



What do you do when you have waited for God beyond what could be considered a reasonable time, and then some?  
How do you reconcile that the LORD is good, when every indication would shout, he is late... and how can late be good?

This is the dilemma often faced by those who would walk by faith with God.  
The LORD lives in eternity.  
You could say, he has all the time in the universe.

But we don't.

Psalm 90:10

The length of our days is seventy years – or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.

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James the brother of Jesus said in his letter...

James 4:14

What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

The psalmist wrote...

Psalm 103:15-16

As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.

Have you ever wondered why... when the people of God have so little time, does the LORD require us to spend large chunks of that time waiting for him? But then have you ever questioned... why am I so prone to grumble and doubt... when the LORD requires me to wait for him?

Wouldn't it be amazing if our hearts could continually find rest... in the LORD... who is sovereign... over all things in the seen and unseen realms, including our lives and its circumstances?

Waiting can seem like such a waste...



**Waiting**

Wasted time waiting

...not only of time, but also opportunity.

Isn't that why you and I, can be quick to take matters into our own hands, hoping that by doing something God will get on board with our plans.

But when we don't wait; when we insist on forging our own way, there can be unforeseen consequences that cannot be undone.

This is the truth that will come out in the story told in Genesis 16.

There is no question... our Sovereign God has the ability to turn things intended for harm into good that saves lives... this was the testimony of OT Joseph.

The LORD our God works for the good of those who love him – this is the promise of Romans 8:28.

And the LORD, who is gracious, even if... and even when... his people act in a faithless way, remains faithful.

But the testimony of the Scriptures is that ... waiting is intended by the LORD to be a means of grace that will bless our lives, not impoverish them.

God uses times and seasons of waiting to grow perseverance within the character of his people.

Our passage for today is **Genesis 16:1-6.**

In Genesis 15 the LORD entered into a covenant relationship with Abram, that specified exactly what land would be given to Abram.

Genesis 15:19-21

...the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.

The LORD further stated to Abram that his descendants would not possess the land immediately, but would have to wait 400 years... because...

Genesis 15:16b

“The sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.”

400

Regarding this, I appreciate what John Piper wrote...



God was not just active in the life of Abram to bless him. God revealed that he was also active among the Amorite people to convict them of their sin and persuade them to repent.

I am grateful that God made this known to Abram.  
In doing so, God revealed not only to Abram, but also to future generations... how patient he is and how rich is his mercy.  
It is these qualities of God by which we view not only world history, but our own.

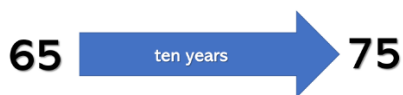
When it came to the promise of an heir, God did not provide Abram with a timeline.  
The LORD was clear in his communication to Abram... he would have a son.  
But the LORD did not specify when.

Though it is unspoken, I think it is implied... just as Abram had to wait on God's time for the land to be his, so Abram and Sarai would also have to wait on the LORD's time for their son to be born.

Genesis 16 takes place ten years after Genesis 15.



Ten years is a long time to wait for God...

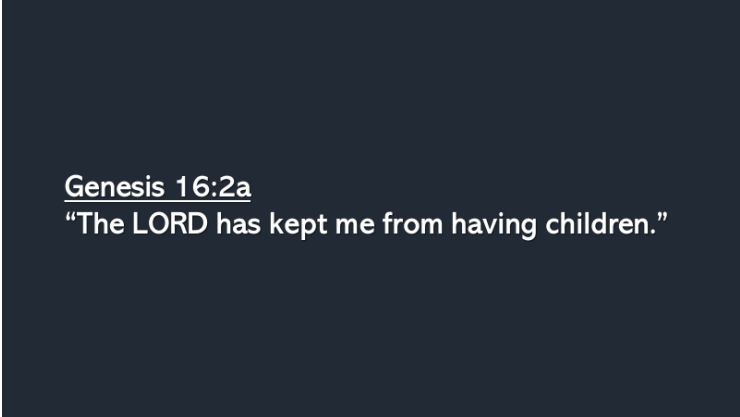


...especially when those ten years take one from age 65 to 75.

