

Impatient Hearts, Faithful God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 June 2026

Preacher: Rob Buttermore

[0:00] Please turn in your Bibles to Genesis 16, our sermon text for today. If you need a Bible, you're welcome to take one off the back table and keep it as our gift to you.

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, Behold, now the Lord has prevented me from bearing children.

Go into my servant, it may be that I shall obtain children by her. And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. So after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram, her husband, as a wife.

And he went into Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. And Sarai said to Abram, May the wrong done to me be on you.

I gave my servant to your embrace. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me. But Abram said to Sarai, Behold, your servant is in your power.

[1:10] Do to her as you please. Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her. The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur.

And he said, Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going? She said, I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai. The angel of the Lord said to her, Return to your mistress and submit to her.

The angel of the Lord also said to her, I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude. And the angel of the Lord said to her, Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son.

You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has listened to your affliction. He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him.

And he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen. So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her. You are a God of seeing, for she said, Truly here I have seen him who looks after me.

[2:15] Therefore the well was called Bir Lahai Roy. It lies between Kadesh and Bered. And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son whom Hagar bore Ishmael.

Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thank you.

Check. Hey, there we go.

Thank you, Jason. All right. Have you guys ever said, if I want this done right, I'm just going to do it myself? If so, you're in good company. James Dyson.

Right. He developed the bagless vacuum cleaner in response to his frustration with traditional vacuums, constantly losing their suction. Ferruccio Lamborghini. Right. After complaining about mechanical issues with his Ferrari.

[3:39] After complaining about mechanical issues with his Ferrari, he went to the owner, Enzo Ferrari, and Enzo told him to go drive tractors. Angered by the snub. Angered by the snub, he created his own luxury sports car company, Lamborghini.

And he created his own luxury sports car company, Lamborghini. Travis Kalanick, Garrett Camp. They founded a ride sharing service after being unable to hail a taxi on a snowy night. So they created Uber. Brian Chesky, Joe Gebbia.

They created a lodging platform out of frustration over unaffordable rent prices in San Francisco. And unable to find hotel rooms at a design conference in San Francisco. So they created Airbnb. The last example, right, Drew Hewson, he invented a cloud storage service out of frustration after

he kept forgetting his USB stick on the MIT campus.

So he created Dropbox. Right, Genesis 16 tells us a similar kind of story. One about the consequences of taking matters into your own hands.

But this chapter is not about frustration with household appliances, broken transportation systems, or forgotten computer hardware. No, this is about something far more serious. God has made a promise.

[4:43] The promise has not yet come to pass. And Sarah and Abram begin acting as if they must accomplish God's will on God's behalf. So today in God's word, we're going to see how impatient hearts run headlong into the faithfulness of God.

Let me pray. Dear Heavenly Father, Lord, your word is true. It is good and it is beautiful. And it speaks directly to us today. So Lord, we ask that your spirit would be with us as we dig into your word.

Help us mine the treasure that is here, the treasure of you. And Lord, we trust you in that. We trust that you will have your way. And Lord, make us soft, submitting to your good will and your good ways.

I pray this in your name. Amen. That's the wrong way. There we go. All right.

So to set the scene over the past few weeks, we've been walking through Genesis 12 through 15. Right? This section, a key theme in these chapters has been God's promise of both land and family. Right?

[5:48] That Abram would one day possess the land of Canaan and that his children would one day outnumber the stars to the sky. Bruce Wacke in his commentary says that Genesis 15 works like a hinge in Abram's story.

Joining the promise of children in verses 1 through 6 with the promise of land in verses 7 through 21. Abram first heard this promise back in Genesis 12 when he was 75 years old.

And now today, we're in Genesis 16, Abram's 86 years old. The promise has not been fulfilled.

Wacke also observes, right, the promise of a son dominates these chapters 12 through 20 in its tantalizing delay.

While Abram alternatively jeopardizes it by failures of his own nerve and failures of his hope. In chapters 12, 16, and 20. But also at times he holds to it by faith in chapters 15, 17, and 18.

But now 10 years have passed. And the covenant making, the covenant keeping God has not yet brought about what he promised. So naturally we have to ask, why the delay?

[6:54] Is 10 years a long time to wait? In some ways it is. What were you waiting for 10 years ago that you're still waiting for now? An investment to come through maybe?

A promotion at work? How about a child to come to know the Lord? How about a marriage to strengthen? A relationship that's broken to be restored?

10 years can feel like such a very long time. But let's put a twist in here. What if the one who made you this promise had complete authority over the thing that you're waiting for?

