

FIVE WEEK STUDY

Believing **GOD**
in the ***In*** - *Between*

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Believing God in the In-Between

WEEK 1

{HOPE FOR MY FUTURE}

"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." Jeremiah 29:11

We are introduced to Abraham and Sarah in their 'golden years' of life. It is just the two of them along with their nephew Lot. Sarah is 65 when this story begins. We know she was barren (Genesis 11:30), unable to conceive and carry her husbands' name forward. Barrenness in those days was shameful, a mark of divine disfavor. We don't know how she managed this, if it was something she just accepted or if bitterness filled the emptiness within her but like it or not, in Sarah's mind the ship had sailed, the opportunity to have her own child to love and hold was long gone. Whatever future she had imagined for herself and her husband seemed pretty dim, or so she thought.

Read Genesis 12:1-9

I imagine there would have been some interesting discussion going on in Abraham's house after this interaction. Sarah probably had Abraham repeat what God said word for word, multiple times. She might have asked, "What does this mean exactly?" or "Are you hearing things?" But Abraham was convinced, believed God, and with prompt obedience followed His instructions with Sarah right by his side. We know this promise was given directly to Abraham, but Sarah was just as much a part of the promise as Abraham.

Read Genesis 17:1-16

I love how the Lord encourages us, He knows just what we need to hear and when. I'm quite certain the first interaction with God back in Genesis 12 gave both Abraham and Sarah new hope and a sense of purpose beyond their expectations. Even though they didn't fully understand what all of this meant in the big picture of their lives they knew there was a God who saw them and knew their deepest desires.

I can't help but see the connection that we are also included in a promise from a God who sees us and knows our greatest needs, deepest longings, and desires. He seeks to give us hope in the places which feel hopeless.

"And you also were included in Christ, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." Ephesians 1:13

Read Ephesians 1: 1- 23

Because you are included in Christ, what things are yours as a result?

Do you know what things have been freely given to you?

Do you ever despair about the present or the future?

What aspects of God's promises about your future given in the Bible can you use to confront these feelings of hopelessness?

Prayerfully read through these verses below, take your time and ask God to speak to your heart through His word. If one jumps out to write it in a journal or maybe even commit it to memory.

1. Blessed with every spiritual blessing

Read Ephesians 1:3, John 1:16. God has given blessing upon blessing in Christ to each one of His children. I must remember the incredible blessings I have and walk in them.

2. Loved


Read John 14:21, Romans 5:1-11, Ephesians 3:16-19. God has expressed such incredible love for me in choosing to adopt me into His family and then sending Jesus to make that a reality. None of my circumstances can possibly cancel out God's love.

3. Sealed with the Holy Spirit

Read Ephesians 1:13-14, Romans 8:9-11. God leaves no doubt about our future; we are marked and sealed as His. Do you take God at His word? How does the fact that He has given you the Spirit increase your trust that He will bring about the eternal glory He has promised?

4. Given a living hope

Read 1 Peter 1:3-7, Ephesians 1:18, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17, Romans 5:5. In the Bible, hope is not wishful thinking, but a firm conviction, much like faith that is directed toward the future. In Christ, God has given us great hope. I have hope! Sure and precious and living hope-now and forever!



Believing **God** in the **In-Between**

WEEK 2

{HE WILL PROTECT ME}

"The Lord will work out his plans for my life - for your faithful love, O LORD, endures forever. Don't abandon me, for you made me." Psalm 138:8

The testimony of the Bible tells us Sarah was unusually beautiful (Genesis 12:11-14). She seems to have had a beauty that grew more attractive with the passing years. Sarah's renowned loveliness certainly brought its share of trouble.

Read Genesis 12:10-20 & Genesis 20:1-18

When famine drove Abraham and Sarah into the land of Egypt, Abraham felt if these hostile kings knew Sarah and he were married they would kill him and add his beautiful wife to their harem. So Abraham came up with an idea—a really bad idea—if taken, Sarah was to say she was Abraham's sister, not his wife. Sure enough, Abraham's story is told and Sarah ends up in the harem of Pharaoh. But God protected her by sending plagues upon the monarch. Pharaoh sent her back to Abraham, untouched.

The same story is repeated with Abimelech, king of the Philistines; he admires Sarah's beauty and takes her to his harem. Again, God delivers Sarah. We don't know what Sarah thought of Abraham's hair-brained scheme. We are told she dearly loved her husband, even calling him "master" (Genesis 18:12; 1 Peter 3:6) and his life was precious to her. She seems to live believing in a truth God will give to Moses hundreds of years later.

"Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you." Deuteronomy 31:8

So what about us? How do we deal with unsettling circumstances and the issues of life which surround us?

Read 1 Peter 3:1-6

Do you believe He is able to protect and preserve you from harm, danger, or even a bad mistake? Do you trust God's care and power to fulfill His promises to you?

How can we trust God like this? How can we live in the faith and trust in God which we see from Sarah?

At the core, we need to cling to God's precious word, and believe Him! When we are in circumstances that exceed our comprehension and stretch our faith, it's vitally important for us to ask Jesus to help us obey Him, and trust He wants only the best for us and be anxious for nothing (Philippians 4:6).

