

So last week we discussed the obedience of Abraham through the lens of his repeated failures. This man Abraham was intentionally disobedient, rebellious and defiant to the Word of the Lord. He succumbed to family, social, and religious pressure, and for many years just flat-out did not do what the Lord had told him to do. During all of this stubborn display of his own insolent will, Abraham stayed in Haran, the land of barrenness. And you better believe that his soul experienced every ounce of that barrenness.

It is a hard thing to live in rebellion to the Lord; especially when you know what He has asked you to do and you just refuse to do it. Most often at the root of your refusal to follow the Word of the Lord is some sort of fear. You are really not sure what is beyond that line which you refuse to cross. You don't really believe that God is going to be there for you or that He is going to be enough. Every outcome that you can imagine in your own mind is horrifying; so you freeze up and just stay where you are living in barrenness.

I have found that it does not matter if your walk with God has in the past been amazing, intense, intimate and so on. As soon as you decide that there is a line which you will not cross or as soon as you reserve for yourself something that God has made clear to you that He wants, everything changes and it often changes quite suddenly. Like Abraham you start off from Ur expecting to go to Canaan but you end up in Haran, the land of barrenness, for many years.

Abraham knew the pain of rebellion far too well. But one day, after many years, God graciously came to him a second time and he finally decided to let the Word of God be authoritative over his life. Abraham finally chose to obey the Lord

and he went forth into Canaan. Have you ever stopped to think about his wife Sarah and what she was doing or thinking during all of this time?

If you remember from **Genesis 11:31** even though they left Ur to go to the land of Canaan (pursuant to Abraham's Word from the Lord), Abraham's dad Terah was in control of the journey and they never went beyond Haran. So I have always wondered whose side she was on, Terah's or the Lord's. Keep in mind that Terah was also her dad (yes, **Genesis 20:12** tells us that Abraham and Sarah were related; different mothers but the same dad). I know; it's kind of creepy.

I wonder. Did she just sit back passively as Abraham was trying to navigate the mine field of family duty, ritual, and loyalty as well as the cultural and religious norms that were pressing in on him, or was she pushing and manipulating him to do what she wanted? After all, we know from the story of Hagar and Ishmael that she was no stranger to manipulation. Did she want Abraham to obey the Lord or to obey their Father? Maybe she never wanted to leave Ur in the first place? Did she really want to leave her Father's household and all her friends and relatives and go to some strange land? Who knows, but either way, you know it had to be difficult for this woman which I am sure made things with Abraham even more stressful than it already was.

There is a chance, however, that she was taken by the promise that God gave Abraham; after all, it was pretty intense and something that would captivate most people. She could be a part of something huge, something great. Isn't that what we all dream of? Maybe she was the one pushing Abraham to follow God. Let's look at that original promise.

Genesis 12:1-3

"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 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. I 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."

That is pretty heady promise to receive—a great nation and a great name where all the families of the earth will be blessed through her husband. I am sure her head was spinning the whole time. If he is going to be the father of a great nation, that means I am either going to be a mother of a great nation or he is going to ditch me for some young hot chick. Yes, I think her head was constantly spinning over this promise wondering what it meant for her. I mean she was like any normal person who tends to make everything about the ME; it's normal.

We also have to keep in mind Abraham was 75 when he left Haran and Sarah was already 65, so when Abraham first received this promise back in Ur he was likely to have been either in his 60's or early 70's which would place Sarah in her late 50's or early 60's. So they were up there in age which might have made this promise hard for either of them to really believe.

Abraham and Sarah; these two are quite a pair and their experiences with God are intense. Tonight, we are going to zoom in on Sarah and get a peek at her relationship with God as she is also commended as a hero of faith.

Hebrews 11:11-12

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

This story originates back in Genesis and we will go there to pick up Sarah's story, but before we do I want to comment on what strikes me most about this passage. The fact that she had a baby well beyond baby making years is supernatural and totally amazing and all (she was 90 and Abraham was 100); but what I am most taken by is Sarah's faith. Sarah did not have some blind religious faith; rather, her faith was based on what she had learned to be true about God and His character and nature.

"She considered him faithful." Through her experiences with God throughout her wanderings in Canaan she experienced firsthand the amazing ways that God protected her, even when her husband was being a complete jerk. She saw the way God blessed her husband and took care of them everywhere that He led them. He even gave them favor amongst the Canaanites. All of this made this intangible God who speaks so very, very tangible.

