

Trusting God
“*The God of All Mercy*”
Genesis 17:3-6 & 15-21

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In the heady days of post-war Europe a famous play was written, called, “Waiting for Godot” by Samuel Beckett. *Waiting for Godot* follows two days in the lives of a pair of men who divert themselves while they wait expectantly and unsuccessfully for someone named Godot to arrive. They claim him as an acquaintance but in fact hardly know him, admitting that they would not recognize him were they to see him. To occupy themselves, they eat, sleep, converse, argue, sing, play games, exercise, swap hats, and contemplate suicide — anything “to hold the terrible silence at bay”.

The point of the play was the absence of God; how the world always seemed to be waiting for God, but God never shows up. We have spent much time over the last few weeks looking at the presence of God and the speech of God. But what about the absence of God and the silence of God? How do we handle that? Let me say right away that God isn’t ever truly absent or silent – but it sure can seem like it at times. Perhaps it’s more accurate to say those are times of waiting for God.

Waiting for God. Waiting upon God. Much of life is a life of learning how to wait upon the Lord. God almost never seems to act on our time frame or according to our schedule. I appreciate all the testimonies of people who have had miracles in their lives. I do believe God works in powerful ways today. But I also know that there are a lot of times when the miracle does not occur. When the promise seems forever deferred. What do we do when that happens? I am coming to believe that faith is most important when the miracles do not occur...

And it happens here: Abraham and Sarah have been promised that they will have a descendant, but here they are, in their 90’s and there is no baby. Both Sarah and Abraham got tired of waiting for God to follow through on his promise.

Taking Matters Into Our Own Hands

So Abraham and Sarah took matters into their own hands. Can you blame them? Both of them are in their 90's. Logic and experience would have told them that it was way too late. If they didn't act soon, all they had worked for and all they hoped for would dissipate into the wind of time.

Here's how they did it: Sarah gave one of her maids – one of her servants – to Abraham, for the purpose of siring a descendant – any descendant would do, as long as it came from Abraham. At least, that's what Sarah thought. Don't be shocked by this. It wasn't a scandal at the time. It was a common practice in those days for a servant to act as a surrogate mother if there was a problem with fertility.

God Helps Those...

Taking matters into our own hands...I believe we need to slow down a bit and look at this more closely. This is such a common experience – we need to learn from this.

First, this is the first failure of faithfulness to the covenant on the part of Abraham and Sarah. Look at how soon it happens! Right after God has established the covenant with Abraham and his descendants forever – and has done so in a vivid way – making sure that Abraham and Sarah KNOW that God will follow through on his covenant promise, no matter what – by walking between the dead animals in Abraham's dream – Abraham and Sarah fail to trust. Right after it says, "Abraham believed God and the Lord credited it to him as righteousness," Right after that – both of them find a way to justify *an act of securing their own existence*.

Second - Life will always be filled with a certain anxiety – it's anxiety about securing one's own existence. Sometimes the anxiety is low-grade. Sometimes it flips into high-grade stuff that keeps you up almost every night.

- **There's health anxiety** – will our health go bad? And what ABOUT health costs? Talk about anxiety! Everything's ok unless and until you have a major health issue – then it threatens to overwhelm.
- **There's money anxiety** – will there be enough to pay the bills? What about getting the kids through college? Will there be enough for retirement? What if we run out?

- **There's work anxiety** – what if my job is cut? What if I get a new boss who's impossible to work for? What if I don't like my job? Will I be stuck there forever?
- **There's kid anxiety** – will my kids be ok? Will they finish college? Will they finish high school? Will they survive?
- **There's parent anxiety** – will Mom and Dad, or Mom OR Dad be ok as they get older? Who will care for them if they need constant care?

The crazy thing about this anxiety is that we have it at the same time we trust in God. Believers have faith – that faith is a gift from God and we know God's promises. But there's also the reality of the anxiety. Sometimes we're able to put it in a little box and keep the lid on. It's there, but we don't let it run amok. Most of the time.

But there are those times... when it's almost the opposite: we put faith in a little box and put a lid on it and live according to the anxieties.

There's something about this faith versus anxiety trade-off that gets people into trouble:

- **On the one hand** – we can put ridiculous expectations on ourselves – as though if we really believed in God, we would NEVER have any anxiety at all.
- **But on the other hand** – we can cave to the anxieties – especially in light of the silence and absence of God.