I imagine that when Abram told Sarai, ten years earlier, what.... the LORD had promised regarding a child... that she was ecstatic.  
Maybe she even began to make preparations for the arrival of their son.

But it would seem that when weeks... stretched into months... which then stretched into years ... disappointment not only visited... but it took up residence in Sarai's heart.

I say this because of what Sarai told Abram in v.2...



Genesis 16:2a  
"The LORD has kept me from having children."

Was Sarai wrong?

She believed God could intervene in her life and allow her to become pregnant. But he hadn't.

And now, ten years later, it seemed, she wasn't even sure that he would.

I believe Sarai thought often about the LORD's promise.

But I can't help but think she was also keenly aware that her body was aging. She experienced great tension between the promise and her circumstances.

I wondered how many times she said to Abram... tell me again... the exact words you said... and the exact words the LORD said in response.

"Sarai" Abram would answer.... I said to the LORD, "You have given me no children, so a servant in my household will be my heir."

And, then... Sarai asked???

The LORD answered me: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir."

In light of what Sarai said next in 16:2b...

Genesis 16:2b

“Go, sleep with my maidservant;  
perhaps I can build a family through her.”

...it would seem she had convinced herself... that while the promised child would be an offspring of Abram's, the child would not come from her body.

Hadn't the LORD said to her husband... “a son coming from your own body will be your heir?” The LORD hadn't mentioned her.

There can come points in our walk with God, as it did with Sarai... where discouragement may convince us that our situation has gone beyond God's intervention.

For Sarai, I think her proposal to Abram would have broken her heart.

Genesis 16:3

...Sarai [Abram's] wife took her maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife.

What Sarai proposed and then did was culturally acceptable in that day. It was not an uncommon thing for a man to have a second or even multiple wives. But for Sarai to propose that she share her husband with another woman in such an intimate way... says to us how desperate she had become.

I don't say these things to excuse her lack of confidence in the LORD, but simply to help us enter into her story.

There is no indication in the Scripture... whatsoever...not here in the book of Genesis or anywhere else in the Bible... that Sarai enquired of the LORD, whether her plan was God's will.

The same can be said about Abram.

If the two of them had only inquired... I believe the response of the LORD would have been as emphatic as it had been when Abram mentioned to the LORD that his heir was a servant, and the LORD had answered him, "This man will not be your heir."

Similarly, I believe the LORD would have emphatically said to Sarai and Abram, "A child born to Hagar will not be your heir. Did I not tell you that your descendants would be as numerous as the sand on the seashore and the stars in the sky? Wait for me to bring about the fulfilling of my promise to you."



With the LORD, in every matter, as Galatians 4:4 says, there is a fulness of time.



Like Sarai we see the details of our lives, but not in the context of the bigger picture as seen by God who is not limited by time and space.



Sarai desperately wanted a baby... and all she could see was her barrenness. Her perspective had become myopic.

The question could be asked – why didn't the LORD just tell her that his delay had everything to do with him preparing her and Abram to be parents? If the LORD had done this, wouldn't that have helped her to continue waiting?

But here we must remember... the LORD was preparing Sarai and Abram to be parents who walked by faith with God and who trusted him unreservedly.

From their lineage the Messiah would come. This is how Abram and Sarai would be a blessing to the entire earth. They were signposts that pointed to the power and wisdom of God. God purposed through them to leave a legacy of faith for those who would come after them.

Fast forward two thousand years... what God ultimately did for Abram and Sarai was of great encouragement to Zechariah and Elizabeth. Elizabeth also had been unable to have children. But she and her husband prayed. What do you think inspired them to trust in the LORD and to keep on boldly praying and waiting?

And when Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel and told she would supernaturally conceive what influenced her to say in faith, "Nothing is impossible with the LORD?"

With Sarai and Abram, God was at work in their lives, to cultivate a vibrant relationship of faith that would leave a legacy of faith for future descendants. Through their waiting they were learning to trust God when all their senses told them it was folly to do so.

