

Impatience

SESSION 11

Genesis 15:1-6; 16:1-6

Memory Verse: Genesis 15:6

God expects His people to patiently wait for His timing.

Shortcuts are often helpful—until they lead away from where we should be, that is. In 2011, news broke of the discovery of a woman who had gone missing some seven weeks earlier. The lady and her husband were on a trip from Canada to Las Vegas when their GPS unit led them onto a snow-covered dirt road in the mountains of northern Nevada. Soon, they got stuck in mud and snow. After three days the husband tried to hike out to get help. The wife stayed behind in the van, surviving on snow, water, and trail mix. Finally, forty-eight days later, she was found by hunters in the area. Her husband's body was discovered more than a year later.

Not all short cuts can be trusted. As you reflect on this session from Genesis 15 and 16, think about shortcuts that didn't work out well for you—both on a trip and in life? Consider sharing with your group how the shortcuts you tried were definitely the wrong choice.



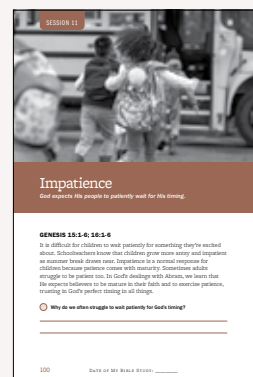
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It is difficult for children to wait patiently for something they're excited about. Schoolteachers know that children grow more antsy and impatient as summer break draws near. Impatience is a normal response for children because patience comes with maturity. Sometimes adults struggle to be patient too. In God's dealings with Abram, we learn that He expects believers to be mature in their faith and to exercise patience, trusting in God's perfect timing in all things. (PSG, p. 100)

Why do we often struggle to wait patiently for God's timing?



Understand the Context (Genesis 15:1–16:16)

Documents found at the ancient city of Nuzi in Mesopotamia shed significant light on the customs and practices of the world of the patriarchs. One custom included the legal adoption of a male servant as heir if the master had no biological son. This historical fact provides the groundwork for today's session.

Ten years or so had passed since God first promised Abram that he would have a son. Abram was pushing 85 or 86 years old when the events of Genesis 15 took place. Still, he had no son, no heir. No doubt, Abram grew impatient, as did Sarai his wife.

Genesis 15:2 suggests that Abram was familiar with the customs described in the Nuzi documents and was thinking about adopting his servant. God, however, had a different plan. He had made His promises to Abram, and He would be faithful to keep them.

After reasserting the promise of a son who would be the first in a line of innumerable descendants, God formally ratified His covenant with Abram. Ancient agreements like this were established with the slaying of animals that would be cut into halves.

After the animals were cut in half, each party would pass between the pieces. This symbolized the seriousness of the agreement with the understanding that “may I too be cut asunder if I break this agreement.” It was a solemn and serious vow because covenants were not taken lightly.

The one thing that set this agreement apart from any other was that God alone passed between the animal halves, emphasizing the one-sidedness of this covenant. God took the initiative and would bless

Abram immensely. This blessing was not based on anything Abram had done or would do. It was rooted in nothing but the sovereign nature and grace of God. Abram's only part in this covenant agreement was trusting and obeying God.

Trust, however, sometimes proves difficult. While Abram and Sarai had God's promise, Sarai grew impatient and doubtful as time passed. In her impatience, she chose a shortcut that proved disastrous. Fathering a child through Sarai's maidservant, Hagar, seemed reasonable. However, this attempt to run ahead of God turned out to be a wrong choice and created problems for years (even centuries) to come. From this shortcut came a son named Ishmael.

Despite Abram and Sarai's attempt to “help” God, He remained faithful to His word. A line of nations was born to Abram through the descendants of Ishmael. But this was not the line of promise. For that, Abram needed to trust—and wait—a little longer.

As you read Genesis 15:1-6 and 16:1-6, identify the problems that arose because of Abram's impatience. (PSG, p. 101)



The Promised Land

Learn more about the land God promised to give Abraham and his descendants.



