grow. We've talked about this before. We've all met these kinds of people. They know their theology and their Bible very well. They think they are mature, but they aren't. If they were mature they would be filled with the fruit of the Spirit and growing in their capacity to love. But, people with lots of truth and little grace are mean and have no interest in growing, so Paul says do not give them the time of day. They will only bring you down.

**<sup>31</sup> So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.**

In verse 28 Paul says the Galatians, and we, are children of the promise. We are the true offspring of Abraham. And now he reiterates it in verse 31. We are not spiritually born into slavery, but into freedom. When I read this it makes me breathe a sigh of relief.

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We are free. Life with Jesus is a walk of freedom and joy and hope and love.

In closing I would like to read 2 Corinthians 3 in the NLT. As I read it notice the similarities between in and Paul's message in Galatians. Let it wash over you and change you. These are God's word to you and me.

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### **2 Corinthians 3 (NLT)**

**<sup>1</sup> Are we beginning to praise ourselves again? Are we like others, who need to bring you letters of recommendation, or who ask you to write such letters on their behalf? Surely not! <sup>2</sup> The only letter of recommendation we need is you yourselves. Your lives are a letter written in our hearts; everyone can read it and recognize our good work among you.**

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**<sup>3</sup> Clearly, you are a letter from Christ showing the result of our ministry among you. This “letter” is written not with pen and ink, but with the Spirit of the living God. It is carved not on tablets of stone, but on human hearts. <sup>4</sup> We are confident of all this because of our great trust in God through Christ. <sup>5</sup> It is not that we think we are qualified to do anything on our own. Our qualification comes from God.**

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**<sup>6</sup> He has enabled us to be ministers of his new covenant. This is a covenant not of written laws, but of the Spirit. The old written covenant ends in death; but under the new covenant, the Spirit gives life. <sup>7</sup> The old way, with laws etched in stone, led to death, though it began with such glory that the people of Israel could not bear to look at Moses' face. For his face shone with the glory of God, even though the brightness was already fading away.**

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**<sup>8</sup> Shouldn't we expect far greater glory under the new way, now that the Holy Spirit is giving life? <sup>9</sup> If the old way, which brings condemnation, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new way, which makes us right with God! <sup>10</sup> In fact, that first glory was not glorious at all compared with the overwhelming glory of the new way. <sup>11</sup> So if the old way, which has been replaced, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new, which remains forever!**

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***12 Since this new way gives us such confidence, we can be very bold. 13 We are not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so the people of Israel would not see the glory, even though it was destined to fade away. 14 But the people's minds were hardened, and to this day whenever the old covenant is being read, the same veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth. And this veil can be removed only by believing in Christ.***

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***15 Yes, even today when they read Moses' writings, their hearts are covered with that veil, and they do not understand. 16 But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.***



**Galatians: Learning to Live in the Freedom of Christ**  
**Children of the Promise – A Walk of Faith**  
**Galatians 4:21-31**  
**Week of January 25th, 2015**

**Objective of this study:** To get closer to living a walk of faith.

**Worship (5 – 10 minutes)**

1. Spend five minutes in silent prayer asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
2. After the five minutes of silence have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 118:19-29** meditatively to the group. Then pause for about a minute and let it sink in.
3. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.

**Welcome (5 – 10 minutes)**

What is an adventure or experience you had that you couldn't do alone, and you had to rely on others?

**Word (20 - 30 minutes)**

1. What stood out for you from the sermon?
2. Read Galatians 4:21-31.
3. In this passage, Paul is juxtaposing two journeys. What are these two? Compare and contrast them.

**Abraham + Hagar -> Ishmael = Mount Sinai, law, earthly Jerusalem, self-effort, slavery**

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**Abraham + Sarah -> Isaac = promise, faith, heavenly Jerusalem, trust in God's provision, freedom**

4. Read 2 Corinthians chapter 3.
5. How does this passage relate to what we've been learning in Galatians?
6. Pull out key words, ideas and themes. Find as many as you can.
7. What does God desire for us? Find as many things here as you can that show God's heart for us, his desires, goals and purposes for us.
8. What in this passage gives you hope?

**Work (30 - 40 minutes)**

1. Sermon Quote: "...**sometimes, even if we are trusting in what Jesus did on the cross to secure our place in heaven we can still be practically living a life of slavery down here on earth...**" How do we do this?
2. Sermon Quote: "**If you always have nagging feelings of guilt or shame in your heart that you have to do more, like it's never enough, and that you need to live up to somebody else's standard instead of God's...**" Contrast these symptoms with what God has for us.
3. What is role of humility in living a life of faith? How does this relate to Spencer West's story?

**PRAYER TIME/HOMEWORK**

(Optional background reading)

- Genesis 16 - Hagar's story
- Genesis 17 - The covenant of circumcision.
- Genesis 21:1-21 - Isaac and Ishmael's story