

Ruth Graham... (the wife of Billy Graham)... once told the famous evangelist: *"I saw a sign on a strip of highway once that I would like to have copied on my gravestone. It said, 'End of construction. Thank you for your patience'."* (She died June 14, 2007... and I was curious... so I Googled it. I saw the picture of her grave stone. She got that wish.)

... ..

Gladys and Rhonda walked along the sidewalk after church... one Sunday. They were on their way home... thinking about meals planned for later that afternoon... and casually discussing the morning service. ... *"That was a great sermon on patience,"* remarked Rhonda. ... Gladys replied, *"Yeah, but he went five minutes long."*

When it comes to faith and patience... perhaps no one has said it any better than Donald Grey Barnhouse. His comment was: *"No perfect feet walk the path of faith."*

We have been studying the life of Abraham in the Book of Genesis these past few weeks... and it might be easy for some to conclude that... (once Abram repented from going to Egypt)... this great "Father of our Faith"... had developed a near perfect faith. ... But our passage today will clearly show that this is not the case.

It is difficult to imagine a greater contrast than what is presented in our present chapter... from the chapter of last week's sermon. ... In Genesis 15 Abram is seen as the man of faith... but in chapter 16... as the man of unbelief. ... In Genesis 15 he "believed in the Lord"... in Genesis 16 he followed the voice of Sarai.

J Vernon McGee wrote:

*As we come to this chapter, I must confess that I almost wish it were not in the Bible. After Abram rose to the heights in chapter 15, you would say that he certainly is treading on high places -- but he is not perfect. In chapter 16 we see the lapse of this man's faith relative to Sarai and Hagar, the Egyptian maid. We have here the unbelief of both Sarai and Abram, and the birth of Ishmael. This is certainly a letdown after the wonder of the previous chapter.*

*"No perfect feet walk the path of faith."*

That is why the Apostle Paul has issued this somber warning:

**1 Corinthians 10:12 (ESV)**

*Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.*

... ..

There are three people involved in today's passage – Abram... Sarai... and... (to make up the eternal triangle)... Hagar (the other woman.) ... As we get ready to open Genesis 16 this morning... let me say that if you picture Abram in a business suit... Sarai in designer clothes... and Hagar as their young... innocent... (perhaps naïve)... very attractive... live-in maid... then our passage today is as modern - as any of today's television shows... or movies at the theater.

The situation was highly explosive. It took the course it did because... for all their spirituality and godly convictions... Abram and Sarai were ordinary people... with hopes and fears and desires and wants... just like those of anyone else. (*"No perfect feet walk the path of faith."*)

Abram wanted a son and heir more than anything in the world. ... Sarai was frustrated beyond words at her inability to give him one. ... Added to that witch's brew were: 1) an attractive slave girl... 2) a legal loophole... 3) some worldly reasoning... and 4) a fleshy solution. ...The result was an entanglement so snarled and so twisted... that **four thousand years** have not unraveled it.

(But unlike most of today's movies and television programs)... this drama has useful lessons for us. This passage gives us a great study on *impatience*. ... It teaches us a great deal about the emotion of restlessness or impatience that grips so many of us (and so very often.) ... What is impatience? ... It is the emotion: that gets tired of waiting... that gets fed up with something that delays us... that arouses us to act or react before we should.

We just get tired of waiting... of being delayed... and want to move on and act or react. ... And too often - **we do**... and we cause all kinds of problems for ourselves and for others... often painful and catastrophic problems.

This was what happened to Abram and Sara. ... They became impatient in waiting for the promised seed... the son promised by God. ... Their impatience was so gripping... that they just felt they could wait no longer. If they did... it would be too late to bear a son. ... They began to rationalize... to question and say... what **we** often say about the promises of God:

- Could God be waiting for **us** to do something before He acts?
- Doesn't "God only help those who help themselves"?
- If we do this for God, then won't God do **that** for us?
- Doesn't God expect us to do our part, then He does His?

This kind of reasoning often leads us to act before we should... and the consequences are often terrible and painful. ... Impatience can cause us to fail with the plans which God has led us to... all because we just do not wait upon God... upon His timing... His will... His way. ... As stated... this was what happened to Abram and Sara.