It took some time, but Sarah came to know her God; she discovered for herself that He is faithful. And with regard to this promise of God that she would have a son, she based her practical decisions on what she knew to be true of God's nature and not what she knew to be true of her practical physical circumstances. As such, true faith was birthed and Sarah is remembered as a hero of faith.

Notice that she had the Word of God; she had a promise. But the Word of God or the promise of God seems to never enough on its own. It is absolutely necessary, as faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of God (**Romans 10:17**); but a person still has to choose to bet their lives on, or to make their choices according to, that Word.

Between man and God, faith is always required and it is only through faith that man is pleasing to God (**11:6**). In addition, we know that faith is always active and it is never passive. Therefore, faith is not only about believing the right things about God, but it is about putting that belief into action; letting that belief penetrate every aspect of your physical being. It is about walking in what you know to be true.

Let me illustrate. Many people have read their Bibles gone to church and know all sorts of stuff about God, but that does not mean they actually “know” God in terms of His personhood. To them He is often still just this big abstract concept in the sky and not a tangible person that they actually know and have learned to trust through experience. Like Abraham, all manner of fear keeps them from actually letting go of the control they yield over their own lives and so their experience with the personhood of God tends to be quite limited.

So knowing the Word of God or even having a great promise from God is not enough to produce within us faith. Even miracles are not enough (which is why Chapters **2** and **3** clearly showed us how all the miracles God did for the Israelites in their wilderness journey was not enough to produce within them saving faith).

But when a person is willing to align the practical choices of their life with what they know to be true about God and what they have personally learned to be true about God, then faith will be produced.

So the key in this passage is the “reason” she was able to put that belief into action. She knew the character and nature of her God. She knew He was faithful. She knew He would do exactly as He said. And that kind of knowledge only comes by way of experience. She had learned “why” she can trust herself to God and like Abraham she learned this to be true through many, many failures—her own and her husband’s.

Each of us has to learn “why” we can trust ourselves to God before we can move to the issue of “how” to practically trust ourselves to God. And we learn this most often through our failure and not our successes. You see when we succeed in things we usually attribute it to how great and amazing we are. But when we fail and completely blow it and yet God still loves us, protects us, provides for us, and leads us, and so on, then we begin to learn a little something about the quality of His nature and His character. When it all comes down to it; He is the reason for our faith.

So let’s track a little bit of Sarah’s experiences with God over the 25-years that she and Abraham wandered around Canaan and Egypt before they had a child, so we can get a feel for how Sarah learned about God’s faithfulness. We will start in **Genesis 12** and do a synopsis of her various experiences and those of Abraham as well; after all, she was with him through everything and was able to observe how consistently God dealt with this man.

In **Genesis 12:5-9** we find that they finally left Haran and arrived in Canaan and settled there amongst the Canaanites. There the Lord appeared to Abraham and said: “I am going to give this land to your offspring” (or literally to your “seed”). So here is the **3rd** time that the Lord confirmed the promise that they were going to have children. Remember, the **1st** time was in Ur, the **2nd** in Haran and now the **3rd** time is in Canaan. God was keeping the promise fresh in their hearts.

Then we find out in **Genesis 12:10-20** that there was a famine in the land so Abraham and Sarah went to Egypt to wait it out. As they were getting close to the Egyptian border Abraham had what we might call an indiscretion of faith which was actually quite horrific from Sarah’s perspective.

Abraham became afraid that because Sarah was so beautiful the Egyptians might want to take her for themselves and in so doing kill Abraham. So he told her to say that she was his sister (which is only a partial lie since she was technically his half-sister), knowing that they would then treat Abraham with great favor wanting to obtain his blessing; it was a cultural thing.

Abraham did not stop to consider that if God made a promise to him on 3 different occasions that he would be a father of a great nation, that he was indestructible until the promise was fulfilled. His fear was unfounded. His life was not at risk. God would ensure that he lived so that this promise would be realized.

But Abraham’s faith was still new and quite weak. So he asked his wife to carry all the risk and put her life and her body at jeopardy just to save his own. Not only was he not chivalrous; he was downright gutless. This man was a great fighter (as we will soon find out), but he had another face to him as well and that was of a

faithless coward. I mean who would do that to their wife? Can you imagine how worthless she must have felt?

Sure enough when they arrived in Egypt everyone spoke of Sarah's beauty and they brought her to the attention of Pharaoh who wanted her for his own. As I said, Sarah had to be in her 60's by now (or more) so either Pharaoh was super old or she was just one hot old lady. Terah must have had good genes. So Pharaoh actually took her into his harem and Abraham just watched her go. How is that for a great husband and a hero of faith? And what's worse. Abraham got rich off of it. Pharaoh paid him handsomely for his "sister."