You and I are prone, because of the culture in which we live... to want from God an answer, an intervention, a change in circumstance... right now, or even better yesterday.

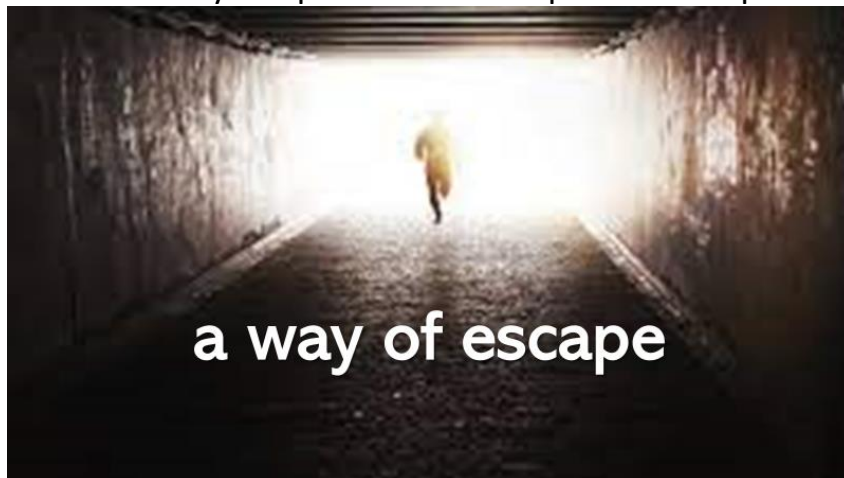
But the LORD who is committed to making us righteous, to transforming our character, grows perseverance within us... how?

By placing us in situations where we learn to trust him... not only to do what is right... but to trust him to do what is right at the time God determines it is right to do so.

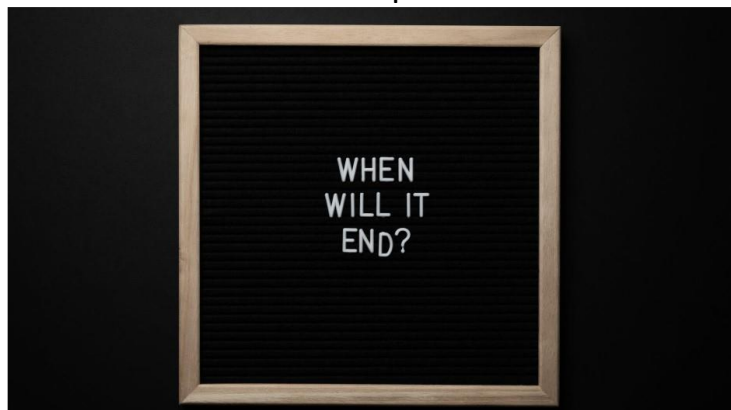
I must remind you ...it is common to be tempted to question... even grumble at God.

Our adversary Satan wants nothing more than to sow distrust of God within the hearts of those who walk with the LORD.

But with every temptation God has promised to provide a way of escape.



Consider these two examples.

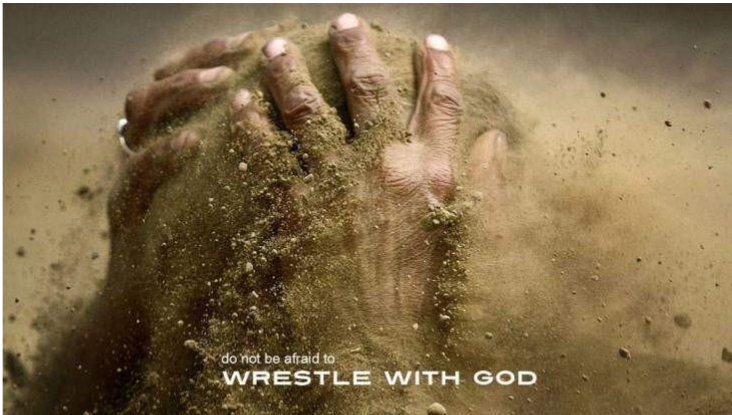


The prophet Habakkuk at one point in his life complained to God, saying, "How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen... and do not save? When God told Habakkuk what he was planning to do, and how and when... the prophet was even more confused and distressed.

