

May 12/13, 2007

*No Perfect People Series*

## **Waiting on God**

**Genesis 16:1-16**

Pastor Bryan Clark

Waiting is really hard. And waiting is never harder than when you are waiting on God. You just feel so helpless, so dependent. There's just nothing you can do; you just have to wait. Sometimes when you're waiting it seems like God doesn't care. It seems like He doesn't see, He doesn't hear, He doesn't do anything – it's just...wait. It's often in those times of waiting that our faith starts to come unraveled.

I don't know about you, I just don't like to wait. I'm really not wired that way. If something is broken, let's get it fixed. You know, I'm kind of a 'get her done' kind of guy. I'm not really a 'wait around' kind of guy. It's just the way God has wired me. Patti and I have a joke at home. She doesn't have a 'honey-do list'; she has a 'honey-stop-doing' list. You know, "Come back in; meet your family." So I don't like to wait. And I really don't like it when God makes me wait.

In Psalm 40, verse 1, the psalmist opens the psalm with what is translated in English usually something like, "I waited patiently for God." But in the Hebrew it's actually much more expressive than that. It literally reads, "Waiting, I waited." Have you ever felt that way? Sometimes in the middle of your waiting, it just seems like you wait more. "Waiting, I waited."

Some of you this morning are in waiting mode. It's Mother's Day, and there are some of you couples that have been asking God, crying out to God for a child. Weeks turn into months turn into years, and it just doesn't seem like it's ever going to happen. You keep asking God, and it seems like God doesn't care—like God doesn't listen. Mother's Day, for you, is just another painful reminder that you're still waiting.

For others of you, you're waiting for something else. Maybe a family that's waiting for God's healing of some physical disease. You're perhaps waiting for the healing of a marriage. Maybe you have a wayward child, and you're waiting for that prodigal to come home. Maybe you're waiting for a new job, a different job; maybe this morning you're waiting for *a* job. You're waiting for answers. You're waiting for direction. You're waiting for your spouse to come to know Jesus. And you're waiting, and you're asking, and like the psalmist, you identify, "Waiting, we wait."

Abraham and Sarah were two of the most courageous people of faith in the Old Testament. It's really a remarkable story. God called them out of their homeland to a land of promise. One can only imagine what that first discussion was like when Abraham said to his wife, "You know, honey, God's calling us to leave this place and to go somewhere else." "Well, honey, where are we going?" "I don't know exactly. God just told me He'd tell us when we got there."

With great courage and faith, they believed. God made a promise that He would make Sarah and Abraham into a great nation. He would bless those that bless them, and curse those that curse them. And this promised seed would come through the family line of Abraham, and one day every nation of the world would be blessed by that seed. It's quite a remarkable promise, really. And Abraham and Sarah believed that.

But the years passed, and it seemed like nothing was happening. And they finally concluded one day that for whatever reason, God isn't going to keep that promise, and they probably needed to take charge of their own lives – in essence be their own god and make it happen themselves. So

they made a choice. It turned out to be a disaster. The consequences of that choice can still be felt today, seen every night on the nightly news.

If you have a Bible, turn with me this morning to Genesis 16 as we talk about what it means to wait on God. The story of Sarah and Abraham really starts in Genesis chapter 12. They lived in Ur of the Chaldees which was a very modern city in the ancient world. It had many of the comforts of home. But God called them to leave and go to an unknown place. And with great faith, they chose to leave with this wonderful promise of becoming a great nation.

One can only imagine the conversations that Abraham and Sarah had as they talked about what that would be like as God would cause them to be fruitful and multiply this great nation and all that was involved in that. But the months turned into years. And year after year after year, nothing happened.

In chapter 15, God comes back and reiterates the promise – a covenant promise with Abraham. And Abraham says, “By the way God, You are aware of the fact that we have no children.” God says, “I know. But I made a promise. I’ll keep the promise. You just have to trust Me.” And you have to imagine after that again Abraham and Sarah had a wonderful conversation of reminding themselves that God made a promise. He’s going to keep the promise. It sounds like it’s coming soon. And they had to have been so excited. It’s with that as a backdrop that we open chapter 16, verse 1:

**Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children.** (Genesis 16:1a; \*NASB)

Sarah had no children. She was barren. God had promised that He would make Abraham and Sarah into a great nation, but now a decade has passed and no children. Sarah was 65 when she left home. She’s 75 now – by human standards, way past the child-bearing years. And they’re beginning to wonder if that day will ever come.

