

A Patient Faith

Heb. 11:11-16

Series “More”

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We’re continuing in our *MORE* series and today, and I am VERY excited about the person we are covering in our study this weekend. Hebrews 11 is the Hall of Faith, and out of the sixteen names that are listed only two of them are female. And we’re going to look at the first that is mentioned today.

You know, nowadays they have a day for everything, and this past Thursday was National Daughter Day. Well, as the dad of four girls, I feel like every day is National Daughter Day! I am swallowed up in daughters.

I was speaking to a group of church planters and pastors in Las Vegas earlier this week, and I showed them a picture of my family...pointed out to them as I do everywhere I go that I am the president of my own sorority house. And I told them, whenever I get invited to speak somewhere the answer is “yes” – I don’t even know what I’m saying “yes” to, it’s just the chance to leave some daughter drama for 24 hours is just so promising to me! Ha!

No...I love my girls and as a dad of four precious girls, I always like to read and study about women in scripture who have done great things for God. As I read about their lives and the choices and decisions these faithful women made, I try to pray their character into the lives of my girls.

I’m grateful for scripture highlighting women of faith and for Jesus throughout his life and ministry always elevating and lifting women up.

Sarah is who we are covering today – this is Abraham’s wife. Last week, we said that Abraham was the GOAT! He is known (Rom. 4:11) as the “father of all who believe”. Well, if he is the “father of all who believe”, Sarah is the mother of all who believe.

And what we will learn from her is how to have...it’s the title of the message today:

A Patient Faith

Just by show of hands:

? - Has anyone here ever prayed for patience?

? – Has anyone here ever prayed for patience and God gave you a circumstance or a situation that demanded your patience and you’ve made up your mind to never to pray for patience again?

Well, Sarah is going to teach us today what to do AND what not to do as it relates to having a patient faith.

Heb. 11:11 – “By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.”

In this verse, we are given some insight into what Sarah was patiently waiting on AND what gave her the strength to make it through the wait.

Now, I know MANY of you are familiar with Abraham and Sarah's story, but some are not, so just like in previous weeks, keep your hand in Hebrews 11 and turn in your Bibles to Genesis 12.

We read this passage last week primarily focusing on it from the perspective of Abraham. Let's read it again this week and shift our focus to the perspective of Sarah.

Gen. 12:1-7 – “Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”⁴ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.⁵ And Abram took Sarai his wife (now, we know there was a ten year age gap between Abraham and Sarah – this would have put her at 65 years of age), and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, ⁶Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.”

Now, just as a reminder – Abraham and Sarah were originally from an ancient city in modern day Babylon called Ur. God speaks to Abraham after they had settled in a city called, Haran (modern day Turkey & close to the Syrian Border) and they make their way to Canaan.

We don't know how long they had settled in Haran, but the total journey from Ur to Haran to Shechem would have been well over the 1000 mile range – some suggest with a caravan as large as Abraham and Sarah's and no direct route, could have been as far as 2,000 miles – either way, it's a long time and again, Abraham and Sarah make this journey together at 75 and 65 years of age.

Now, the promise they are given is that their offspring will inherit this land God shows them...it's the promise land of Canaan (v. 7).

It must have been breathtaking to look every direction as far as the eye could see and have the promise of God that this land will belong to your offspring and that you will be a great nation.

There's only one problem with this: Abraham and Sarah don't have any offspring!

The Bible makes clear on several occasions that they remain childless through these years. In fact, it's one of the major emphasis surrounding their story.

You can imagine how much this weighed on them. Heck, the name “Abram” before it's changed means “exalted father” – and the man has no children...THEN it's changed to Abraham which means “father of many nations” and he still doesn't have children!

Can you imagine carrying this name, but carrying no children?! It's almost like it's some cruel joke...it would not have gone past those that knew and met him.

In this society barrenness was considered a curse...a form of divine disfavor! In the times of the Bible, if a woman couldn't have children, it often brought shame and isolation...to not have children meant the family line discontinued

While to have many children was a sign of blessing and favor. A son(s) was essential to family survival and legacy.