PREPARE: Before the session, write each of the following questions on separate index cards:

- *When have you been overwhelmed by the stars in the night sky?*
- *When have you blamed God for something?*
- *When have you had to wait patiently for something to happen?*
- *When have you taken matters into your own hands to get something done?*
- *When have you discovered that God's plan was better than your plan?*
- *When have you cried out to God for a solution or answer to something going on in your life?*

INTRODUCE: As adults arrive, distribute the six index cards to the group and answer the question. (Note: For smaller groups, an adult can have more than one card.) As time permits, allow others to answer each question too.

ASK: **What makes it hard to have patience?**

CONTEXT: Read aloud the opening paragraph and question on page 100 of the PSG. Invite volunteers to share why it can be hard to trust God sometimes.

TRANSITION: *This session explores a time when Abram and Sarai got tired of waiting and tried to circumvent God's plan by creating a plan of their own.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Music

Play the song "First Things First" by the band Consumed by Fire (or show their official music video).

Ask: *What does it mean to seek God's will and not your own? What does it feel like and/or look like to surrender all your wants to God? What makes that difficult?*

Believed (Genesis 15:1-6)

1 After these events, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield; your reward will be very great. **2** But Abram said, “Lord God, what can you give me, since I am childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” **3** Abram continued, “Look, you have given me no offspring, so a slave born in my house will be my heir.” **4** Now the word of the LORD came to him: “This one will not be your heir; instead, one who comes from your own body will be your heir.” **5** He took him outside and said, “Look at the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “Your offspring will be that numerous.” **6** Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

(v. 1) The word of the LORD: This phrase appears here for the first time in Genesis—and again in verse 4. While these are the only two times the wording appears in Genesis, it occurs more than one hundred times throughout the Old Testament, often in conjunction with a vision from God. The phrase most often is associated with a prophetic word from God.

(v. 1) Vision: The Old Testament differentiates between a dream and a **vision**. God spoke to His people in both ways, but a vision often occurred when a person was awake. Visions were a frequent way that God spoke to the patriarchs in Genesis. These encounters with God always contained some special revelation from Him that provided direction and commands.

(v. 1) Shield . . . reward: The challenge to Abram to reject fear might raise the question of why he was afraid. Perhaps his fear was that God’s promise of an heir was not going to happen. To this fear (and any others Abram might have harbored), God’s answer was twofold. First, He promised protection, pictured in the image of a **shield**. Second, God also promised provision as He spoke of a great **reward**. This reward referred to the promised descendants of Abram.

(v. 2) Lord God: The Hebrew—*Adonai Yahweh*—can also be translated “Sovereign Lord.” This title is very rare in Genesis among the patriarchs, but it is much more common in the Old Testament’s prophetic writings.

(v. 2) Childless: In Abram’s world, being **childless** was interpreted as divine punishment. Abram reminded God of the promise given to him and suggested a shortcut or a compromise that might fulfill God’s promise. Taking a household servant as an **heir** was common in that day.

(v. 2) •Eliezer of Damascus: This is the only time this servant is mentioned by name. **Eliezer** could possibly

be the servant mentioned in the narrative of Abraham seeking a wife for Isaac in Genesis 24.

(v. 5) Count the stars: To dispel the idea of Eliezer being Abram’s heir, God restated the promise of numerous offspring. In Genesis 13:16, God stated that Abram’s descendants would be as numerous as particles of dust. Here, God pointed to the **stars** and challenged Abram to **count** them, a task that can’t be done.

(v. 6) Believed: For a husband and wife who were childless and advanced in age, God’s promises seemed like an impossibility. Yet, Abraham **believed the LORD**. The phrase carries the idea of putting your full weight on something, trusting it will hold you up. The word also points toward the future because what had been promised would be achieved at a later date.

Abram put his confidence in God’s promise, trusting that He would accomplish what He said He would do (see Rom. 4:21). This was not the first time Abram trusted the Lord. His obedience in journeying to Canaan was another step of faith (see v. 7).

Key Doctrine

The Kingdom

The Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ. (See Romans 4:22-25; Galatians 3:5-6.)