To make matters worse, in the ancient world there was a belief that when a woman was barren it was because God or the gods were angry and this was God’s discipline. If a woman was fruitful, it was because God was pleased. Now that theology is certainly not correct. And we see many examples of that throughout the Old Testament. But in that culture, that is what they believed. And Abraham and Sarah bought into that belief.

It is a reminder for us that truth does matter. Your view of God does affect how you process the difficult times of life. Some of you ladies who know the pain of wanting a child and waiting year after year understand to some degree what Sarah was going through, but add to that the pain of a theological belief that says, “If you do not have a child, it’s your fault. God is mad at you.” That doesn’t exactly help in your hour of need.

There’s a similar belief today in a message of health and wealth and prosperity – that what God wants is for you to be healthy, wealthy and prosperous. And if you’re not, it’s because God is mad at you, or you lack the faith to pull it off. Imagine if you have a family member that’s struggling with a terminal disease and the theology is, *If that’s the case, it’s your fault. If you had more faith, this wouldn’t be happening.* I don’t find that very comforting. As a matter of fact, I would say that’s a form of spiritual abuse, because it’s just not true. God has a plan and a purpose, and we don’t always understand that.

There were many people healed in the Bible that didn’t even know who God was. There’s a great story in the Gospels where a man is healed and goes to the Temple and they say, “Who did this to

you?” And he says, “I don’t even know. All I know is I once was blind, now I can see.” He didn’t even know who Jesus was. Jesus just healed him. God had a plan and a purpose.

The same thing is true with Sarah, but their theological belief was, *This was her fault. And in some way, she had made God angry, so there were no children.*

**Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. [At this point, we say, “Uh oh.”] So Sarai said to Abram, “Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her.” And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. After Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife. He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight. And Sarai said to Abram, “May the wrong done me be upon you I gave my maid into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight. May the LORD judge between you and me.” But Abram said to Sarai, “Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight.” So Sarai treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence. (vs. 1-6)**

It was common in the ancient world and acceptable that if a husband had a wife who was barren, he could bring in a slave girl and father a child through her. And that child would be considered the property of the wife, not the birth mother. The translation made is really misleading. She was a slave girl. She was considered the property of Sarah, and Sarah could do with her what she pleased.

If you’re not familiar with the story, Abraham and Sarah were originally named “Abram” and Sarai.” Their names don’t get changed until chapter 17. So if you’re wondering, it’s the same two people, just a little bit of a name change.

So Abraham and Sarah had bought into this cultural belief. But it reminds us there are always those things that the culture says is acceptable that are not necessarily acceptable to God. That’s always a challenge to sort out what the culture says is right, and what God says is right. And God never endorsed this behavior, even though it was commonly done.

So the suggestion is made that perhaps Abram can father a child through the slave girl. It’s interesting in verse 2 when Sarai speaks. It’s always a big deal in a Hebrew narrative the first time a main character speaks. Sarai was introduced in chapter 12, but no words have ever come out of her mouth until chapter 16.

The very first words to ever come out of her mouth are, **“Please go in to my maid [or my slave girl]; perhaps I will obtain children.”** The Hebrew there is “perhaps I will be sonned through her.” This isn’t just about having children. This is about fulfillment of the promise. She understands what the promise was. And she also understands that this magnificent promise is not coming to pass because she can’t have a child. She, in a sense, is the one that is failing to fulfill this magnificent promise. So she feels the weight of that and, “Maybe I can be sonned through her.”

One of the interesting characteristics of this text is I think the author tries very hard to connect us back to Genesis chapter 3. Of course in the flow of Genesis, we’re just a few chapters removed. And in Genesis chapter 3, Adam and Eve experience temptation. They decide to be their own god – to run their own show. And that’s the source of their decision to sin against God. And I think that’s

the same thing that is happening here. Abraham and Sarah fail to trust God, decide to become their own god, and decide to pull this off on their own.

So for example, at the end of verse 2, it says, “**And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.**” That’s almost exactly the Hebrew of Genesis chapter 3. “And Adam listened to his wife Eve when she offered him the fruit.” Same thing in chapter 16 when it says, “**Sarai took Hagar...and gave her to her husband Abram.**” It’s almost exactly the same Hebrew, “And Eve took the fruit and gave it to her husband.” So the writer is trying to take us back and say, “This is the same thing. This is what happens when we try to be our own god.”