Abraham was now eighty-five years old. He had been walking with the Lord for ten years and had learned some valuable lessons about faith. God had promised Abraham and Sarah a child but had not told them when the child would be born. It was a period of waiting, and most people don't like to wait. But **it is through faith and patience that we inherit the promises of God.**

**Hebrews 6:11-12 (ESV)**

*<sup>11</sup> And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, <sup>12</sup> so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

Did you catch what those verses were saying...? It is through faith and patience that we inherit the promises of God! ... Oh! How we need them! ... Faith and patience are better than GOLD to the believer.

Therefore... it is not unusual for God to be silent. Indeed... He has been silent far more than He has spoken. **His silences are as eloquent as His sayings.** ... He usually does what He did here with Abram. He gave him a revelation of His mind and will concerning a son and heir... then He waited for faith to operate. ... Unfortunately with Abram... as so often with us... instead of **faith** triumphing... the **flesh** triumphed instead.

It has often been said that “*God's delays are not God's denials*”... but Satan whispers to us: “*God is holding out on you! If He loved you... things would be different!*” So our impatience takes hold.

But a willingness to wait on the Lord is evidence that you are walking by faith. ... (Willingness to wait on the Lord... is the first of four evidences that I want to quickly give you... that show if you are walking by faith.)... Whenever we stop trusting God... we act in haste... we go the wrong direction... and we end up being ashamed.

Here is another evidence that you are walking by faith. Your primary concern is for God’s glory... not your own... or any other human being... even if it is to eliminate (or minimize) another person’s pain. The foremost objective... for a person walking by faith... is God’s glory.

Here is a third evidence that you are walking by faith. You are acting on the authority of God’s Word – over any other authority (worldly or otherwise)... and it doesn’t matter how practical that other authority seems.

The world’s psychology (for example) may offer good advice... and it may seem to help a lot of people... but the authority of God’s Word matters more than anything else... to those who walk by faith. ... (You see... unlike using Worldly wisdom... you can act by faith and KNOW that God will bless... if you are obeying what God says in His Word.)

A third evidence that you are walking by faith... is that God gives you a certain peace that overcomes Satan’s little whispers of how God is holding out on you. ... Conflict may surround you... but you will have God’s overall peace and joy within you... knowing that God will come through... with His blessings.

So... these four evidences can be used as a test... to see if we are walking by faith. I mention them... because as we study Genesis 16... we will see that Abram and Sarai did not pass the test. Watch and see. We will see them fail the tests of evidence for walking by faith:

- (1) you are willing to wait;
- (2) you are concerned only for the glory of God;
- (3) you are acting on the authority of God's Word over every other authority; and
- (4) you have God's joy and peace within (that God is not holding out on you... or needs you to help Him.)

Now let's go to our text for this morning... We'll start with just two verses.

### **Genesis 16:1-2**

In the story of God's promise to Abram to multiply his seed and to make of him a great nation... we seldom focus on another... (who is central to this promise.) ... It is Abram's wife... Sarai. ... The curse of barrenness was a great burden for women of that generation. ... As Sarai had waited for God's promise to be fulfilled... she felt responsible. ... Trying to reason things out in her mind... she evidently concluded that God would not grant Abram a son because of her. ... *'And Sarai said to Abram... Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing. Go in into my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her...'* (16:2).

Do you sense the dynamic going on here...? Sarai reasoned very personally... and applied her personal distress to Abram. Her barrenness was deemed a tragedy in ancient culture... (where it was a mark of success to have many children... and a sad failure... to have none.) ...

From Sarai's perspective... the flower was fading... and time was running out. Anguished humiliation throbbed within her.

From her own pain... she becomes a voice seeking to counsel Abram. (There is no mention of God's promised seed. We have to read into the narrative... here... to say that Sarai was concerned about the fulfillment of God's promise. What is mentioned... is what was primary to her. And what was it? – her personal pain.)

No doubt Abram had often received excellent advice from his wife... but that time her counsel was extreme folly. It might have gone like this:

*"My dear, I have discovered that the code of Hammurabi... (the most civilized... progressive... and decent legislative code so far proposed for civilized men)... is honored here in Canaan! ... Well... according to the code... it would be in order for you to marry Hagar... my slave. Then... when a son is born to her... I can legally make it my son. In this way we fix the problem of my inability to have children. I can enjoy motherhood."*

It did not take Abram long to fall-in with his wife's suggestion.

