



Near and Now

When I doubt my calling – Abraham and Sarah
By Rev. Ollie Bergh

Warm-up Question

What do you need in order to believe a promise?

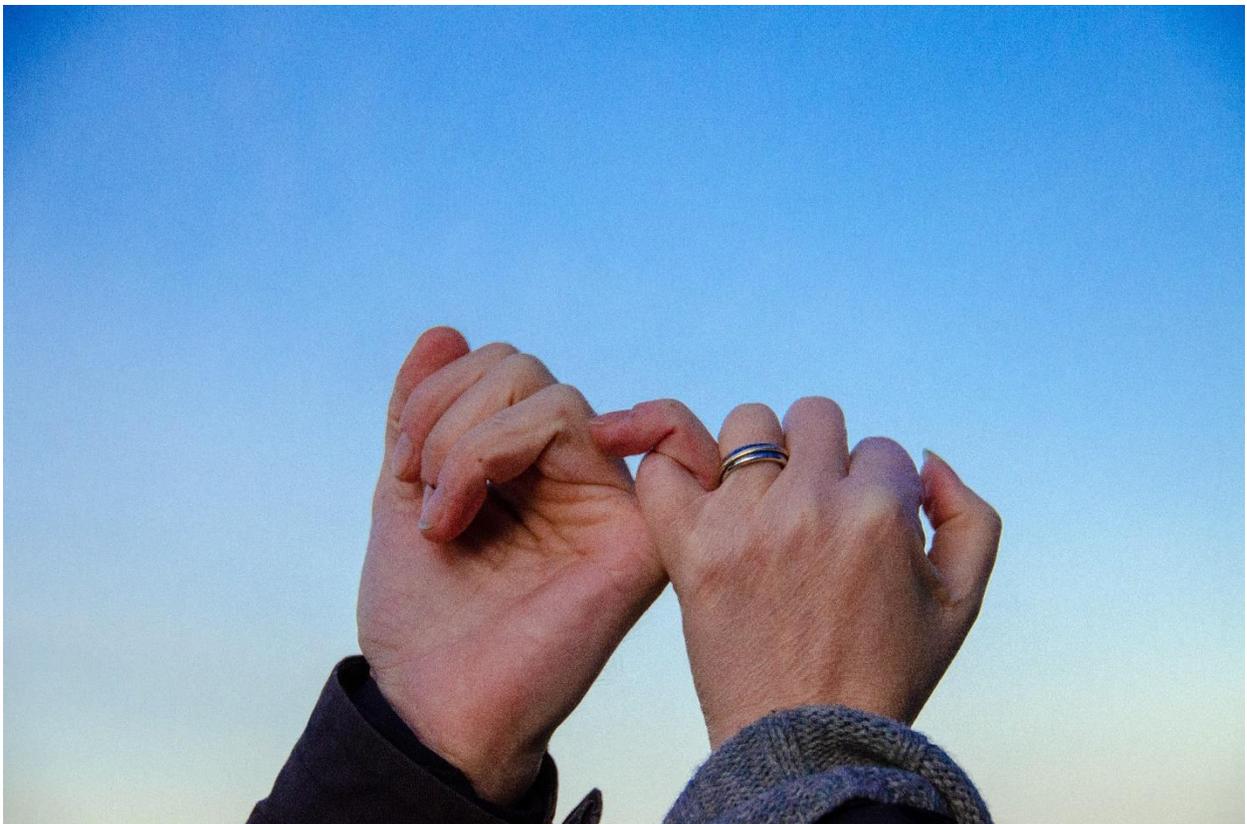


Photo by Alise Storsul on [Unsplash](#)

Discussion Questions

1. What do you see in this image?
2. What do you feel looking at this image?
3. What stories from your own life does this image bring to mind?
4. What stories of the world does this image bring to mind?

**Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old?
Can Sarah, who is ninety years old bear a child?**

Read [Genesis 16:1-18:15](#)

Bible Story Reflection

Over and over, God appeared to Abraham and to Sarah to make promises. God was making Abraham so many promises, God even gave some to Hagar and Ishmael. God loves to give promises—even outlandish ones! When God promised Abraham and Sarah that Sarah would give birth at 90, not only did Sarah laugh—Abraham even redirected God to Ishmael, the son he already had: “Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh that Ishmael might live in your sight!’” (17:17-18).

God gives the promise. Our hearts and minds do not always receive the promise; sometimes, we laugh God’s promises off like they are cheap laughs at a stand-up show. Here is where we need theology. Theology reminds us that *faith* receives God’s promises. Faith deals with the promises while we keep living, doubting, and waiting for those promises to come to fruition. Without faith, the story of Abraham and Sarah is ultimately a story of broken promises.

God gives Abraham and Sarah their child Isaac. That’s a promise kept. God also promised to Abraham that Sarah would give birth to many nations and that “kings of peoples shall come from her” (17:16). Sarah and Abraham never lived to see the nations and kings that would come from them. Their first begotten king was David, and he came 14 generations after them. God keeps God’s promises, but on God’s crazy-making time, not ours.

We need faith because God’s promises are otherwise only as good as our grip. Every single promise God made to Abraham took *at least* a year to come to fruition, usually generations. Humans don’t have the strength to hold on to a promise for that long. Thanks be to God that through Christ we have a faith that waits for the promises when we cannot. Sarah and Abraham’s faith held on to the promises even after they died. Your faith will do the same.

Discussion Questions

1. What promise has God made you that made you laugh like Sarah?
2. How can faith do something we cannot do?
3. How did God react to Abraham and Sarah’s doubts?
4. In what ways do you identify with Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, or Ishmael?
5. Talk about promises God has kept or hasn’t kept among your ancestors.
6. When have you had to wait for God to make good on a promise? How did you or did you not cope?
7. What have you done to cultivate patience in your life?
8. Imagine you were Sarah making the decision to turn Abraham over to Hagar. How do you feel toward God?
9. How does thinking about promises in the long-term help or hinder our callings?

Activity Suggestions

Write everything you're waiting for on a slip of paper and place it near an icon or statue of Jesus (or Abraham/Sarah if you have one!)

Think of something you wish would come true despite it being impossible. Laugh at it. Then come up with ways God could make it possible.

With a group of people, take turns one by one asking God to make good on a promise. After the person speaks, the group can respond "How long, O Lord?" or, if the group is okay with something more casual, "Come on, God, we're serious here!"

Prayer Concerns

Those struggling with infertility, generational/ancestral hopes, broken promises.

Closing Prayer

It can be easy to grow impatient, O God, as I wait for the fulfillment of your call in my life. Give me the faith to wait upon you. In the name of +Jesus, Amen.