Praise Him - Fix your eyes upon Jesus. Focus on who He is-your Almighty God, the LORD, your Redeemer.

Admit to Him - Confess your fear, your weakness, and your human frailty. Confess your inability.

Thank Him - Thank your Lord for His listening ear. Thank Him for His heart of compassion and His loving kindness.

Ask Him - Ask the Lord for His help with your needs and bring your requests before Him. Do not be afraid to let the Lord hear your worries or your concerns.

What are you worried about? Take some time to think through areas of your life that are the most difficult to trust God (i.e. children, finances, or health). Ask God to shine His light on places where your trust may be wavering. We are not designed to carry those burdens. In prayer, lay them down at the Lord's feet.

Psalms 34:5 *"Those who look to Him for help will be radiant with joy.."*

Isaiah 41:10 *"Don't be afraid, for I am with you?"*

Psalms 138:8 *"The Lord will work out his plans for my life - for your faithful love, O LORD, endures forever. Don't abandon me, for you made me."*

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WEEK 3

{TRUSTING HIS TIMING}

"The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake..." 2 Peter 3:9

Ten years have passed since Abraham first received the promise from God when He said: *"I will make you into a great nation..."* (Genesis 12:2). Sarah is now 75 years old and if she thought it was impossible to have a child at 65, how crazy to think she would be starting a family at 75. Maybe they misunderstood God somehow. Maybe she and Abraham were to put their heads together and help God along because clearly, it seemed He might need a hand. In last week's devotion, we saw Abraham's bright idea about lying to protect themselves from foreign kings, now we see in Genesis 16 Sarah has an idea, and it's also pretty bad.

Read Genesis 16:1-16

This is the first time in the story we hear something directly from Sarah and here it is: "The LORD has prevented me from having children. Go, sleep with my servant; perhaps I can have children through her" (Genesis 16:3).

Sarah impatiently implied God was not keeping His promise. She was creating a solution to remove the burden she was carrying. The idea of giving Hagar to Abraham was not a new idea from this period in time; it was a common practice that insured the birth of a male heir to carry on a family line. This was a "man-made" idea, not a "God idea." Sarah would solve the problem of her barrenness by herself but sadly, we see this idea backfired and things began to unravel quickly in the home. Hurt feelings, hostility, and suspicion were the result of this plan of Sarah's.

Can you recall a time when you had given up on God?

Did you try to "help" Him along? If so, how? What was the result?

There is tension in waiting on God; the balance between placing a situation in God's hands and stepping into prayerful action toward that goal. We can probably all attest to times when we've had a good idea which wasn't a God idea and it left some scars. We need godly discernment to help us in those times. Thankfully God's word gives us many promises on this very topic.

Here are a few scriptures to help you discern God's leading:

1. *The Holy Spirit guides us into God's will* Psalm 143:10
2. *The Holy Spirit guides those who belong to God* Romans 8:14
3. *The Holy Spirit guides us by His power* Zechariah 4:6
4. *The Holy Spirit guides us into all truth* John 16:13
5. *The Holy Spirit guides us to live by God's Word* Ezekiel 36:27
6. *The Holy Spirit guides us to obtain God's promises* Ephesians 1:13-14
7. *The Holy Spirit guides us away from sin* Galatians 5:16
8. *The Holy Spirit guides us to pray God's will* Romans 8:26-27

If God has deposited something in your heart and it hasn't happened yet, DON'T GIVE UP! DON'T THROW IN THE TOWEL! Just wait on God! Maybe it's not quite your time yet, but it doesn't mean it's not coming. NOTHING can stand in the way of God's purposes for your life if you just have faith that HIS ways are HIGHER than your ways, and HIS thoughts are HIGHER than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Do you trust Him today? Do you trust His plan is to prosper you and not harm you (Jeremiah 29:11)?

Do you trust that if God is for you then who can be against you (Romans 8:31)?

Set your mind on HIM, on things above, and NOT on what you SEE, earthly things (Colossians 3:2) and He will meet you there as you wait in expectation and trust.

Claim this beautiful verse in Zephaniah 3:17!

"For the LORD your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs."

Believing God in the In-Between

WEEK 4

{NOTHING IS TOO HARD}

"I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!" Mark 9:24

As we step back into the story with Sarah, fourteen years have passed since the Hagar incident. Let's see what happened next. Read Genesis 18:1-15 "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14). No, nothing is too difficult when we believe in Him enough to go forward, doing His will, and letting Him do the impossible for us. The only thing "too hard for the Lord" is our deliberate and continual disbelief in His love and power and our ultimate rejection of his plans for us. Nothing is impossible for the Lord to do for those who trust Him (Mark 9:23).

This is God's loving challenge to you and me each day. He wants us to think of the deepest, highest, worthiest desires, and longings of our hearts (Psalm 37:4). He wants us to think of those things which perhaps were desires for ourselves, yet have gone unfulfilled for so long we now see them as simply lost desires. God even urges us to think of the one thing we once believe was possible but now have given up all hope of seeing fulfilled in this life.