So, God has made this promise to Abraham (and Sarah) ...and again, made it on a number of occasions (Gen. 12, Gen. 15, Gen. 17) – and yet nothing was happening.

In fact, in Gen. 15 God reiterates this promise, and listen to what Abraham says to him in:

Gen. 15:2-3 – “But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” (servant of the home...a slave!) ³ And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.”

Now, Abraham is expressing this to the Lord and if it's weighing heavy on him, don't you know it's weighing heavy on Sarah. I know I'm reading a bit into the text here, but any marriage...this had to be a topic of their marriage from time to time. It had to cause some heated discussions.

- “I don't know why it's not working out?
- “I don't know when it's going to happen?

I'm thinking that Sarah if she hasn't said it a time or two, Abraham has felt it – “You need to go take this up with God!” It doesn't feel like a very good place to be when you're waiting on the Lord and NOT hearing a thing!

Now, we don't know how long it is between Gen. 12 (the promise is made) and Gen. 15 where this question comes in, but most suggest it's somewhere between 5-10 years.

This puts Abraham at roughly 80-85 and Sarah at somewhere between 70-75 – they are no spring chicken as they say!

I actually had to “google” what that phrase meant! You learn all sorts of things here at Champion Forest!

Illus. “No Spring Chicken” - In the early 1700s, Farmers found that chickens born in the spring brought better prices than 'old' ones that had gone through the winter. When farmers tried to sell the old birds as 'new spring born', buyers complained that they were 'no spring chicken'. The first recorded use of the phrase in its figurative meaning was in 1906. Now you know!

Well, Abraham and Sarah – they were no spring chickens...and here they are waiting on God to come through on his word. And they are waiting a LONG TIME!

I mean, check this: the original promise was made when Abraham was 75 and Sarah 65. The birth of their son didn't come until Abraham was 100 and Sarah 90 – so in total, that's 25 years of waiting on God!

I don't know about you, but I don't know of much that is harder in life than waiting on God. Some of you today feel this...you are in a “waiting time in life”.

- Maybe you're like Abraham and Sarah and waiting on God to give you a child...
- Maybe you are in that waiting season of life trying to find that special someone that you are going to partner up next to in marriage for the rest of your life...

- Maybe you're waiting for those test results or undergoing chemo or radiation and you're waiting to see if this is going to be the tool God uses to help restore and make you healthy again...
- Some of you may be waiting on a job to open up, and it feels like it's taking forever...
- Or maybe you're waiting on that wayward child or grandchild to come back to the Lord – right now it just seems like they are so far away, and you've been waiting and waiting for years...
- Or maybe you're a Texans fan and you're waiting for that first win of the season...

Listen: I don't know what you are waiting on right now, but here is what I want to encourage you with today: **Don't waste your wait**

God does his BEST work in the waiting times of life. There are simply some things that he can't teach us ANY other way than causing us to wait on him in faith.

Faith is what we're talking about here...Hebrews 11 – Sarah is in the Hall of Faith because she waited on God and believed God by faith – now, she didn't do everything right as she waited on God (as we'll see in just a moment), but she's listed because of her faith.

Look...the goal of our life is a purified faith. Listen to Peter in:

1 Peter 1:6-7 – “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Or how about James, the half-brother of Jesus:

James 1:2-3 – “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

NOTHING tests our faith...proves our faith better and stronger than waiting on God!

Much of the reason the writer of Hebrews is penning this book is because believers are being tested for their faith and the temptation is for them to give up on Christianity and just revert back to Judaism.

The writer of Hebrews says, “don't do that!” You've got this great cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12) and one of those witnesses is Sarah and she is beckoning from the heavens, “It's worth it to wait on God! He can be trusted. Don't waste your wait!”

Think about it...nearly everyone in the Bible we look up to and admire had to learn to wait.

- Abraham and Sarah had to wait for the promise to have an heir be fulfilled – and btw, didn't see the promise ultimately come to fruition in their lifetime...

- Moses had to wait for 40 years wandering in the desert with a hard-hearted and rebellious people...
- Joseph learned to wait on God after being thrown in a pit and having to serve Potiphar's house for 13 years, at least two of those years he was in prison...
- Job had to wait to be vindicated...
- David had to wait close to 15 years AFTER he was anointed the King of Israel before he ascended to the throne...
- Jesus' disciples had to wait for three days before he was resurrected and had to wait again for him to send the Holy Spirit!