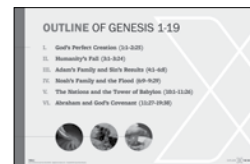
(v. 6) Credited . . . righteousness: **Credited** is an accounting term that relates to assigning value or adding to one’s account. **Righteousness** speaks of behavior that holds to a certain standard. Abram’s belief met God’s standard; therefore, he was in a right standing with God. This righteousness did not come from anything Abram did. It was a unilateral act of God. This verse is quoted three times in the New Testament (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; Jas. 2:23).

EXPLORE Genesis 15:1-6



APPLICATION POINT: Believers can celebrate being declared righteous through faith.

REVIEW: Direct attention to **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Genesis 1–19) and overview how this session fits into the four sessions focused on the life of Abraham. Use **Pack Item 1** (Map: The Migration of Abraham) and **Pack Item 6** (Poster: The Life of Abram/Abraham) to remind adults of the geographic and historical context of the narrative.



READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Genesis 15:1-6**. Explain that God was reminding Abram of His plan to make him a great nation.



RESEARCH: Divide the group into an even number of teams. Instruct half the teams to study verses 2-3 (PSG, p. 103) to identify Abram's response to God. Instruct the other teams to review verses 4-5 (PSG, pp. 103-104) to identify God's response to Abram. After several minutes, call for the teams to share their findings.



MINI-LECTURE: Read aloud Genesis 15:6. Refer to page 104 in the PSG to explain how Abram was credited with righteous. Emphasize that this is the memory verse for this session and encourage adults to review and reflect on the verse several times during the week. Use **Pack Item 10** (Handout: Covenants in Genesis) to highlight the Abrahamic covenant.

ASK: **How does faith in God produce right standing before God?** (PSG, p. 105) Emphasize that faith has always been God's standard for righteousness.

Group Activity Option

Memory Verse

Lead the group to read aloud Genesis 15:6. Read a dictionary definition of “righteousness” from your phone. Enlist three volunteers to read one of the following verses aloud: Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6; and James 2:23. Explain that it was Abraham’s faith that led to righteousness. Say: *Our faith in Christ also allows us to be righteous in God’s sight.* Lead the group to read aloud Genesis 15:6 again. Encourage the group to memorize the verse this week.

Impatient (Genesis 16:1-4)

1 Abram’s wife, Sarai, had not borne any children for him, but she owned an Egyptian slave named Hagar. **2** Sarai said to Abram, “Since the LORD has prevented me from bearing children, go to my slave; perhaps through her I can build a family.” And Abram agreed to what Sarai said. **3** So Abram’s wife, Sarai, took Hagar, her Egyptian slave, and gave her to her husband, Abram, as a wife for him. This happened after Abram had lived in the land of Canaan ten years. **4** He slept with Hagar, and she became pregnant. When she saw that she was pregnant, her mistress became contemptible to her.

(v. 1) Egyptian slave: The Hebrew wording does not refer to a common **slave**, but to a personal servant. Bible scholars speculate that this servant was acquired while Abram and Sarai were in Egypt (see Gen. 12:10-20), possibly even as a gift from Pharaoh (12:16).

Key Person

•Hagar

The name means “stranger” which may be an apt description of how she felt when Sarai turned against her. The name appears 12 times in Genesis and twice in the New Testament book of Galatians. The two different Genesis narratives concerning **Hagar**—here and in chapter 21—identify her as both a victim and an antagonist in her conflicts with Sarai. While Sarai’s plan to get an heir for Abram turned out to be a tremendous mistake, the descendants of Hagar through Ishmael would agitate the descendants of Sarai through Isaac for centuries to come.

(v. 2) Has prevented me: Ten years had passed since God’s promise of an heir, and Sarai apparently had lost hope. In fact, she blamed God for her circumstance, stating that He was the reason she had not had children. Barrenness was a devastating embarrassment and stigma. Out of this mindset, Sarai hatched a plan to remedy the situation.

(v. 2) Through her I can build a family: Ancient cultures in the Middle East allowed for surrogate arrangements to ensure heirs. To **build a family** was an idiomatic expression for bearing children. This custom of surrogate motherhood is illustrated well in the life of Jacob. Because one of his wives, Rachel, was initially barren, she gave Jacob her maidservant to father a child (30:1-9). Later, his other wife, Leah, did the same thing when she could no longer bear children of her own (30:9-11).