Abram goes in to Hagar, she conceived, and immediately when she conceives, she despises Sarai. That word “despises” means she believed her to be cursed. In Genesis 12 when it says, “I will bless those that bless you; I will curse” - that’s the same Hebrew word “I will curse” that’s translated “despises”.

What’s happening is up until this point, no one could be sure if the problem was with Abram or Sarai. But immediately when Abram has relations with Hagar, she conceives. At that point it’s obvious the problem is not with Abram. The problem is with Sarai. So at that moment, Hagar looks at Sarai and realizes, *You are cursed. You’re the problem*—which of course only adds to Sarai’s pain. So out of her pain, she responds.

Just like in Genesis 3, the blame game begins. Sarai says to Abram, “Hey fella, this is your fault.” You can imagine Abram going, “What are you talking about?” I think what happened is up until that point, neither Abram nor Sarai really knew what the problem was. But when Hagar immediately became pregnant, everybody knew the problem was Sarai. And I’m guessing Abram was pretty excited about the fact that he was about to father a son through Hagar, and in his excitement and in his frustration with Sarai, he probably did not respond very well.

And in that moment, what Sarai needed from her husband was probably some love and compassion. That’s not what she got. So she’s saying, “Hey fella, this is your fault. You should have seen this coming. And when Hagar looked at me to point the finger at me, you should have done something. You should have stopped that, but you didn’t. So I’m blaming you for this.”

And Abram in essence says, “Hey, listen here, woman.” (That’s kind of a loose translation speaking as a guy.) Something like that. You know, you kind of get the impression Abram’s frustrated. He probably bought into this belief that Sarai *is* the problem. It’s obvious now, and he’s frustrated with this, and he says, “Listen woman, this is your property – this slave girl. If you’ve got a problem with her, deal with her.”

So that’s what she does. “**So Sarai treated her harshly**” – that’s the same word used to describe how the Egyptians treated the Israelites. It basically means “to abuse them”. This pain that was within Sarai was now getting vented on Hagar to the extent that she finally just had to leave, had to escape.

One of the other interesting characteristics of this passage is the repetition of the word “sight”. It’s obvious the writer’s trying to make a point. In verse 4, “**...saw that she had conceived...was despised in her sight**”, verse 5, “**saw she had conceived...despised in her sight,**” verse 6, “**...do to her what is good in your sight.**” We understand that the walk of faith is just that – it’s a walk of faith.

Hebrews 11 verse 1 says, faith is the evidence of things *not* seen. The alternative to that is of course the walk of sight – manmade solutions to our problems. So there is an emphasis here – when Abram and Sarai ceased to walk by faith, they took the alternative route to become their own god, to take charge of their own lives, and will do this through a manmade solution, which is the walk of sight.

Every single one of us who are followers of Jesus walk one of two routes: the walk of faith or the walk of sight. That’s exactly what happened in this story.

Verse 7:

**Now the angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. He said, “Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from and where are you going?” And she said, “I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai.” Then the angel of the LORD said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority.” Moreover, the angel of the LORD said to her, “I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count.” The angel of the LORD said to her further, “Behold, you are with child, and you will bear a son; and you shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has given heed to your affliction. He will be a wild donkey of a man, His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand will be against him; and he will live to the east of all his brothers.” Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, “You are a God who sees”; for she said, “Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?” Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered. (vs. 7-14)**

We know that Hagar is headed back to Egypt. The route here through Shur is the route back to Egypt. She’s got nowhere else to go; she’s going home. And she has an encounter with the angel of the LORD. The angel of the LORD is what we would call in the Old Testament a theophany. It basically means God manifested Himself in a physical way to someone in the Old Testament.

The angel of the LORD – capital L-O-R-D – is often what we call an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ. In other words, it’s Jesus in the Old Testament. You’re aware of the fact that Jesus did not begin at Christmas. Jesus has been eternally existent – God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Before He became flesh, which is what incarnate means, He existed pre-incarnate. So when the angel of the LORD in all caps appears in the Old Testament, it’s typically referring to the pre-incarnate Christ. So in essence this is an encounter with Jesus Himself.