In all of these examples, I can promise you if these people were here with us today, they would say, "Don't waste your wait and know that the wait is worth it!"

We're waiting right now on Jesus to come a second time...don't you know it's going to be worth it?! Listen, there are some things God can only do in the waiting rooms of life.

C.S. Lewis – "I am sure that God keeps no one waiting unless that is good for them to wait."

Good? How can it be good? It sure doesn't feel good when you need God to come through and you're waiting. How can it be good? Because waiting:

- teaches us dependence...
- it teaches us trust...
- it teaches us faith...
- it teaches us humility...
- it teaches us submission to the will of God...

I'll give some promises as it relates to waiting on God toward the end of the message today that I think will really encourage you and give you hope. But, listen: if you are here and waiting on God today, I just want you to know that you are in good company.

Looking at Sarah's life, let me give you three facts as it relates to waiting on God:

As you wait on God: **There will be moments of disbelief**

As mentioned, the Lord made this promise concerning an offspring to Abraham and Sarah several different times. We get to (Gen. 17) and he gets explicit with it!

Gen. 17:15-19 – "And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." ¹⁷Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a

hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?”¹⁸ And Abraham said to God, “Oh that Ishmael might live before you!”¹⁹ God said, “No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.”

God has been clear about this. Here they are 90 and 100 years old! You can understand why Abraham laughs.

This scene is followed by three men appearing to Abraham and Sarah, and they are clearly sent by the Lord. They have a message they are going to give to Abraham and Sarah eavesdrops on the conversation.

Gen. 18:9-15 – “They said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” And he said, “She is in the tent.”¹⁰ The Lord said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him.¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah.¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?”¹³ The Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the Lord? (that’s a good word for some of you in the waiting room of life. God is developing a Patient Faith in you, and you need to hear this – is anything too hard for the Lord?!) At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.”¹⁵ But Sarah denied it, saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was afraid. He said, “No, but you did laugh.”

Sarah laughed when she heard she was having a baby. It was a moment of disbelief.

And you just need to know as you wait on God, there will be moments of disbelief. after all, to walk by faith means to be stretched:

- We may be called to leave the comforts of home (missionaries)...
- Faith beckons us to believe him for something that on the surface seems impossible (project to undertake, a ministry to start – campaign) ...

Listen: You need to know that it’s normal, natural when God speaks and calls us to live by faith there will be these moments of disbelief – THAT doesn’t mean they have to win the day, and it doesn’t mean you have to be defined by them.

Sarah got called out – if God has called you to something/is calling you to something and you are living in disbelief, let me call you out – there is NOTHING too hard for the Lord! Ask the Lord to help you with your unbelief and move past it.

This is what Sarah did because the scripture says (Heb. 11:11) “by faith she received power to conceive when she was past the age...” Her unbelief lifted like a cloud and her faith ultimately shined through.

Secondly, as you wait on God: **There will be moments of doubt**

Now, in Sarah’s story there was FOR SURE a moment or two of doubt – “Is God really going to do this? Can God really do this?”

And here was the temptation that Sarah fell prey to (again, she wasn’t perfect – shows us how to wait on

God AND how not to wait on God) – here is the temptation she fell prey to that we have to beware of as well.

In times of doubt, the temptation will be to take matters into our own hands!

God's not coming through like he said he would, so I guess I'll just help him out! In moments of doubt on this journey of faith, one of the great temptations will be to take matters into your own hands.

Abraham and Sarah did...and according to scripture, one of these times was completely Sarah's idea. At this point they had been waiting ten years on the promise to be fulfilled. God's not coming through...so she takes matters into her own hands!

Gen. 16:1-6 – “Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. ² And Sarai said to Abram, “Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.” And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. ³ So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. ⁴ And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. ⁵ 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!” ⁶ 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.”

You read this entire account and it's sad the consequences that come from NOT waiting on God! In fact, there's A LOT we could say about this! This decision to take matters into her own hands caused problems and conflicts throughout Sarah's life.