Thankfully God was faithful to her and rescued her. He brought a plague upon Pharaoh's household because of Sarah and He made sure that Pharaoh knew why. Pharaoh was ticked; he called for Abraham and chewed him out for lying and setting him up for judgment. Pharaoh immediately sent Abraham and Sarah out of the country under armed guard with all of his new wealth and possessions.

So God used Abraham's great failure as a way to show Sarah that He was her God, and even though Abraham treated her as worthless in His eyes she was a treasure to be relished. He showed her that He would protect her and that he would be faithful to her (since the promise applied to her as well). In addition, He even used this horrific situation to provide more than abundantly for her as they left Egypt extremely wealthy.

Do you want to know the really freaky thing about this story? Think about it. Sarah actually agreed to Abraham's plan, said she was his sister, and willingly went to Pharaoh's harem (we find out about her agreement with Abraham's plan later in **Genesis 20:5, 13**). Clearly she was not freaking out claiming to really be his

wife otherwise the Pharaoh would have looked into it earlier. In fact, no one knew; she kept it secret. Wow; I think she must have actually believed the promises of God and was convinced that God would find a way to rescue her. That is impressive.

In **Genesis 13**, we find that they left Egypt and went back to Canaan and it was there that Abraham's nephew Lot separated from Abraham and Sarah. Lot went to live in the fertile land of the Jordan Valley near the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah. After Lot was gone the Lord said to Abraham: "Look as far as you can see in every direction. I am going to give all this land to you and your offspring as a permanent possession. And I am going to give you so many descendants that, like dust, they cannot be counted" (**Genesis 13:14-16**)! So here is the **4th** time that the Lord made this promise.

The in **Genesis 14** we find that Lot was taken captive during a war between some kings from the East (4 of them) and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding territory (5 of them). Abraham took the men in his household (318 in all) and went after those kings in order to rescue his nephew. He quickly caught up to the kings and their armies and had a great victory. They recovered everything; the goods that had been taken as well as all the people, including his nephew Lot.

Now I am speculating, but I am fairly sure that Sarah was a bit worried that Abraham would march off to war with so few men against 4 kings and their armies especially since they easily conquered the 5 kings of Canaan and were probably on an adrenaline rush after their victory. But at the same time this event gave her another opportunity to experience the faithfulness of God. Sarah saw

that Abraham returned unscathed and victorious. God again was faithful to defy the odds and protect them in the most dire of circumstances.

Afterward, in **Genesis 15**, the Lord spoke to Abraham in a vision and said to him: “do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you and your reward will be great.” The Lord went on to tell Abraham that he will have a son of his own and took him outside of his tent and told him, “Look up into the heavens and count the stars if you can. Your descendants will be like that—too many to count.” It was then that we get the famous line: “And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord declared him righteous because of his faith.” So this was the **5th** time the Lord made this promise.

Then in **Genesis 16**, we come up against the one foe of faith that seems to eventually trip everyone up and that is the passage of time. Isn't that so true? It seems that waiting can make even the strongest weak in their faith. According to **Genesis 16:3 and 15**, it had been just over 10 years since they arrived in Canaan and still no child—10 long years of waiting.

What we see in this story is that Sarah started to get frustrated over how long it was taking God to fulfill His promise; so she decided to take matters into her own hands. Using her wisdom, she concocted a way to fulfill the promise of God. She told Abraham to take her servant Hagar as his wife and maybe she will conceive. After all, technically the child would belong to Abraham and Sarah since Hagar was Sarah's personal possession. Besides, God did not actually say that Sarah would have the kid just that Abraham would. So it seemed that this was as good of a plan as any.

Well as we know that plan did not turn out so good. Abraham did what his wife suggested and Hagar got pregnant. This infuriated Sarah and of course she blamed Abraham; the jealousy was just too much. She began to treat Hagar so horribly that Hagar eventually ran away. However, an Angel met her along a desert road and told her what to name the child and promised her many descendants. Then the angel sent Hagar back to Sarah. I am sure that despite Sarah's anger, knowing that God would protect even Hagar must have been another little stepping stone on her journey of faith.

What a powerful picture. Anytime we try and fulfill God's promises on our own it always turns out bad. God wants us to trust Him no matter how long we have to wait. I know that the "ticking of the clock" for many of us is tantamount to finger nails on the chalk board. But God wants us to learn about Him through the waiting. He wants us to remember that He has proven Himself faithful; therefore, we can trust Him despite what our circumstances tell us and despite how long we have to wait for God to fulfill His promises.