What if the one who promised swore by himself that he would keep his word? How much more would that shape the way that we wait? That's where we enter today's story.

Abram and Sarai are waiting for a child of their own. And Sarai is getting older. We'll move through the chapter in three parts.

[7:53] First, Genesis 16, 1-4. We'll see Sarai's scheme. And then next we'll go through verses 5 and 6. We'll see the painful consequences of that scheme.

And then third, in verses 7-16, we'll see Hagar's isolation. But at the same time, God's care for her. We'll start with 1-4. Moses is our author of Genesis.

He lays out the problem clearly. Sarai and Abram, now Sarai, Abram's wife, had bore him no children. The problem has now reached a breaking point. Sarai and Abram have no children.

And Sarai has an Egyptian servant named Hagar. Even if this is our first time going through the text, you can feel the tension building. Sarai states the problem and then proposes a solution.

Since the Lord has prevented her from having children, she concludes that the child God promised Abram would not come from her body. So she decides they should find another way.

[8:53] And just as an aside, right, for some among us, the ache of childlessness, it's not just an idea or a story in the Bible that we read and we move on from.

No, for some it's deeply personal. We don't always know why the Lord in his wisdom allows this sorrow. And he allows it for some and not for others. But this we do know.

He does not overlook your grief. So if this is a burden that you carry today, we pray that this message would be a gracious reminder that the God who meets Sarai in her childlessness, and the same God that meets Hagar in her pain, is a God who is near you.

Jumping back into the story here. In effect, Sarai says, Go into Hagar. We'll have children through her.

We'll stop waiting on God, and we're going to get this done ourselves. In their culture, this would not have seemed unusual. Having a child through a servant was sometimes an accepted practice in the ancient world.

[10:01] But be clear here. This does not make it an act of faith. Abram had already raised the possibility of an adopted heir in Genesis 15. He mentioned Eliezer of Damascus. But the word of the Lord there assured him the promised heir would come from his own body.

Abram believed the Lord, and it was counted to him as righteousness. A strong point in Abram's life. He believed the Lord, and it was counted to him as righteousness. Now, Sarai proposes what sounds like a loophole she's found.

God said the child would be Abram's, but did he specifically say the child would be Sarai's as well? Maybe they could borrow practice from the surrounding culture and help God fulfill his promise. You see where this is going, right? How does Abram respond to this proposal? Verse 2, Here's an important lesson.

When we are listening to one voice, we're probably not listening to another. Abram here is guided by what? He's guided by reason and the voice of his wife, not by a fresh word from the Lord.

[11:08] Abram here is not thinking rightly about God's design for marriage. That man shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. No, right? Abram here allows human logic to carry more weight than the word of the living God.

He lets his own reasoning rule where God's promise should have led. So the next step into sin comes in verse 3.

This is when Sarai gives Hagar to Abram as a wife. We begin what began as impatience now becomes a breakdown of God's good order. And that breakdown begins a series of painful consequences.

Moses, right, again the author reminds us, They've been in the land of Canaan for 10 years. 10 years of wondering. 10 years of trying to make sense of God's timing. And finally, they give in. This scene, it clearly echoes some of Genesis 3, right? Where Adam and Eve fall into sin by eating from the tree God had forbidden them. Eve is tempted by the serpent and begins to question whether God's word is true and whether God's way is best.

[12:27] Then she takes the fruit, and what does she do? She gives it to Adam. And what does Adam do? He joins her in disobedience. Moses uses the same pattern here in Genesis 16.

Sarai took Hagar, gave her to Abram, and this pattern is familiar. God's word is set aside, human wisdom takes over, and sin begins to grow. And then in verse 4, Hagar conceives, and the brokenness of this decision appears right away.

Sarai's plan, Abram's passivity, and the broken marriage arrangement produce the first of many painful consequences. What does Hagar do? She begins to look at Sarai with contempt.

She begins to look down on her. The irony here is striking, right? Just before this, Hagar was a servant of Sarai. And now, Hagar's putting herself above Sarai.

The tables have turned. This plan that she laid out, meant to solve their pain, is now only deepening it. So far, the pattern is clear. Sarai's going to propose something.

[13:34] Abram's going to go along with it. Sarai makes the move, and she acts. And then Hagar reacts. And then in verses 5 and 6, this pattern repeats. In verse 5, Sarai speaks again.