So – how do we handle all this? I see four responses to those times when it seems like God is silent, or absent:

- **One: Accept the anxieties** – they are a part of life this side of the Kingdom of the Heavens. God isn't finished redeeming the world yet. Every day of our lives will have some anxiety as a part of it. This is why we pray... “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done ONE EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN...” But this doesn't mean CAPITULATE to the anxieties, it just means accept them as realities... but then:
- **Two: Take them to the Lord** – be honest before the One who loves your soul.
 - This is what the Psalms are all about. They display all the emotions and anxieties of life. They cover the full range from exuberant praise to despair. If you make the Psalms a part of your prayer-life and let

them be your prayers to God, you will be able to express your anxieties before the Lord.

- I Peter 5:7 – memorize this verse: “Cast all your anxieties upon him, for he cares for you!”
- Philippians 4:6 – “Be anxious for nothing. But in everything, by prayer and petition, present your requests to God. And the peace which transcends all human understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus
- **Three: Never act to secure your own existence** – make a commitment never to act in order to secure your own existence. Never try to make the anxieties go all the way away. It CANNOT be done! As I look back on my own life, I can say with conviction that I have never seen anything good come from me trying to take matters into my own hands. Whenever I try to MAKE something happen? It never turns out well. Let’s look at the anxieties in this light:
 - **There will never be enough money to take away money anxiety**
 - **Kid anxiety? We have to let them be who they are.**
 - **Work? Find out what you do best and do it the most.**
 - **Parent Anxiety? You’ll know what to do.**
 - **Health?** – embrace the weakness of the body, we have been promised resurrection bodies that will never wear out.
 - **The Lord IS your existence – so don’t be one of the people who thinks it’s up to US to MAKE THINGS HAPPEN – because God seems distant or silent.**
 - **Psalm 73:25-26**, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And besides you I desire nothing upon the earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”
 - **Remember the basic truths** we have learned from God through Abraham and Sarah:
 - **Election & Covenant**
 - **Election** - The Lord marshalls all his power, love and work to redeem the lost.
 - **Covenant** – Therefore everything we do has to do with our relationship with God.
- **Four: Wait Upon the Lord** – Abe and Sarah could have waited. By acting to secure their own existence they created a lot of problems for themselves and for Ishmael and Hagar, the maid. WAIT UPON THE LORD.

- **Passivity?** – Does this then mean that we are supposed to live a life of passivity? Just sitting around waiting for God to do something? Never lifting a finger to help ourselves? OF COURSE NOT!
 - **Wait expectantly** – through prayer. Specific prayer. This is when we should pray openly, boldly and specifically for that which we seek and about which we are worried.
 - **Wait while taking actions – we know ARE guided by the revealed will of God.** In this story Abe and Sarah went outside the clear will of God and did what everybody else in the culture around them accepted as normal. They didn't have to do that. They could have waited while going about life as God had directed it – loving each other, worshipping God, working their flocks and herds.
 - **This is especially true regarding matters of injustice –** In those times, do the just thing. Seek it out. Protect yourself, seek help. Don't wait to act in these situations – either for yourself or others.
- **Waiting is not passivity** – There are many times, when we simply have to wait upon the Lord. “Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord ...we will wait upon the Lord, we will wait upon the Lord...”
 - **Pray**
 - **Do the right thing**
 - **Wait...**
 - **Never – ever, force God's hand...**

The God of All Mercy

So. Wait for the Lord. But when you don't, when you and I live according to the anxieties and take matters into our own hands, know this: The Lord is the God of all mercy.

I had never seen this before in this passage – the MERCY of God. After Abraham and Sarah take matters into their own hands and it gets all messy and difficult... God doesn't let them have it! There is no judgment, no scolding, no impatience, no punishment for their sin.

Instead, the Lord is full of mercy....The Lord takes care of Hagar and Ishmael. Then God renames Abram and Sarai – to become Abraham and Sarah. Abram

means exalted father, but Abraham means father of Nations. Sarai means 'princess', and Sarah is a name of honor: "*THE princess.*" Then God affirms the covenant through the rite of circumcision – a sign the radical nature of covenant faith.

In all these acts of God, we peer into the merciful heart of the Father – the creator and redeemer, who could punish, but instead withholds judgment and works around the disbelief of Abraham and Sarah. God simply will not let it get in the way of his larger work to save the lost.

Godot

In *Waiting for Godot*, Godot never does show up. What is experienced by the two characters in the play is meaninglessness and hopelessness. Since God is absent and silent, there is no hope, no reason for anything. If that were true, the play would be right!

But it's wrong. In real life, God is truly never absent. God is never really silent. We do have to wait, but the mercy of God and the work of God moves forward.