It should be noted that, as the story played out, Sarai never directly addressed Hagar as a person. Rather, Sarai saw her as a piece of property to be used for whatever purpose was needed. Also, Sarai never recognized Ishmael as a son.

(v. 3) As a wife: Clearly, Hagar was treated as an inferior to Sarai. This was not a case of Abram taking a second **wife** so much as taking a concubine. The relationship was essentially sexual, as Hagar served as a surrogate mother for Abram’s offspring. This is the only instance of “wife” being applied to Hagar.

(v. 3) Ten years: According to the teachings of Jewish rabbis, after **ten years** of barrenness, a husband could lawfully divorce his wife and marry another. This, of course, was not happening here. What we do see, though, is that Sarai lost hope in the promise of God after a decade of waiting. Her shortcut around God’s plan and her ability to bring Abram into the scheme might remind some of Eve bypassing God’s command and Adam following her example (3:6).

(v. 4) Her mistress became contemptible: Contemptible means to think lightly of someone or to despise them. Obviously, Hagar was filled with pride because she had achieved what Sarai could not. The seeds of discord between the two began to grow. In fact, the contempt demonstrated between Sarai and Hagar foreshadowed the strife that has grown between their offspring over thousands of years. Genesis 16:12 states that Ishmael’s descendants would live in conflict with others—and that included Abram’s descendants through Isaac.

EXPLORE Genesis 16:1-4



APPLICATION POINT: Believers must safeguard against accepting shortcuts to God's plans.

- READ:** Call for a volunteer to read aloud **Genesis 16:1-4**, directing the group to listen for Sarai's plan to "help" God.
- EXPLAIN:** Use information for Genesis 16:1-2 (PSG, pp. 105-106) to help the group understand the context. Share that being unable to have children was a stigma in their culture. *However, Sarai's plan was not completely uncommon in that day.*
- ASK:** **What are some things in culture that are widely accepted but still violate God's plan?**
- READ:** Call for a volunteer to read aloud the information for Genesis 16:3-4 on page 106 of the PSG. Discuss how Abram responded to Sarai's suggestion. Emphasize that believers must safeguard against accepting shortcuts to God's plans.
- ASK:** **What are the dangers of looking for a shortcut to fulfill God's promises?** (PSG, p. 106) Lead the group to identify some examples of spiritual shortcuts.
- TRANSITION:** *When we try to get around God's plans and promises, we can make things worse. That's what happened to Sarai.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Science Experiment

Prior to the session, fill a zip top bag with water. Collect several sharpened pencils and a towel. During the session, enlist a volunteer and show them the bag of water. Ask: ***Do you have faith that I won't let you get wet (at least too wet)?*** Instruct the volunteer to sit in a chair and hold the bag above their head. Push one of the sharpened pencils all the way through the bag and let go, leaving the pencil in the bag. Continue with a few pencils. Say: *There is a scientific reason why the bag didn't leak, but it illustrates having faith even when we might not understand how things will turn out. (Note: Practice this at home first. You also can search "pencils in bag of water" to find video demonstrations.)*

Impetuous (Genesis 16:5-6)

5 Then Sarai said to Abram, “You are responsible for my suffering! I put my slave in your arms, and when she saw that she was pregnant, I became contemptible to her. May the LORD judge between me and you.”

6 Abram replied to Sarai, “Here, your slave is in your power; do whatever you want with her.” Then Sarai mistreated her so much that she ran away from her.

(v. 5) You are responsible: Sarai’s immediate response to the birth of Hagar’s child was the opposite of what one might expect. Earlier, she had blamed God for her situation. Now, she placed the blame on Abram. In essence, she wished all the cruelty and oppression she was experiencing would fall on his head as well.

Sarai had lost sight of the fact that this was her idea from the beginning—not to mention a step away from God’s specific promises and direction. This shortcut to achieving God’s promise had no chance of succeeding from the start and brought out the worst in everyone involved.

