

Is Anything Too Hard for the LORD?

Genesis 18:1-14 (NIV)

¹ The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. ² Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. ³ He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. ⁵ Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say." ⁶ So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread." ⁷ Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. ⁸ He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree. ⁹ "Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There, in the tent," he said. ¹⁰ Then one of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. ¹¹ Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?" ¹³ Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' ¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

At age 75, the LORD told Abram (as he was called at the time) to go to a land he would show him. He was going to make Abram a great nation and all people on the earth would be blessed through him. Abram believed the LORD's promise and went, taking with him his wife Sarai. About 10 years passed but Abram and Sarai still had no children. Abram was about to appoint one of his servants as heir of his estate, but God stopped him and reiterated his promise with a new detail: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." (Genesis 15:4) Abram believed the LORD and continued on, but his wife Sarai was convinced she would never have children. So, Sarai suggested that her husband take her maidservant Hagar and have a child through her. This way, the child would be Abram's flesh and blood. Ishmael was born.

About 13 years later, still with no other children, the LORD came before Abram again. This time, the LORD changed his name to Abraham, a name meaning "father of many." He also changed Sarai's name to Sarah and said, "I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." (Genesis 17:16) He said that this will finally happen next year and the LORD gave the child's name in advance. The name was Isaac. To keep Abraham ever mindful that the child of promise will come from him and his wife Sarah, the LORD gave him the special sign of circumcision.

Days after this event, three travelers come to Abraham's settlement. As soon as he notices them, he goes into full host mode. He rushes around to give them not just a snack, a morsel of bread, but more like a lavish three course meal with tender veal, cottage cheese, milk, and about enough bread to feed 100 people. While they are eating one of them asks, "Where is your wife Sarah?" (verse 9) Remember, these are strangers, they've never met before, and they are asking about Abraham's wife by name. Abraham motions to the tent and answers him, "There, in the tent." (verse 9) Then one of them says, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." (verse 10)

Wait. What? Abraham is 99 years old and Sarah is 89. It's been 24 years since the original promise was made. The Bible says, "Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing." (verse 11) She can't have kids anymore. What exactly are you saying here?

Think of it this way. Let's say that you got married at 25. You have always wanted a big family, and God told you that you would have children, lots of children. A year goes by and no kids. That's okay. You keep trying. But then another year goes by and still no kids. 5 years into the marriage and you decide to go see a fertility doctor, and you are told that you can never have kids. The years continue to pass. You are now 59, and a stranger comes to your doorstep and tells you next year you will have son. He tells you the time when you will have the child, what you will name him. He even knows your name without ever asking and with you never having met him before. If that happened to you, would you respond any differently than Sarah who laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my [husband] is old, will I now have this pleasure?" (verse 12) Sarah has heard this promise from God for 24 years. She past the age of having kids. It's not going to happen. Sarah responded to God's Word with cynicism.

When do we get cynical with God and his Word? Some find themselves in the same position as Sarah. They have always wanted children. They view children as a blessing from God, a blessing of marriage, something that God would want them to have. But after years of trying they are told that they will never have them. The wife feels less than a woman, incomplete. The husband feels less than a man, inadequate. They try fertility treatments, but nothing. They try adoption, but every promising opportunity ends in heartbreak. But they're Christians. They go to church every Sunday. They saved themselves for marriage. They pray for children day after day. They pray with their pastor, and their pastor prays for them. They pray with their family, and their family prays for them. They search Scripture constantly looking for answers from God as to why they can't have kids. They have done everything God asked of them, but he does not bless them with children. People keep telling them not to lose faith, that God will provide, but will he?

The same thoughts go through the mind of the person who struggles every day with unrelenting pain – pain maybe from a surgery gone wrong, from a car accident that you never fully recovered from, or pain that no doctor can seem to explain. You listen to all sorts of stories from the Bible of God healing debilitating injuries, but he's not answering your prayer for healing. You wait and wait and wait, but God doesn't really seem to want to answer your prayer and help you. People keep telling you, "God works all things for your good." We respond with Sarah's cynicism. "Yeah. Uh-huh. Sure. Whatever you say. Like that will ever happen."

This cynicism towards God and his Word is just a step away from total unbelief. The distrust is already there; where does it stop? You already roll your eyes at his promises because you have been waiting with nothing happening. What's next? Do you stop believing that God cares for you? That Jesus died for you? That you will go to heaven? Cynicism against God's Word borne from impatience in him keeping his Word can destroy our faith.

Yet, how did the LORD answer Sarah's cynicism? He could have said, "Fine. You laugh at my promises to you. You think it can't be done. You don't believe me. Then I won't do this for you after all. You will never have a son." But he didn't say that. Instead he said, "Why did Sarah laugh? ... Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son." (verses 13, 14) The LORD repeats the promise that he had been giving to Abraham and Sarah for 24 years – not because of Abraham's great hospitality, not because Sarah deserves the promise, but because this is what God said he would do.

That's exactly what happened. About that time next year, Sarah held baby Isaac in her arms. The woman who had gone through menopause, whose husband was beyond the ability to have kids, to this couple, God gives a baby, an impossible baby, but that's what God said he would do.

Sometimes God takes his time in fulfilling his Word. It took 25 years from the first promise to Abraham and Sarah to the day Isaac was born. He took 4,000 years from his first promise to Adam and Eve before the offspring of the woman came who crushed the serpent's head - 4,000 years before completing the promised deliverance from the devil by the life and death of Jesus Christ. Humans may fail their word and not keep it, but not God. God always keeps his Word, even if it looks impossible, even if it looks like it will never happen, God can and will do it. If he promised to do it, he will. "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (verse 14)

Why does God take so long in keeping his Word? Maybe the LORD has not yet answered your prayer giving you what you asked for because he is drawing you closer to him during this time. Maybe he is not giving you what you asked for because he is giving you something else you asked for – like patience, patience which is slowly increased as you wait for God to make good on his Word. Maybe while you wait for God to make good on his Word he is using you as an example to others of how a godly person waits for the LORD to keep his Word to them at the timing that is absolutely the best.

So, what do you say to the couple still waiting to be parents? What do you say to the person who is on so much medication for their pain that they can't remember half of the medication list? You tell them to put their hope in the LORD. This is not a wish-washy hope, a kind of hope that thinks maybe this will happen, but it probably won't. No. Hope in God's Word is something that is sure and certain, something that you can plan on, something that you can expect to happen. The Lord will always make good on his Word no matter how long it takes or how impossible it looks. To the couple who still have no children, God tells them that they are valuable to him, that their value is not defined by the ability to have children. Their value comes from God who willingly gave his child to death so that this couple could live forever with him, that God would fill any and every void in their lives. To the couple with constant pain, God promised to you a day when this pain will end. Maybe you will have to wait 25 years for that to happen, like Abraham and Sarah did. Maybe you will have to wait until heaven. I don't know. But what I do know is that no matter how long you have to wait, the LORD will keep his Word. In the meantime, he is going to walk with you through the pain and give you the strength to carry on.

"Is anything too hard for the Lord?" No. Remember that as you wait for the Lord to keep his Word. Amen.