If you are faced with a situation... where God has you in a wait pattern... it is not uncommon to receive unsolicited advice from others. ... Those voices that talk to us can be well-meaning... and sincere... but we must determine if they are speaking out of the baggage of their own hurts... needing spiritual comfort themselves. ... Sarai spoke from her own hurt.

The voice of Sarai was powerful. ... First... Abram cared for her... and did not like seeing her hurting. ... Second... she had a solution that society accepted. ... Third... Abram probably liked the solution. (Here was Sarai giving him permission to do something that was already a temptation.) ...

... The result, '*...And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai*'... with little or no hesitation.

Christians must always realize how easily they are attracted to sin. Sincere voices can sometimes be the leading instrument in directing us to sin. We should always seek wisdom to know when those sincere voices may be leading us astray. Here are five sensible deliberations we can pull from our passage so far... for being extremely careful with counsel that we are given.

**#1.** A person who offers you counsel out of their own hurt... should have their advice very carefully weighed. ... Always acknowledge it... if the advice-giver “has a dog in the fight”... and evaluate their advice with that in mind. ... The main thrust of Sarai’s reasoning... was that she had no children... and Abram... seems to act on impulse to ease her pain.

**#2.** (This relates closely to this first one)... Make sure that God’s glory is primary to the motive. ... As noble as helping someone eliminate their pain is... make sure God’s glory is your main target.

**#3.** If there is a powerful sense of gratifying your own fleshly desire... slow down and diligently seek the Lord. (For example) advise given to you... might be to “go tell that person off.” This might gratify your flesh (in an immediate sense) – but create bigger problems for you. ... A different fleshly desire... could be “ease.” ... However... adopting the easiest solution... also might lead you down an ungodly path. ... (For example) Confrontation makes most of us uncomfortable. Ease would have us avoid

it at all cost. But trying to gratify this fleshly desire might create horrible results.

(LISTEN!) It is hard to find a temptation more appealing... than one that pampers the fleshly appetite... **and** appears to obtain the goals of faith! ... “*You need to go tell them off... (Be harsh with them)... so they won’t offend anyone else!*” ... .. Be very careful when fleshly desires are aroused by the proposal.

**#4**... Always be very leery about applying the world’s wisdom. “*God helps those who help themselves*” – is NOT a Biblical concept. It is the exact opposite of what Scripture teaches. ... And I have actually heard believers say, “*You can always ask forgiveness later...*” In other words “*Do – anyway - what you know will be disapproved... or is wrong in some way... and ask forgiveness later.*” ... .. “*The end justifies the means*” is yet another worldly solution that is NEVER to be applied to God’s work.

Sarai’s suggestion was unobjectionable according to the customs of the day... but God often repudiates social customs... especially if they interfere with His wonderful works. ... Her suggestion looked very practical – it had... (no doubt) helped many women eliminate the pain they were suffering. ... But this was a custom devised by man... not a practice instituted by God.

So much advice that is given to us is like that. ... It has only one fundamental test (the pragmatic yardstick): “**Does it work?**” ... But IF it seems practical... although it interferes with Biblical procedure... it must be rejected! ... Sara's idea was to follow a practice of the world... which

interfered with the procedure of God's Word. ... What was the procedure of God's Word...? Faith !

The right response would have been to believe in God's promise. However... Sarai became impatient with the promise of God and embraced a human plan to produce an heir. This plan did not require faith... but was a natural... human response... to the problem. ... In other words... Abram and Sarai tried to solve this problem through their own ability.

**#5.** Test the advise you receive... and see if it will minimize your faith... or have you depend more on God and increase your faith.

### **Genesis 16:3-5**

If we are appalled by Sarai's volunteering Hagar to be her surrogate... Abram's passive... compliant conduct... is even **more** offensive. ... He... (not Sarai)... had heard the voice of God. ... He had led them from Ur. ... And Abram was fresh from the fiery assurance (that we studied last week.) But he did not question her idea. ... He did not balk (or question it... in the slightest.) ... Rather... as the Hebrew blandly says, "*Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.*" (He listened to her and then acted... without any attempt to hear from God on it.)