Bible Skill

Compare the attitudes and actions of different Bible characters.

Create a chart with three columns labeled Sarai, Abram, and Hagar. Read Genesis 16:1-6 and identify the incorrect attitude and action of each person. Write words and phrases in each column to express your thoughts. *What might each person have done differently that would have eased the difficult situation? What lessons can you learn about relating to others from this study?*

(v. 5) The LORD judge between me and you: Sarai demonstrated a self-righteous attitude, as if she had done nothing wrong. In truth, both Sarai and Abram bore the judgment of God due to their lack of faith. Sarai sought to do God’s will her way. Abraham allowed Sarai to control the situation instead of taking the lead. Both were at fault, and the faith exhibited in Genesis 15:6 appears to be missing in this whole incident.

(v. 6) In your power: This is the second time that Abram had given in to his wife’s wishes. Instead of feeling compassion for Hagar and defending the biological mother of his son, Abram left her open to the vindictive abuse of Sarai. Abram, the great man of faith and character, didn’t always act in a righteous

manner. His journey of faith, with its ups and downs, mirrors the journey we all take today. We are all broken, but, thankfully, we are not beyond repair.

(v. 6) Sarai mistreated her: The Hebrew term translated **mistreated** comes from a group of words that speak of oppression, domination, and severe treatment. The phrase indicates bursts of anger and possibly even physical blows. All the anger that Sarai had experienced during these barren years, waiting on God’s promise, was suddenly and explosively poured out on Hagar.

This was not the last time Sarai would do this. Later after Hagar’s son, Ishmael, was born, Sarai kicked both of them out of the camp in jealousy and rage (see Gen. 21:9-10).

(v. 6) She ran away: Most likely, Hagar thought about fleeing back to Egypt. Since the support of a family group was lacking in Abram’s camp, the next logical thing would be to return to her own people.

Genesis 16 states that later on her journey, Hagar encountered the angel of the Lord who announced that she would give birth to a son who would father numberless descendants. The angel of the Lord instructed her to return to Sarai and to submit to her authority.



APPLICATION POINT: Believers must take responsibility for their own sin.

READ: Call for a volunteer to read **Genesis 16:5-6**, directing the group to listen for how things got worse, not better, for Sarai.

EXAMINE: Lead the group to read silently the information about Genesis 16:5-6 (PSG, p. 107). Encourage the group to share their reactions to Sarai's response. Note that we all do things that we later wished we hadn't done—usually because there are consequences to those actions. Point out that Sarai didn't think through the consequences, so she actually made her situation worse.

ASK: **What kind of excuses do people create when they try to do things without God?** (PSG, p. 107) Emphasize that it's always better when we own up to our poor choices and take responsibility for our sins.

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Reflective

Distribute index cards and pens. Lead the group to prayerfully consider situations in their lives where they may have failed to take personal responsibility for their actions or decisions. Encourage the group to write those things down and to confess them to God. Challenge them to take responsibility in the future.

CHALLENGE

- SUMMARIZE:** Review these points from Apply the Text on page 108 of the Personal Study Guide:
- *Believers can celebrate being declared righteous through faith.*
 - *Believers must safeguard against accepting shortcuts to God's plans.*
 - *Believers must take responsibility for their own sin.*
- REFLECT:** Lead the group to discuss why it's important to take personal responsibility for sin and what can happen if we don't take personal responsibility.
- DISCUSS:** Guide the group to identify ways people often accept shortcuts in their relationship with God. Encourage a few volunteers to share their thoughts on the first question on page 108 of the PSG: **How does being part of a Bible study group help safeguard against this?**
- PRAY:** Close in prayer, asking God to give believers patience to trust in His plan and promises.

After the Session

Reinforce the session by texting the group and encouraging them to patiently wait on God's timing when they face a difficult situation. Remind them of the blessings of trusting God and challenge them to memorize Genesis 15:6 during the week.

ADULT COMMENTARY



Want to go deeper in your study?
Explore the Bible Adult Commentary offers additional information and biblical insights related to the key passages.
(Available for purchase at **Lifeway.com.**)

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