Whenever you see the idea of a well or a spring in the Bible, it’s always in reference to hope. It’s always in reference to life. In a very barren, difficult, desolate place, the idea of water or a well was always symbolic of life or hope. It is really interesting how similar this passage right here is to what Mark talked about a couple of weeks ago from John chapter 4 with the woman at the well. You have a woman here who is now an outcast; she’s a slave girl. She’s headed back to Egypt. She’s been deeply wounded. And there at the well, she encounters the living Christ who’s going to meet her in her hour of need and give her hope – very much as it is in John chapter 4.

It’s worth noting this is the very first appearance of the angel of the LORD in the Old Testament. And it’s worth noting it is to a desperate, Egyptian slave girl in her hour of need. He says, **“Hagar, Sarai's maid.”** One other thing to note here is as far as we can tell, this is the only time in any ancient literature – both in the Scriptures and outside – where God or one of the gods actually addressed a woman by name. So this is highly unusual. But God Himself speaks Hagar’s name. **“Where have you come from and where are you going?”**

She tells the story and says, “I’m headed home.” The angel of the LORD responds with a command and a promise. The command is, “I want you to go back home, and I want you to submit yourself to your mistress.” Now what is He saying there? What He is not saying is, “I want you to go home and return to the abuse.” That’s not what He’s saying. What He is saying is this, “Hagar, I want you to know Me. I am going to build this great nation. And I want you to be there. And I want you to experience it. And I want you to know Me.”

That’s what this whole text right here is about. Abram and Sarai, because of their lack of faith during their time of waiting, have clearly communicated a message to Hagar. And the message is this, “You need to know that we have lots of God-talk, but when push comes to shove and we reach our hour of need, our God will not come through. So we have got to take matters into our own hands.” And so Hagar is thinking, *That’s no different than the gods of Egypt. They don’t seem to ever show up in our hour of need either. So I might as well go home.*

That’s why God appears to her at the spring. It’s God’s way of saying, “I know you’ve been taught by Abram and Sarai that I don’t really exist, that I don’t listen, that I’m not going to respond, that I’m not going to come through. But I want you to know I’m not like the gods of Egypt. I am real and I am alive and I’m living and I’m appearing to you. And I’m talking to you. And I’m telling you I’m going to meet you in your hour of need. You have to trust Me. So what I’m asking is for you to go back home because what you’re going to find with Abram and Sarai is going to be different than anything you could find in Egypt.” This is really God’s heart for Hagar. He wants her to be a part of what He’s doing. That’s really what He’s saying here.

It is a dramatic reminder to all of us that when we get tired of waiting and decide to take matters into our own hands and become our own god, we make a powerful statement to our children and to the people around us. And in those moments what we are saying is, “By the way, you need to know that I have a lot of God-talk and I talk a lot about faith, but when push comes to shove in my hour of need, my God cannot come through. That’s why I’m taking matters into my own hands.” With the decisions we make, that is what we are saying. And the people around us hear it for what it is. That’s exactly what happens here. And that’s why God so dramatically appears to Hagar. He’s saying, “By the way, I am real. And I am powerful. And I want you to know that.”

That’s the command. The promise is that He will make Hagar and her offspring into a great nation – too many to count. He says, “**Behold, you are with child, and you will bear a son; and you shall call his name Ishmael.**” (v. 11) It’s a word that means “God hears.” What she had been taught in the theological lessons at home under Abram and Sarai is apparently God doesn’t hear. Apparently God doesn’t see. Apparently God has forgotten about us. And again that’s why she’s fleeing back to Egypt, because that’s no different than the gods of Egypt.

But God has appeared to her and said, “Hagar, that’s not true. I’m standing right in front of you. And I want you to know I do hear, I am alive, and I’m different from those gods in Egypt. And I want you to name your child “God hears” because I’ve met you in your hour of pain. And I don’t want you to ever forget, I do hear you when you cry out to Me.”

“**Because the LORD has given heed to your affliction. He will be a wild donkey of a man**” (vs. 11b-12a) - not a domesticated donkey, a wild donkey. Wild, independent, stubborn, you can fill in all the adjectives you like there. “**His hand will be against everyone, and everyone’s hand will be against him**” (v. 12a) – constantly in conflict, constantly fighting. It just seems to define their very existence. “**And he will live to the east of all his brothers**” (v. 12b) - probably better translated,

“He will live in defiance of his brothers.” What it’s saying is geographically, they will live side-by-side, but they will constantly be in conflict.

