

## **Our Bible Sisters:**

### **Sarah – Learning to Wait on God's Timing**

#### **Leader's Guide**

This Bible study was written by Marilyn Miller, a staff minister at Abiding Word Lutheran Church in Houston, TX. The theological content was reviewed by Professor Lyle Lange.

*Our Bible Sisters is a series of one-hour studies that may be used separately or in any combination. Each looks at a different woman of the Bible, highlighting God's faithfulness in her life, with applications to the lives of all Christian women today.*

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# Sarah – Learning to Wait on God’s Timing

## Opening Prayer

## The Setting

1. What do we know about Sarah’s background? Read Genesis 11:27-31, 12:1-3, 15:5-6 and 20:11-12?

*Her name was Sarai which means “princess,” wife of Abram (Abraham); she was from Ur of the Chaldeans (modern day Iraq) and moved to Haran (modern day Syria) with Abram’s extended family, and then on to Canaan with her husband and his nephew, Lot. God promised that Abram would be the father of great nations, but Sarai was childless. She was Abram’s half sister; their father was Terah but they had different mothers.*

2. Read Genesis 12:10-20. What do we learn about Abram in this episode?

*He was so human! His faith was young and he didn’t implicitly trust God to take care of him and his family. He focused on his own safety (might he be killed so that Pharaoh could take his wife as his own?) rather than his God-given responsibility to his wife. He took things into his own hands.*

3. How was God’s plan superior to Abram’s?

*God kept Sarai and Abram, as well as their worldly possessions, safe and put things back the way they were supposed to be – Sarai was returned to her husband.*

4. What can we learn from this short story?

*1) Trust that God will protect us 2) focus on God’s promises (Abram to be the father of a great nation) and know that he has a plan for us and it will come to pass 3) praise God that he loves and cares for us in spite of what we do 4) persevere – God will give those who love him another chance (forgiveness) 5) submit to those God has given us as heads (our husbands) even when they don’t appear to have our best interest in mind 6) find our confidence in God’s love and promises ...*

## Sarah’s Response

5. Read Genesis 16:1-3. God had promised more offspring than stars in the sky, yet Abram and Sarai were both getting old and had no children. What are some of the things Sarai might have been thinking?

*Self-focus: Embarrassment/grief at not having children; thinking that God was not blessing or maybe even was cursing her marriage; feeling empty/unfulfilled; wondering what’s wrong with me; giving up - having a child was becoming biologically impossible - was the promise made to her husband never going to happen because of her inability to conceive; what could she do so that God’s promise of a great nation could come true ...*

6. Was Sarai's plan acceptable in their culture?

*Yes, to ensure a male heir, taking a concubine was common.*

7. Was it acceptable to God?

*One of the reasons God established marriage is to bring children into the world; he had promised to give them children and he keeps his promises without our help; this was a self-focused act of doubt and pride, not of faith. Sarai's plan was also not in harmony with God's original institution of marriage—one man and one woman.*

8. What role did Abram play in this sin?

*He went along with it rather than reminding his wife of God's providence*

9. Discuss a time that you tried to help God with your own plan instead of waiting on his timing.

10. When we take God's plan into our own hands as Sarai did, what attitudes are we displaying toward God?

## The Result

11. Read Genesis 16:4-8. What are some of the immediate consequences of Abram's having a child with Hagar?

*Chaos! Hagar disrespects her mistress; Sarai and Abram are at odds with each other; Abram walks away from his responsibilities to keep order in his house and to be the spiritual/moral head; Sarai abuses Hagar so badly that she runs away*

12. From Genesis 16:9-12 we learn that Hagar's child was named Ishmael and would be a "wild man" who would live in hostility toward his brothers. We see this hostility to this very day. Ishmael is the father of the Arab races and Sarai's son the father of the Jewish races. What lessons can we learn from Sarai's "solution" to her problems?

*God's plan is not fulfilled when we take things into our own hands! The end does not justify the means – sin begets sin. Responding to situations in anger and without first consulting God does not bring honor or God-pleasing results. Our sins bring far-reaching consequences. God's will does prevail in spite of what we do...*

## God Repeats His Promise

13. Years later, God repeats his promises to Abraham and now it is very clear, since Sarai is no longer young enough to have children, that God alone would make this happen. Read Genesis 17:1-7 and 17:15-16. What is the significance of changing their names to Abraham and Sarah?

*God marked them in a very personal way to remind them of his promise every time someone called them by name. The meaning of those names also was significant – from "exalted father" (though he had no children)*

to “father of many nations” for Abraham and from “my princess” to “queen” for Sarah showing that she would be the mother of a huge family

14. Even with the name change, Sarah and Abraham still exhibit doubt. In Genesis 18:10-15, the Lord visits Abraham and once again voices the same promise he has been making for over 25 years. What is the response of both Sarah and her husband?