ZOOM OUT and talk about consequences of sin and getting out in front of God- refusing to wait on him!

Big picture consequence of not waiting on God results in the disdain that exists between the Jew and the Arab – you can trace it back to this moment! It's the birth of Ishamel from the slave woman verses the birth of Isaac, the promised child of faith.

PLEASE, when waiting on God...one of the WORST things you could do is take matters into your own hands – it could have devastating consequences.

- Don't jump the gun on that marriage and settle just because you fear someone else won't come along...
- Don't jump to that other job just because it offers an instant raise, but there is some questionable leadership stuff going on...
- Don't move before God does and confront a brother or sister that has offended you without soaking it in prayer and asking for wisdom...

Instead, wait on the LORD. As Sarah ultimately found and believed (Heb. 11:11) – he who promised is faithful! God will give that wisdom...he will lead in that decision...he will open doors when they seemed to shut...he'll carve a path (Prov. 3:5-6) where there seemed to be no path – and he'll often do it in the 11th hour!

Third and finally: As you wait on God: **There will be moments of difficulty**

The faith journey is a LOOONG journey. We talked about this! 1000-2000 miles - getting out of our comfort zone. Going where God calls us to go...doing what God tells us to...believing the seemingly impossible!

It's NOT going to be without its ups and downs and twists and turns. Read Sarah's life...there was conflict. You have the Hagar episode. There were two times where Abraham feared man more than God and told people Sarah was his sister rather than his wife to try to protect himself...don't you know that caused an argument or two! Add to this the waiting on God – 25 years of waiting.

Her journey wasn't easy. But God never promises it will be.

We trust him...we keep our eyes on him...we do as Sarah and the Patriarchs did. Our eyes are on a better country.

Heb. 11:12-16 – “Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. (God came through on his word) ¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (Go back and listen to last week's message: mindset, motivation, movement)¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.”

Let me close with some quick application. I encouraged you not to waste your wait. Well, let's look at Sarah and see what she did in not wasting her wait. First, she found:

1. Hope in God's Promises

This is what (Heb. 11:11) teaches us...she found hope in God's promises! I told you I was going to give you some scripture regarding waiting on the Lord.

Listen to these words and see if it doesn't awaken hope!

Isaiah 40:31 – “but they who wait (It's NOT in vain!) for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

Ps. 25:3a – “Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame...”

Ps. 27:14 – “Wait for the LORD, be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD.”

Ps. 31:24 – “Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the LORD!”

Don't waste your wait! Hope in God's promises (8,000 promises!).

Secondly, Sarah as she waited on God, found:

2. Strength in community

I know I am reading into the text a bit here, but I think it's fair. Abraham and Sarah walked through life TOGETHER. In fact, Sarah is mentioned 4x in the New Testament and one of those times is in (1 Peter 3) in the context of marriage.

Abraham and Sarah's journey was one that was filled with ups and downs, but they went through it TOGETHER. I highlight this here just to remind those that are married, that as you walk through life, your partner is not your enemy – you can get through anything if you are TOGETHER.

And TOGETHER is what the church is about as well. If you need strength in the waiting today, get into community and have people pray over you and for you...this is why Life Groups are so important!

When you are tempted to get out in front of God or take things into your own hands, you need brothers and sisters in Christ that are praying for you and that have your back and hold you accountable to keep waiting in faith.

And then, third and finally. Sarah shows us how to not waste our wait in that she found hope in the promises of God, strength in community and then:

3. Joy in the journey

You remember Sarah laughing when she was told she'd give birth at 90? Scripture records her laughing again...you know when? At the birth of Isaac.

Gen. 21:1-7 – “The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. ² And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. ³ Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. ⁴ And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. ⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶ And Sarah said, “God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me.” ⁷ And she said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

She first laughs in disbelief...the next time she laughs, she's laughing in joy...and that's actually what the name Isaac means – “laughter”.

And do you know what I think? I think every time she said his name – “Isaac” - it was a reminder of the faithfulness of God and the joy of journeying with him.

God, help us to be like Sarah, and not waste our wait...to have a patient faith for your glory. Will you pray with me?

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