Now talk about the "ticking of the clock." 14 years later—yes 14-more long years after this episode with Hagar—when Abraham was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Him again and said: "I will make a covenant with you, by which I will guarantee to make you into a mighty nation. This is my covenant with you: I will make you the father of not just one nation, but a multitude of nations" (**Genesis 17:4-5**). It was in this encounter that the Lord changed his name from Abram to Abraham (which means father of many nations). This is the 6th time God made this promise.

I find it interesting that this is the 6th time and “6” is the number of man. This multitude of nations, which would come through Ishmael, was spawned by a work of man, a work of the flesh, an attempt to fulfill God’s will through human means.

Then God added, “Regarding Sarai, your wife—her name will no longer be Sarai; from now on you will call her Sarah [which means princess]. And I will bless her and give you a son from her! Yes, I will bless her richly, and she will become the mother of many nations. Kings will be among her descendants” (**Genesis 17:15-16**)!

Here it is the 7th time God made this promise to Abraham and this time God specifically states that Sarah would have the child. “7” is the number of divine perfection, divine completion, and it is often used when describing the covenant between God and man. In other words, this child would be a child of faith and not a work of man. God would bring it about.

It’s sad, but even after this Abraham did not really believe God. He laughed to himself in disbelief and wondered: “How could I become a father at the age of one hundred?” Besides, Sarah is ninety; how could she have a baby?” So Abraham said to God, “Yes, may Ishmael enjoy your special blessing”. But God replied, “Sarah, your wife, will bear you a son. You will name him Isaac” [which means “he laughs”] (**Genesis 17:17-19**).

God then said that He would also bless Ishmael but that His covenant is with Isaac, who will be born to Sarah about that time in the following year. (**Genesis 17:20-21**).

It was not too long after that the Lord appeared again to Abraham in **Genesis 18**. Three men came walking up to him and Abraham bowed low to the ground

and asked them to stay. Two of these guys were the angels who went to rescue Lot out of Sodom and Gomorrah before their destruction and the third was a pre-incarnation of Jesus himself.

By the way, every time that the Old Testament says that the Lord appeared, it is referring to a pre-incarnation appearance of Jesus. Jesus is who Abraham had been talking to all this time. **1 Timothy 6:16** and **John 1:18** tells us that no man has seen the Father, but only His Son. So we know that these appearances were not the Father but Jesus.

The men asked Abraham where Sarah was and he said in the tent. Then one of them said, “About this time next year I will return, and your wife Sarah will have a son” (**Genesis 18:9-10**). This is the 8th time that the Lord repeated the promise—“8” is the number of new beginnings. Their life was soon to dramatically change. The years and years of barrenness would be transformed into fruitfulness.

Now Sarah was listening to this conversation from inside the tent and like Abraham she started to laugh silently to herself thinking, “How could a worn-out woman like me have a baby? And when my master—my husband—is also so old?”

Then the Lord said to Abraham, “why did Sarah laugh? Why did she say, ‘Can an old woman like me have a baby?’ Is anything too hard for the Lord? About one year from now, just as I told you, I will return and Sarah will have a son” Sarah was freaked out that He knew what she was thinking and denied that she laughed. That’s real smart to lie to someone who just read your mind. So God said: “that is not true. You did laugh.” Oops. I am sure she was embarrassed about

that one, but she finally had her own personal promise and the Lord spoke it in her presence (**Genesis 18:11-15**).

Now get this; I am always amazed at this next part of the story. Remember what happened in Egypt with Pharaoh's harem, well it happened all over again. In **Genesis 20** we are told that Abraham packed up his tents and moved the family south to the Negev which is between Canaan and Egypt. Once again, despite all that God had said and done, despite all the personal visits, Abraham told the locals that Sarah was his sister and not his wife. This must have obviously been before they knew she was pregnant.

It's crazy that after all this time Abraham is still ruled by fear. But it tells us that unless we really deal with our own roots of fear, it does not just go away on its own, regardless of what God does for us or says to us. Each of us has to be willing to take that fear and really compare it to what we have learned to be true about God and then make choices of faith instead of choices of fear. Clearly Sarah did just that; she still trusted herself practically and physically to the Lord.

We are told that King Abimelech sent for Sarah and had her brought to him at his palace. Wow, 90-years old and still wanted by the big man of the town. But once again Abraham just waved goodbye to his wife. I don't even understand it. There is no place for that to fit in my head.