But this time, her words are fueled with anger. She says to Abraham, in effect, The wrong you've done to me is your fault. I gave you Hagar, and now she looks down on me. Like Eve shifting blame after the fall, Sarai shifts responsibility.

She brings her complaint to Abram, almost as though he's a judge who should right this injustice.

And then she invokes the name of the Lord as judge over the situation. Again, we see the plan that was supposed to solve their problem.

It has now only multiplied their pain. Abram's response, right? It's very similar to what we saw before. Once again, we don't see a response shaped by faith.

We don't hear Abraham leading with truth and courage. Like Adam, he shrugs off responsibility. He feels that pressure, right?

[14:45] Sarai's angry. So what does he say? Hey, behold, she's under your power. Do to her whatever you want. So what does he do? He steps back. He tries to act like Switzerland.

He's neutral. While letting Sarai decide what happens next. Neutrality is not an option for a husband. Sarai's response is to treat Hagar harshly.

We are not given all the details of what that means, right? But this picture is clear enough. Sarai tried to solve the problem of childlessness through her own cleverness.

But now, what's happening? Everything is collapsing on itself. She's hurt by barrenness. Then she's wounded by Hagar's contempt. Sarai now becomes the one who lashes out and hurts somebody else.

The pain, the jealousy, the anger and regret have been building inside her. And now this all spills onto Hagar. And then Hagar responds. Earlier, right, after Sarai's first decision, Hagar responded with contempt.

[15:50] Now, after Sarai's harsh treatment, how does Hagar respond? She responds with self-protection. She flees. She leaves the place of her work. Right?

Her shelter. Her familiar surroundings. Whatever sense of security she had, she's now on the run. By now, this pattern is clear.

Sin often repeats itself. In Scripture, what is it doing? It does what it always does. It holds up the mirror to us for us to see how quickly fear, passivity, anger, and self-protection can take root.

That brings us to our final section in verses 7 through 16. Hagar's now pregnant.

She's alone. And she's fleeing from Sarai. She's fleeing from Abram, from her home, and the life that she knows. She's in the wilderness. And what do we read next? She's found by an angel of the Lord.

[16:52] In Scripture, God usually doesn't just find people by accident. No, Hagar is found on purpose.

She's found where? On a spring on the way to shore. That spring, right? What is a spring in the desert? It's a sign of life, of hope in the middle of suffering. And the road to shore would have been the way back toward Egypt.

Hagar, the Egyptian, is trying to make her way back home after everything in her life has fallen apart. So the angel opens up, right? The angel begins and says, Hagar, servant of Sarai.

He already knows who she is, and he knows something about her situation. And the road to shore would have been the... Oh, then he asks the question, Where have you come from, and where are you going?

Like a good parent, he asks a question, he already knows the answer to. But the question, what does it do? It draws Hagar out. Interestingly, she does not answer with places. About where?

[17:57] She says, I am fleeing from my mistress, Sarai. In other words, she's saying, I'm fleeing from a person, and I'm going anywhere else. I just cannot be there. We're kind of shocked by the response here, right?

The angel of the Lord says, Without softening this command, return to your mistress and submit to her. That can be hard for us to hear, right? Does the angel not know what Hagar's endured here? Does he not know what returning might cost her? But the angel continues with a promise. God's command to Hagar to return comes with a gracious promise.

The Lord will multiply her offspring so greatly that they cannot be numbered. What comfort this must have been for a woman wandering in the wilderness, wondering what her future was.

Someone caught in the wreckage of people's sin. Someone who has lost their home and their hope. Someone who has been told to return to a difficult place.

[18:56] All of this stacking up. But this promise given to her. The Lord assures her that her child and her family, they are not forgotten. God's commitment to Abram and Sarai and Isaac in the future, it does not mean that God overlooks the wrong or the oppressed.

In verse 11, the angel continues speaking to Hagar. It says, Hagar, you are pregnant. You will bear a son and his name will be Ishmael.

Ishmael, what does that mean? It means God hears. The name itself is a testimony. The Lord has heard Hagar's affliction. He listened to her suffering.

Every time Ishmael's name is spoken, it will be a testimony to the God who hears. He exists because God hears. The angel goes on and he speaks about Hagar's child's future, Ishmael's future.

This might sound kind of funny. He will be a wild donkey of a man. His hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand will be against him. Further, he will dwell over and against his kinsmen.

[20 : 06] In simple terms, Ishmael will live with independence. Right? But he's also going to live in conflict. His life and his line will be marked by hostility. So how does Hagar respond to all this?