It seemed to Habakkuk that God was crossing a line that shouldn't be crossed.



Greatly perplexed... Habakkuk said to the LORD, “I heard [of your fame] and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled.” 3:16a.



Like Jacob, who wrestled with God and would not let go, Habakkuk fought hard to maintain his trust in the LORD.

The book of Habakkuk confirms that finally, the prophet broke through to a place where he could say, 3:16, “I will wait patiently for the LORD... even though my circumstances are hard. I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength... he enables me to go on the heights.”

Waiting for the LORD will often lead us into an inner struggle, where a fierce battle is fought over whose will... will be done... and on whose timetable.

How sweet it is, when in trust of him, a follower of God experiences breakthrough... and with that breakthrough the joy from heaven that enables them to walk... as Habakkuk wrote... on the heights... confident in the LORD and in the LORD’s timing.

After feeding a large crowd of people with a few pieces of bread and fish, a crowd wanted to make Jesus their political king.

To have permitted them to do so, would have bypassed the cross.

Jesus' way of escape was to dismiss the crowd and go up into the mountain to pray in order that his will... be aligned with that of the Father's.

Jesus chose to wait for the fullness of the Father's time which would take him to Golgotha.

In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus was again tempted to bypass the cross.

His way of escape was to place his life in the Father's hand and to pray, as he did, three times, "Not my will, but yours be done."

In Genesis 16, like it had occurred when they went to Egypt, Sarai and Abram, ran ahead of God.

The results were devastating... and the consequences of their actions continue to be played out even to this very day.

What happened was a whole series of unfortunate actions and reactions.

v.4a – Abram slept with Hagar

v.4b – Hagar conceived

v.4b – once pregnant Hagar began to despise Sarai

v.5 – Sarai became angry with Abram and blamed him for what happened and for Hagar's attitude towards her

v.6a – Abram passively gave Sarai free reign to do with Hagar whatever she wanted

v.6b – Hagar was mistreated by Sarai

v.6c – Hagar ran away

Where does this story connect to our lives?

We are to remember the warning of 1 Corinthians 10:12:

"If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall."

Jesus once told a parable to some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on others.

The story goes like this... two men went to the temple to pray.

The first man prayed...

**“God, I thank you  
that I am not  
like other people!”**



The second man prayed...

**“O God, be merciful  
to me a sinner.”  
Luke 18:13**



For some this story in Genesis 16 would convince us to confess our sin and receive from God his forgiveness.

We are to remember that when we are tempted... to believe the lie of our adversary that God has forgotten us... and tempted... to take matters into our own hands, there is a way of escape which God provides for us. Some of us may need to take hold of God until he shows us the way out.

We are to remember that the LORD is committed to our transformation. We can trust the means by which he does so... even though it may be painful. Some of us may need to rest in this truth and let it saturate our heart with hope.

As we wait on the LORD, we are to remember the counsel of Habakkuk – Be joyful in God who is our Strength. In the LORD we will walk on the heights as Habakkuk wrote. Some of us may need to speak these words to our hearts and mind... that our faith may grow in the goodness, ability and power of God

This incident in Genesis 16 is not the end of Sarai and Abram's story. Without question their choices and actions at that point in their lives... created a horrific mess.

But remember... they were not alone in making a mess of their lives.

For their failures the grace of God was greater.

And what was true of them, is true for you and me.

God who redeemed them and their failures, redeems us and ours.

And so, we praise God for his immeasurable grace in all of its manifold forms, including the grace of "waiting."

## **Prayer**

We come to the table to remember Christ the LORD.

We look back to his cross where he paid the price of our sin and failures.

We remember that this was how we are redeemed.

But we also look forward to his soon return when our salvation will be completed – body, soul and spirit.