It was God's expressed will for Abraham and Sarah to have a son. When we know the longings of our hearts align with God's expressed will for us, we can be certain God will accomplish them. Yes, if we will let Him, God will do those very things, even if we know it is such an utter impossibility we would simply laugh at the absurdity of anyone ever suggesting they could come to pass.

Faith is the last thing the enemy wants us to secure. What keeps us from believing God?

1. When He calls us to tasks beyond our capability

When we believe we cannot do what He asks us to do, our disbelief blinds us to God's capacity. When God puts things in front of us we feel we cannot do, we fear our abilities aren't enough. Essentially we put too much faith in our ability. We don't need to have full confidence in ourselves we need to have confidence in God (Philippians 1:6).

2. When God leads us into something we don't understand

Why are we going through this? Real faith does not demand He explain Himself. The longer I walk with God the more I realize I will never understand the depths of God (Romans 8). Your faith can remain intact when you are unsure. Don't feel as if you have to have a full understanding before you can take full possession of faith.

3. We are not convinced God is good

If we feel as if God isn't hearing our cries, do we assume His silence is arbitrary? Or we are being punished? Not worthy of His forgiveness and grace? "He's good to everyone else, but I don't deserve it." God's character says His desires are for my good (Jeremiah 29:11). God uses His kindness to lead us to repentance. (Romans 2:4) God is good. He is for us.

4. We don't trust He has the best for us

Are we too scared to believe God for hope? Are we too afraid to move forward? "And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us because He has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love." (Romans 5:5) Give your heart permission to trust Him. Faith is a process, day by day. Not just the big moments. It hinges on how we think about God. Is He trustworthy even when I don't understand? Believe God and His character. We develop faith because that is how we express our love for Him. Faith does not erase suffering, doubt, fear, or insecurity. It simply overcomes them. God is big, capable, and trustworthy. It is safe to have faith in a faithful God.

Looking at the four areas of doubt listed above, which one do you tend to wrestle with faith and doubt?

How has God been attempting to grow your faith in this area?

Lord, help my unbelief. Transform my heart, develop my trust.

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WEEK 5

{EVEN IN THE WAITING}

"But those who wait on 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." Isaiah 40:31

How do you respond when left in a waiting room longer than you'd like?

"She became pregnant, and she gave birth to a son for Abraham in his old age. This happened at just the time God had said it would." Genesis 21:2

Read Genesis 21:1-7

It has been thirty years since Abraham first received the word from the Lord when He said: "I will make you into a great nation" (Genesis 12:2). The long-awaited time came at last, and the laughter of doubt we saw back in Genesis 18:12 has turned to joyous laughter which filled their home and caused the now elderly couple to forget their long and tiring wait. God's timing is precise for He does things "at just the time" He has set. And when the time came for the promise to be fulfilled, no one would be able to deny this was indeed God's doing. This was God's power on display!

Read Isaiah 55:8-13

"So is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Isaiah 55:11

We can take God at His word, He is entirely, completely, and totally trustworthy. The Psalmist said, "Yet I am confident I will see the Lord's goodness while I am here in the land of the living. Wait patiently for the Lord. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the Lord." Ps.27:13-14. David had not yet seen the Lord's answer to his prayers, but he was confident he would see them and his confidence sustained him.

Trusting God's Word and His power more than we trust our own feelings and experiences is our anchor. In the raging storms of life, we can choose to not allow our life and emotions to be tossed back and forth.

Remember, your Rock is the Lord (Psalm 18:2) and it is the sea that ebbs and flows with the tides, not Him.

Have you been waiting on God to work, fearing you have been forgotten? Lift up your head and begin praising Him right now for the deliverance that is on its way to you. Turn to Psalm 71 and make this your prayer today.

As we end our story about Sarah, I'm so encouraged to see both her and Abraham mentioned in the Hall of Faith. They definitely had their share of rough patches yet they are commended for their faith in God for all time! (Hebrews 11)

True faith relies on God and believes before seeing (Hebrews 11:13). Naturally, we want some evidence our petition is granted before we believe, but when we "live by faith" (2 Cor.5:7), we need no evidence other than God's Word. He has spoken, and in harmony with our faith, it will be done. We will see because we have believed, and true faith sustains us in the most trying of times, even when everything around us seems to contradict God's Word.

Faith that believes it will see God's answer, will keep us from becoming discouraged. We will laugh at seemingly impossible situations while we watch with delight to see how God is going to open a path where there seems like there is no possible way. It's in those times when our faith grows and is strengthened.

"When I cannot feel the faith of assurance, I live by the fact of God's faithfulness."

- Matthew Henry

How strong is your faith?

What are some things that challenge it?

What are some ways you can cultivate it?

Prayerfully read Hebrews 12:1-2

Read the following verses and notice what they say about God's timing:

Isaiah 49:8

Romans 5:6

2 Corinthians 6:2

Galatians 6:9

1 Timothy 2:6

1 Timothy 6:15

Titus 1:3

So take heart, dear one, when God requires you to wait. The One you wait for will not disappoint you. He will never be even five minutes behind "the appointed time." And soon "your grief will turn to joy" (John 16:20).