The command to return, the promise of many offspring, the announcement that her son will be named Ishmael, and then the words about his future. What's her response? She calls upon the name of the Lord and she praises him.

Her response, it's beautiful. She says, You are a God of seeing. She responds not merely to the promise. She doesn't just rejoice in the words she's received.

She rejoices in the God who delivered them. She no longer gloats that she's pregnant, but she's now marveling that the Lord has seen her pain. The section closes with the naming of the well where she is, where the Lord found her.

Be your lahairoi, which means the well of the living one who sees me. Just like the naming of Ishmael. Right? This name of the well will remind people, anyone that speaks the name of that well, the Lord hears and the Lord sees.

[21 : 19] Another testimony. And now, as Genesis 16 comes to a close, Moses contrasts his opening problem of childlessness.

Sarah had born Abram, no children. But now, with the birth of Ishmael, Hagar bears Abram a son when Abram's 86 years old. On the surface, we see that Abram's no longer childless.

But the deeper issue remains. Ishmael is not the child of promise. He's not the son through whom God intended to fulfill the covenant promises given in Genesis 12.

In fact, the tension for the promised son only grows from here on in Genesis. We see Abram's confusion in the next chapter. Right? God gives him the promise again.

Abram's response? He laughs at God. God says, you and Sarah will have a son in their old age. And Abram starts pleading, oh, let it be Ishmael.

[22 : 23] Let Ishmael live that he might be a son for me. But God's answer is clear again in the next chapter. Isaac will be born to Abram and Sarah. And Isaac, the future son coming, will be the one through whom God establishes his everlasting covenant with his offspring after him.

Again, Bruce Wacke healthily points out, this tension continues to build until it reaches its greatest climax later in Genesis 22. Right?

This part of Abraham's story is dominated, once again, by the promise of a child. The story moves through pain caused by the long delay of God's promise. Yet, the whole time, we see God remaining faithful to his covenant despite the weakness of his people.

Abram and Sarah's faith is weak here, but God's covenant stands. In Genesis 22, this is so encouraging, Abram's faith is shown to have grown as he offers Isaac back to the Lord and in a sense receives him back from the dead.

The Lord swears to keep the very promise he had made from the beginning. I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky.

[23 : 42] Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies and through your offspring, all the nations of the earth will be blessed because you have obeyed me. In other words, Genesis 16, the chapter today is not the end of the story.

Abram and Sarah's impatience cannot overturn God's faithfulness. Sometimes the promise might be delayed. It might even seem threatened by human fear and human failure.

But God's promise will not fail. If you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, this promise isn't for you, then Genesis 16 presses beyond Abram and Sarah, presses beyond Hagar, and it presses into your own life.

The question of the sermon is not, are you impatient? Right? The deeper question is, what are you trusting to make life work? We all know what it is to try to secure blessing, peace, identity, forgiveness, control by our own effort.

We've all gone down that path. We try to make ourselves right. We try to manage our guilt. We try to build a life sturdy enough to save us. But Genesis 16 shows us the limits of human effort. [24 : 57] What is born according to the flesh cannot bring the freedom. It can't bring the forgiveness. It can't bring the life that only God can bring.

This is why as Christians the good news of Jesus Christ is so precious. God didn't leave sinners to save themselves. No, he sent his own son, the true offspring of Abram, the one we've been talking about, the promised one through whom all nations of the earth would be blessed.

Jesus didn't come because we had waited well. He didn't come because we obeyed perfectly or trusted faithfully. He came because we did not do those things.

He lived the life we failed to live. He died the death our sin deserved and he rose again. Why? So that everyone who turns from sin and trusts in him would be forgiven.

Not only forgiven but reconciled to God and made a child of promise by grace. One in the line of Abram and Isaac. So today, if you're not in Christ, don't hear this sermon as merely a call to be more patient.

[26 : 10] Right? Don't hear this sermon as a call to be more religious. Hear it as an invitation to stop striving to save yourself and come to the God who sees and who hears.

but more importantly, the God who saves. Turn from your sin. Trust in Jesus Christ. In him, God's promise is not merely something you observe from a distance.

It's something that becomes your inheritance. You belong. In him, you're brought out of slavery into freedom. In him, you're brought out of condemnation and into forgiveness.

Out of self-reliance and into the family of God. So how should we respond to that? If impatient hearts run headlong into the faithfulness of God, then we need to ask what it looks like to wait on him faithfully when his promises feel delayed.