Now of course we understand that Ishmael is the father of the Arab people. And the Arabs and the Jews geographically have lived side-by-side for thousands of years, and they have fought constantly. Every night we turn on the nightly news, we read the daily newspaper, and we are reminded of this ongoing conflict that never goes away in the Middle East. And frankly, no matter who we send over there, it’s always going to be a point of conflict. That is what God is saying in this passage. But it’s very important to understand, God deeply loved Hagar. God wanted nothing more than for Hagar to know Him in a real and intimate way. God loves the Arab people. God loves the Hebrew people. He wants them to know Him. But the reality of this choice is lived out before us for thousands of years.

In verse 13 in a very interesting fashion, Hagar names God. That also is very unusual. But she says, “God, I’m going to name You.” **“Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, ‘You are a God who sees.’”** You can hear this theology lesson she’s getting. “You are real. You are alive. You do hear. And I’m going to name you that – El Roi – You are the God who hears me.” She even says, “And I have seen You, and I have lived through it.” In amazing fashion she has seen the living God and she’s still alive. This is really quite an experience here.

Therefore the well was called “The Well of the Living One Who Sees Me.” So there is this wonderful moment where she recognizes, *I am standing before the God of Abram and Sarai. He is alive. He is real. He does see. He does hear. And I’ve lived to tell about it.*

Verse 15:

**So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him.** (vs. 15-16)

We don’t really get much of the story here, but one can only imagine the scene when Hagar shows up back home and tells the story of what she encountered. This amazing story that, “I actually met your God face-to-face, and He talked to me. And He reminded me that He hears me. And He sees me.”

And she talks about the promise of Ishmael and the nation that would flow out of her. And Abram and Sarai must have heard this as a significant rebuke as they are reminded that that is true. What were they thinking? And why did they take matters into their own hands and make a mess of things? Abram’s decision to name this son Ishmael is simply the narrative’s way of saying, Abram believed what she said. That he believed her story was true. And on that basis named the child, ‘God hears.’

Now if you didn’t know the rest of the story, you would imagine this is really wonderful. They probably all hug each other and probably a year later, Sarai’s pregnant and has the promised seed. And the story is wonderful. But that’s not the way the story goes at all. Because Abram and Sarai after this encounter would wait another year, would wait another five years, would wait another ten years, would wait fourteen more years before they would finally have the promised child. Fourteen long years of wondering, *Does God hear? Does God see? Does God care?*

I mean this must have seemed like some sort of a cruel joke, some sort of a strange game God was playing. It wasn’t until Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 years old when she

conceived and had the promised child. And the New Testament tells us that the reason God did that is because He wanted Abraham and Sarah and everyone else to know that this promised seed was not something that Abraham and Sarah could produce on their own. It was a miracle from God. So He waited until physically they were as good as dead in their ability to have a child before God stepped in and did a miracle.

And of course it is symbolic of the salvation that would come through that seed as God would want us to know that it's all God with no works of the flesh added. But Abraham and Sarah could not possibly have known that. They could not possibly have known what God was doing. The theology of the day said, "Obviously God's mad." And that was wrong theology. It's hard to wait, but it's especially hard to wait when none of the circumstances seem to make sense. Why would God do this? Why would God make us a promise and make us wait year after year after year after year?

And in those fourteen years, there must have been days when again they thought, *God is not going to show up. God's not going to keep His promise. This is not going to work.* I mean really, how could you be 90 years old as a mother and think, *Maybe this year?*

But those fourteen years, everyday they raised a little boy by the name of 'God hears'. And everyday they called his name and were reminded, *Hey we made that mistake once, let's not make it again. God hears. God sees and God hears. And even though this makes absolutely no sense, God hears and God sees and we've got to believe that by faith.*

We have to understand that if we're going to be people of faith, we have to trust God. We have to wait on God even when the circumstances of life make no sense. Some of you couples have been crying out to God for a child year after year after year. And this Mother's Day is just another painful reminder that that prayer has not been answered. And that makes absolutely no sense to you. You love Jesus with all your heart. You love God. You want nothing more than to love a child and introduce this child to Jesus and raise him in a way that would be honoring to God. And you look around at all these babies born to all these mothers who don't really even want these children, and you wonder, *God, why wouldn't You give us a child.*