*They both laughed/ doubted because this does not appear to be humanly possible; Sarah lies when accused of laughing*

15. What is the significance of the words “at the appointed time” in vs 14?

*God’s time is not for us to fathom – our job is to expectantly wait on him*

16. What promises can we focus on when we are waiting on God’s timing?

*Take turns reading the following verses: Jeremiah 29:11-12 (God has a good plan for us); 2 Peter 3:9 (the Lord is not slow in keeping his promise...he is patient); Numbers 23:19 (Balaam’s oracle – Does he promise and not fulfill?); Romans 8:32 (He did not spare his own Son; he will graciously give us all things)*

17. What do we learn from the Lord’s words to Sarah in vs 15?

*He knows everything we think and do. He does not change his plans even when we show doubt/disrespect – he remains faithful. Once again Sarah experiences God’s forgiveness.*

## **The Promise is Fulfilled**

18. Read Genesis 21:1-7 God keeps his promises! Sarah was 90 years old and Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born. Compare Sarah’s laughter in Genesis 18:12 with that in 21:6.

*Laughter of unbelief vs laughter of joy as God blesses her immensely. The laughter in chapter 18 came from Satan’s temptations while the laughter of chapter 21 came from joy and thanksgiving to God.*

19. As we read about Sarah and Abraham holding their new son in their arms and reflecting on their years of waiting, it calls to mind other faithful Christians who have been called to lives of waiting. God said in 2 Corinthians 12:9, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” How does the act of waiting show us our weakness?

*By how quickly we become impatient; by our worry; our selfish behavior expecting instant gratification; perhaps by other outward and inward actions*

20. How does the act of waiting show us God’s power and grace?

*Ask someone to look up the following: Romans 5:1-11 (rejoice in suffering, hope does not disappoint), Hebrews 11:38-40, 12:3 (consider him who endured) Hebrews 12:10 (God’s discipline is for our good, to share in his holiness...that’s an incredible thought...that God’s intent in our discipline and hardship is to share in his holiness!)*

21. Those who believe can trace their heritage back to Abraham and likewise to Sarah. She is mentioned alongside Abraham in Isaiah 51: 2a as well as Romans 9:8-9 as the mother of the righteous. Their faith is praised in that great chapter of heroes, Hebrews 11 (vs 11). It is clear that we are to look to Sarah as an example for our lives. What can we learn from her?

*Our faith comes only from God; Satan makes our doubts seem so “logical;” God keeps his promises to us even when we doubt and sin and really mess things up – he is faithful; God uses us in his plans; repeatedly we all stumble and make mistakes but we may come back to God and beg his forgiveness; God uses us as we are ...*

## **Closing Prayer/Meditation**

If You But Trust in God to Guide You CW 444 vs. 1, 3, 4

*If you but trust in God to guide you  
And place your confidence in him,  
He'll give you strength and stand beside you  
When days are dreary, dark, and dim.  
For those who trust his changeless love  
Build on the rock that does not move.*

*Be patient and await his leisure  
In cheerful hope, with heart content;  
Then take whate'er your Father's pleasure  
And his discerning love have sent.  
Doubt not; your inmost wants are known  
To him who chose you for his own.*

*Sing, pray, and keep his ways unswerving,  
Perform your duties faithfully,  
And trust his Word; though undeserving,  
You'll find his promise true to be.  
God never yet forsook in need  
The soul that trusted him indeed.*

### **For further study:**

- In the days ahead, reflect on the situations in your life right now that require trust in God's promises and God's timing.
- Pray or journal about Genesis 18:14a, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" and 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."
- Like Sarah we doubt, but like Sarah we have the same God who is faithful even when we falter. Read the beautiful picture of how, in the end, God regards his "friend" Abraham (Isaiah 41:8-11) and the fullness of his grace as recorded in Romans 4:16-25— a message of strength and comfort and hope.

- Confess your failure to trust in this great promise and confidently ask God to strengthen you through his Holy Spirit. He will do it!

**Additional references:**

- Psalm 145:13-14 (for all generations; God is faithful to all his promises; he lifts up all who are bowed down)
- 2 Timothy 2:11-13 (he will remain faithful)
- Hebrews 10:23 (Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful!)

Perhaps there is someone dear to you who also needs to be strengthened in the midst of doubt. Pray for God to open your eyes to others' needs; pray for his guidance holding out the wonderful message of hope and his promises.

**References:**

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