So first application here. Let God's word guide our waiting. Genesis 16 presses this question in on us. What voice is really ruling us while we wait?

[27 : 20] If you're single, that may mean letting God's word speak louder than the fear, louder than the lie that you're forgotten, that you're unwanted, or that you're running out of time.

For young couples like me with kids, it might mean letting God's word speak louder than the pressure to control every outcome for your children. Abram had the promise of God, but in the moment of pressure, another voice became more convincing to him.

when circumstances seem slow, when fear starts sounding reasonable, when human wisdom offers a shortcut, what should we do? Return again to what the Lord has said.

Second, let sound doctrine become lived trust. trust. We all know this. It's possible to confess true things about God, but then live as if they're not true in the moment of pressure.

Abram and Sarai knew the promise, but Genesis 16 shows how easily right beliefs can be contradicted by anxious choices. Older saints can believe that God is faithful, but still be swallowed by regret over what cannot be changed in the past.

[28 : 39] If you're a new believer, you can believe that Jesus saves, but at the same time be pulled back to those old ways, those old patterns of self-reliance. We need gospel truth to move from our lips into our lives, from confession to living.

We need to become the kind of people who not only say God is faithful, but who wait as though God is faithful. Third, help one another wait faithfully.

One of the ordinary ways God teaches us to wait is through his people. Abram and Sarai's failure reminds us that impatient hearts often become lonely hearts.

We get quiet. We stop asking for counsel. We rehearse our fears over and over and over again until they begin to sound like wisdom to us. But God has not called us to follow him alone.

Young parents, again like me, we need people who will pray with us, to encourage us, and to remind us that God is at work even in our ordinary and exhausting days.

[29 : 52] The brokenhearted among us, they need people to sit with them, pray with them, and gently remind them that the Lord has not forgotten them. Hebrews 10 is so beautiful.

It tells us to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, but encouraging one another as the day draws near. That means part of our life together as a church, as Shoreline, is helping one another to wait on the Lord.

We need brothers and sisters who will ask that loving question. Are you actually trusting God here or are you trying to take control? We need to be those people to one another as well.

Last one. Finally, remember who you are in Christ. You are children of promise, not children of the flesh.

Paul takes this up in Galatians 4, which Megan and Ethan read. It says that Ishmael was born according to the flesh, while Isaac, right later, is going to be born through promise.

[30:57] Ishmael shows what human effort produces when it tries to secure, tries to grab hold of God's blessing apart from God's way. Isaac shows what only God can give by promising grace.

And then Paul, what does he do? He turns to the Galatians and he says, now brothers, like Isaac, you are children of promise. Be encouraged. This means their identity is not defined by your relationship status.

It's not defined by your parenting success. It's not defined by your season of life, your spiritual maturity, or even your sorrow. If you're single in Christ, you're not incomplete.

You're first a child of the promise. If you're brokenhearted, your grief does not get the final word.

You're a child of promise. So the final application here, right, it's not simply try harder and wait better.

The application is this. Remember who you are. If you belong to Christ, you're not children of slavery trying to manufacture blessing through your own control.

[32:09] You're children of promise, free in Christ, called to trust the God who gives what he has promised, but remember, in his own time and by his own grace.

So to close, brothers and sisters, where are we tempted to take matters into our own hands? Where has waiting begun to feel unbearable? Where has fear started to sound like wisdom?

Genesis 16, it does multiple things. It warns us about the damage caused by impatient hearts, but it also comforts us with the faithfulness of God. He hears, he sees, and he keeps his promises.

In Christ, the true promised son, God has shown us once and for all that promises may feel delayed, but they'll never fail. So let us wait on him, let us listen to his word, encourage one another in faith, and live as children of the promise before the faithful God who always keeps his promises.

Let me close this in prayer. dear heavenly father, Lord, again, your word is good.

[33:31] Your word is true, it's beautiful, and we thank you for it. God, as we continue to chew on Genesis 16 and the rest of your word, help us apply it to our lives so that we live in a way that makes us more and more like Christ.

We might be ambassadors of him in this world. God, waiting is such a hard thing. We've all experienced waiting one way or another, and God, through this, we see that you are a God who is worth waiting on.

Your ways are higher than ours. Your ways are better than ours. So God, would you be with us, encourage us, as we wait well for you, but also live as children of the promise, never forgetting your goodness and your hand in our lives.

Though we are waiting for you to return, we live in you and for you right now. Help us do that well, and help us do that for your glory, and help us do that not by human effort, but by the power of your spirit.

We pray this in your name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.