And I have to tell you there isn't a single person in this room that has an answer to that question. I don't know. I don't know. That's the faith walk. Sometimes it seems like God doesn't care, God doesn't hear, God doesn't see, and our faith begins to come unraveled. And it's in those moments we have to remember by faith, *Even though this makes no sense, I've got to believe God hears and God sees. And I've got to trust Him. He's going to meet me in my hour of need and give me the hope that I need.*

Maybe for you this morning it's not a child you're waiting for. Maybe you're waiting for a different job. Maybe you're waiting for a job. Maybe you're waiting for a spouse to come to know Jesus as Savior. Maybe you're waiting for some answers. Maybe you're waiting for a healing. Maybe you're waiting for a prodigal child to come home. Whatever the circumstances, this morning you find that you're waiting. And deep in your heart it feels like God doesn't really care. God doesn't seem to be listening. He doesn't seem to see. And you're thinking, *Maybe I need to take charge of my life and be my own god, call my own shots, come up with my solution.*

You know we've all been there. We decide to take charge of our own lives, and we just make a mess of things. Just like Abram and Sarai did. It's in these hours, in these moments, that we have to walk by faith. We just have to believe God does care; He does see; He does hear. God has a plan

and purpose beyond our ability to grasp, and we can't really always understand what's going on. We just have to trust Him. We have to believe in Him. And in those hours, we say together, "Waiting, we wait."

*Our Father, we're thankful that You are real. You are alive. You are a God who sees. You are a God who hears. Lord, we can only imagine what that was like for Hagar that moment to recognize that You truly are a living God who sees and hears and was fully able to meet her in her hour of need and give her hope. Lord, it's hard to wait. It's especially hard to wait when life just doesn't seem to make much sense. Lord, I pray specifically this morning for those couples here that are waiting for a child. Lord, they've waited and they've waited and they've cried out to You. This Mother's Day is just another painful reminder that they have no child. Lord, I pray today that You would meet them in their grief and give them encouragement. Give them hope. Just remind them that You do see and You do hear and You have a plan and purpose that often goes beyond our ability to understand. Lord, forgive us for the times when we take matters into our own hands and just make a mess of things because we fail to trust You. Lord, give us the courage to wait. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

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## Study Questions

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### Waiting on God

Genesis 16:1-16

Pastor Bryan Clark

#### Opening Discussion

1. Do you agree that waiting is hard? Why is this?
2. Describe a time when you had to wait on God for an extended period of time. What were the challenges of waiting?
3. Can you think of a time you grew tired of waiting and took matters into your own hands only to make a mess of things? What did you learn from that?

#### Bible Study

1. Read Genesis 16:1-16. Abraham and Sarah were two of the most courageous heroes of faith in the Old Testament. God has promised them more descendants than the stars of the sky. He has promised them that the seed that would eventually come through their line would bless all the nations of the earth. Yet, Abraham is 85 and Sarah is 75 and they have had no children. Describe the challenges and emotions they must have experienced.

2. The belief of the day was that barrenness was a sign of God's anger and fertility was a sign of God's blessing. How did that "belief" affect Abraham and Sarah's ability to wait on God?

Does your view of God and understanding of truth affect your ability to wait on God? In what way?

3. In what ways does the story of Abraham and Sarah resemble the story of Adam and Eve in the garden?

Is this a coincidence or is the writer trying to make a point by comparing the two events?

4. Notice the repetition on the idea of "sight" in verses 1-6. What is the contrast between walking by faith and walking by sight? Compare Hebrews 11:1.
5. While the main characters of the narrative are Abraham and Sarah, what do we learn from Hagar's encounter with the angel of the LORD in Genesis 16:7-14?
6. Why do you think Hagar was sent back to Sarah?

What did Hagar learn about God that Abraham and Sarah needed to learn again?

How is this reflected in the name "Ishmael"?

## **Application**

1. Write down three lessons of faith you learned from this text?
2. What will be necessary for you to wait on God, especially when life circumstances seem to make no sense?
3. Is anyone in your group waiting on God at the moment? Share the circumstances and have the group pray for the faith to trust God and His timing. Remember, Ishmael, God hears.