Now some time must have passed while she was in Abimelech's household because we are told that God unleashed a plague against Abimelech's wife and family as all the woman had become infertile (**Genesis 20:17-18**). Then one night God came to Abimelech in a dream and told him, "You are a dead man, for that woman you took is married." Abimelech freaked and said, "Lord will you kill an

innocent man? Abraham told me, 'She is my sister,' and she herself said, 'Yes, he is my brother.' I acted in complete innocence.

God told him, "Yes I know you are innocent. That is why I kept you from sinning against me; I did not let you touch her. Now return her to her husband, and he will pray for you, for he is a prophet. Then you will live. But if you don't return her to him, you can be sure that you and your entire household will die."

Wow that is intense. Notice how God takes an offense against those who belong to Him as a personal offense against Himself. Isn't that amazing? That brings me a lot of comfort and it is the reason that Sarah could comply with Abraham's ridiculous requests and just trust the Lord.

Understandably, Abimelech was pretty mad at Abraham and Abraham just cowardly said that when God first sent him out of Haran that he told his wife, "Wherever we go, have the kindness to say that you are my sister." I can picture Sarah feeling so betrayed and worthless" Can you imagine? Now they did get a lot of cash out of it just like the last time, but still the whole thing is more than humiliating and embarrassing. Just imagine the look on her face as she stood by Abraham while he explained all of this to the king.

But even when her husband failed her time and time again, God always came through and protected her. She came to know God as her husband and the one to whom she could place her faith. She was willing to let Abraham be stupid and she went along with it because her trust was not in Abraham, but in God.

And even though she had her lapses of faith with Hagar, Ishmael, and the whole laughing incident, she knew her God and she believed He would be faithful to provide her a son as He promised because she knew that faithfulness was part

of His character and nature. He had proven Himself to her and she believed; and more than believed, she had faith.

So let's think about this. How did Sarah turn her belief and all her experiences with God into faith? Remember, faith is always active. Thus, despite her age, she still had to go and have sex with Abraham trusting that God would do what He said. When she said earlier that she was worn-out, that was literal; both of them were just too old. But still somehow she and Abraham found a way to do the deed and lo and behold, according to **Genesis 21:1-2** "The Lord did exactly what He had promised. Sarah became pregnant, and she gave a son to Abraham in his old age. It all happened at the time God had said it would."

"And Sarah declared, God has brought me laughter! All who hear about this will laugh with me" (**Genesis 21:6**). Remember, Isaac means laughter. Because of God's faithfulness, her laughter of doubt turned into a laughter of joy. We don't find her complaining that God waited too long; rather, she rejoiced in the miracle—she rejoiced in her God. "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" (**Hebrews 11:12**).

Imagine how much Sarah had to go through in order to finally consider that God would be faithful to His Word. In her case it even required a person to person visit. If you have ever wondered why you have to have to go through so much difficulty in this life, this is why. God wants you to know His character and nature so well that you no longer waiver but respond to Him whenever He calls for you.

I love the fact that despite all of Abraham's and Sarah's failings, God's call and plan for their life was going to be fulfilled—He would ensure it. It was just a

matter of time, and in their case, it took a long time for them to learn what He needed them to learn about who He really is. It was all about the relationship. Isaac would be a child of faith so they had to first become a man and woman of faith.

There is a wonderful passage in ***Zechariah 10:6, 8*** that talks about God's plan of redemption for Judah and Israel. He says that He will reestablish them because He loves them. Then He says: "when I whistle to them, they will come running for I have redeemed them." That is how I want to be. I want to always have such a sensitive and thankful heart to the Lord for how He has redeemed me that when He calls I come running without hesitation.

I want to know Him so well that I can instantly detect His whistle and distinguish it from all others. I also want to get to the place where I understand and know that all the difficulty I go through is just another opportunity to learn more about His faithfulness. It is another opportunity to trust myself to Him, instead of taking control, and experience Him as my God.

It took a lot for Sarah and Abraham to trust themselves to Jesus and they are our great examples of faith. So take comfort and hope; I'm pretty sure we are going to get there. Fear and doubt after all is only human and is therefore expected—don't get too wrapped up about it. What matters is whether or not we choose to operate on that fear and doubt or upon what we know to be true about God. How big is your God? I know that mine is getting bigger and bigger everyday as I have to learn to let go of control and let Him handle what I clearly cannot. Remember, He is faithful—it's a part of His character and nature. Depend on it!

Let's Pray.