Is this passive... pliant man... the same one who chased the four eastern kings for 120 miles... and whipped them above Damascus? Yes. ... But there his faith was soaring. Now it is plunging. ... "*No perfect feet walk the path of faith.*"

... ..

Hagar's spite and feeling of superiority came from her confidence that a deity had blessed her... and that Abram was now dependent on her ... since she carried the heir to the family in her womb. ... No wonder she considered herself to have attained privileged status.

Sarai's accusation against Abram is that... apparently in his delight at becoming a father... he has neglected the necessary steps that would keep Hagar remembering her appropriate place within the household.

Here is where Abram should have been the man. He should have taken his Sarai aside and assured her of his love and that she was first. He should have accepted the full blame and responsibility. He should have dealt kindly and firmly with Hagar. But very tellingly... he... like Sarai... (we will see in the next verse)... does not refer to Hagar by name... but only by label ("your servant"). It is so much easier when you depersonalize those you abuse.

Abram should have sought God's wisdom in repentant prayer. Instead... he yielded again. "*Behold, your servant is in your power,*" Abram said. "*Do to her as you please.*"

### **Genesis 16:6**

Notice how one evil leads to another. ... In wronging his wife... Abram now surrenders to her - his position as head of the household.

Every member of Abram's household was doing the natural thing. ... Abram acted naturally in marrying Hagar... Sarai in resenting her maid... and Hagar in running away.

(LISTEN!) The tests of faith... and God's silences... are to give us an opportunity to act *spiritually* instead of *naturally*. If you are under a period of God's testing (and silence) right now... will you act spiritually... or naturally...?

Hagar's running away from Sarai's constant nagging... is understandable enough. ... But there was something especially sad about Abram's attitude. ... He surrendered his headship to Sarai... and allowed her to nag the unfortunate Hagar into *total* frustration. ... Abram bears most of the responsibility here. ... He failed as the head of his home.

### **Genesis 16:7-9**

The tents of Abram were far behind. The weary fugitive with the tear-stained face had traveled fast... had crossed Sinai... and had arrived at the wilderness of Shur... (on the outskirts of Egypt.) ... She was going back... (back to Egypt)... back into the world... back to the house of an even *greater bondage* than anything known in Sarai's tents. ... She was going back into eternal darkness... back to that gilded land of death... back to her pagan people... and to her pagan gods.

But... then... *suddenly*... before it was forever too late... (before the gates of Egypt closed behind her forever)... God in His sovereignty stepped in.

This is the first appearance in Scripture of "*the* Angel of the Lord"... Who Bible scholars identify as Old Testament appearances... (pre-incarnate materializations Jesus Christ. ... This has to be God Himself... because in verse 10... the Being promised to do what only God can do ("I will surely multiply your offspring..."))... and in verse 13, Hagar called the angel "God."

These pre-incarnation visits of Jesus Christ to the earth (and there are several in the Old Testament)... were to meet special needs and to accomplish special tasks. ... The fact that the Son of God took on a temporary body... left heaven... and came down to help a rejected servant-girl... surely reveals His grace and love. His servants Abraham and Sarah had sinned against the Lord and against Hagar... but the Lord did not desert them.

**AND**... it is remarkable... to say the least... that the first occurrence of the pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus... would **not** be to Abram... but to Hagar... (not to the heir of all the promises... but to an Egyptian fugitive... not to a man... but to a woman... not to a saint... but to a sinner... not to a person of high rank... but to a slave... not to one seeking God... but to one fleeing toward Egypt. ... The Friend of the friendless... (the loving second Person of the Godhead)... met that forlorn woman beside a fountain. This is a revelation of the grace of God. ... He loved Hagar just as much as He loved Abram. ... He sought her and found her on the frontiers of Egypt.

But notice... He called her "Sarai's maid" not "Abram's wife." ... Sarah and Abraham had it arranged to make Hagar his wife (Genesis 16:3)... to make sin look better. ... But even though we call sin nice names... that does not change the character of sin... and God will still call it by the right names. Today we call a lot of evil things by nice names. But God does not! ... Hagar would not be part of the covenant that God made with Abram.

The angel asked Hagar two questions: "*Where have you come from, and where are you going?*" (16:8). These... like the questions asked of others so far in the book... were **rhetorical**... because God already knew the

answers. ... These questions were designed to get Hagar to pour out her heart to God. ... And when she did... God gave her two distinct messages: One was a command—return and submit... and the other was prophetic promises — she would give birth to a boy... innumerable descendants... and they would be very combative people.

### **Genesis 16:10-12**

The character of Ishmael (and his descendants) is presented as **hostility toward everyone**... even against their own kinsmen. He is described as a 'wild donkey of a man'... a phrase which indicates a lifestyle outside of accepted social conventions... (He will be an antagonist who does not get along well with others.) ... He will live an independent existence because 'his hand is against everyone... and everyone's hand is against him'.

The descendants of Ishmael settled in the area of Arabia and Arab Muslims today... have their lineage traced back to Abraham through Ishmael.

Little did Abram and Sarai imagine that their shortcut would originate a conflict that would run for thousands of years... and that oceans of blood would be spilt. ... Abram... the father of the faithful... had begotten a wild man... instead of a child of grace. ... How tragic was Abram and Sarai's expedient solution!

### **Genesis 16:13-15**

Abram's God blessed her with the manifestation of his presence. He spoke a clear word. She can return to the house of Abram and place her destiny in the promise of this God who has seen her. ... Hagar learned that God cared for her in her dire situation in the wilderness. God came to her in her

trial and rescued her. Her heathen idol gods were not caring gods. But Jehovah-God is a caring God.

Hagar trusted and obeyed God. She returned to her mistress Sarah. ... This must have been a shock to Sarah and Abraham. ... How would Sarah respond to Hagar... when she came back to the camp... and reported that God had talked with her? ... Did they believe that God would have time for a poor servant girl? ... Was God concerned about a slave-girl's baby? ... The record does not tell us how Sarah responded... but it would appear that she accepted both Hagar... and her report... and took her back as her servant. ... Sarah did not mistreat her again... as... perhaps Sarai learned that God is the God Who sees. If she continued to abuse Hagar - God was watching!

Both Abraham and Sarah had to learn to live with their mistakes. Certainly Abraham enjoyed watching the boy grow up... and the old man's heart was full of love for him (as Genesis 17:18 will reveal).

*“No perfect feet walk the path of faith.”*

### **Genesis 16:16**

And it would be another **14 years** before Isaac was born! Remember that all of today's events were the result of an impatient waiting of only **ten** years. After the lessons Abram and Sarai learned by the events of our passage today... they had an even LONGER period of time to wait... (14 more years!)

Often we must wait a long time for the promised blessing of God... but the blessings make the wait worth it. ... Impatience... (running ahead of God's will and refusing to wait)... will always result in a terrible consequence.

Christian... are you contemplating an expediency to obtain what you imagine to be God's will... in your most treasured relationship... in a friendship... in a professional pursuit... in your career... in your education... in your ministry? ... If so... take a deep breath... stand back... take some time... read God's Word... think... pray... and obey the Word of God over any worldly advice you might receive.

All that we have studied today... began when people of faith began to distrust God's Word. It took shape when they decided that God needed help in fulfilling His word. It took off when Abram and Sarai took a shortcut to obtain what they knew God had promised. ... Their expedience brought a degenerative mess! ... So complicated... so *impossible*... so painful — and... I must say as a pastor (now for some thirty years)... so *true to life*. I have seen many occasions where believers resort to expediences in order to *hurry* what they have believed to be God's will... and it always resulted in humanly unsolvable problems.

But God's grace is greater than man's sin and can accomplish God's best - even when men do their worst. In grace... God saw Hagar fleeing to Egypt... and He came to her and met her needs.

*"No perfect feet walk the path of faith"* and... Satan wants us to think that our "disobedience detours" must become the permanent road for the rest of our lives. ... But this is a lie. ... No problem is too complicated for God if

you are willing to let him help you. ... We need to confess our sins and accept God's cleansing (just as 1 John 1:9 tells us to.) ... We might still have to live with some of the pain and regret (as ongoing consequences)... but the grace of God will ultimately prevail.

As soon as I hear an "AMEN!" – I will close in prayer.