

As we have seen in our study through the book of Genesis - Abram's trouble was that he could not wait. God had promised him a son and many descendants. And in our last passage together... Abram showed anxiety to see that promise fulfilled. So he decided to help God out... and to hurry things up... by marrying Hagar... and having a child through her.

... ..

It reminds me of an often-told story (perhaps you have heard)... about a naturalist... who had been bed-ridden because of an illness. In the window sill of the room where he had been recuperating... he delighted himself by watching the slow process of a worm spin a bright emerald green and gold cocoon and intricately cover it's entire body. For several weeks... he had to tell his visitors and caretakers to leave it alone... as they wanted to remove the outdoor creature from his room. No. He wanted to witness the metamorphosized moth's emergence in due time.

The cocoon was flask-shaped with a narrow opening at the neck through which the moth would emerge. The great difference between the narrow opening and the size of the moth made the naturalist wonder how ever the insect would get out of its prison.

At last the day came and all morning the man watched the shaking cocoon with the struggles of the insect. ... It struggled... and it struggled. But it never seemed to get beyond a certain point.

What he did not know... at the time... was that the labor to emerge... is what forces the fluids of the moth's body into the wings... and makes it possible for it to fly. But not knowing that... the naturalist had exhausted his

patience... in watching what seemed to be a losing battle. ... So... he decided to help things along. He picked up a pair of scissors... that were at his bedside for his bandages... and hobbled closer to the window sill. With the point of his scissors he carefully snipped the confining threads to make the exit just a little easier.

Immediately the moth crawled out... and with perfect ease. But the naturalist watched in vain to see the gorgeous wings expand and fill. They never did. ... His impatience and false kindness had ruined the moth. ...It never became anything but a stunted and deformed creature... crawling painfully through its brief life of less than a day. ... It should have had a much longer life... flying through the air on rainbow wings.

It is always a mistake to try to hasten the work of God. He has His own reasons for His seeming delays. But Abram could not wait.

Look with me at the verse that ended our passage of study... the last time... which dealt with Abram having a son through Hagar.

Genesis 16:16

And now please notice how today's opening verse begins. It is the very next verse.

Genesis 17:1

As a result of Abram's impatience there followed a solemn silence in which... for thirteen long years... he received no further word from God. He was eighty-six when Ishmael was born and ninety-nine when God at last broke the silence. That tells us... there were thirteen years during which

Abram made no further progress in the things of God... in which he saw no fruit... and during which nothing worthy of note happened in his life.

The bleakness of Abram and Sarai's shortcut attempt to obtain an heir through Hagar... is meant to provide the spiritual background for the story of today's passage... (dealing with covenant renewal.) The interconnectedness of the two accounts is clear... because the back to back appearances of the final verse of chapter 16 and the opening verse of chapter 17. The author intends that the reader understand that for some thirteen years now... a cloud of domestic gloom and growing darkness about the promise... had hung over the tents of Abram.

Abram and Hagar's child (Ishmael)... was rushing toward manhood. Though he was certainly loved by Abram and Hagar... his untamed and combative nature (that we saw in the last chapter prophesied about him) must have been evident to all. Sarai (a decade younger than Abram) was eighty-nine. She had always been barren and was well past childbearing years. And the thirteen years of Ishmael's childhood probably increased the tension between her and Hagar.... (Ishmael's combative nature would not have helped matters.)

Abram... a year shy of the century mark... believed that God would fulfill his promise. ... He also inwardly hoped that "dashing Ishmael"... despite his insolent ways... would be the fulfillment of God's promised blessing. (We see this later on in this chapter in v. 18). The boy was Abram's flesh and blood... and so Ishmael lodged deep in Abram's affections. But Ishmael was not God's fulfillment.

It had been some twenty-three years since God's initial promise.... that he would father many people. And now... with the bleak silence of the last thirteen years... God had given Abram a lot of time to think about his sin of trying to hurry God's promise (and his lapse of trust) — as well as living out the consequences. ... God was growing the patriarch's faith. Great days lay ahead. But Abram did not know it.

So Genesis chapter 17 is about how God came to Abram and elevated his faith. Abram needed to be renewed... to look at the impossible... and to believe in the miraculous power and works of God.

I don't need to guess that this is exactly what you need from time to time. (I know that I certainly do.) Whenever we face a long period of waiting on God... the Lord knows that our faith will need a boost. ... We need to be aroused by God. ... We need a fresh... stirring... experience... with God... similar to Abram's experience. This is the subject of today's important passage.

You might be waiting on God (as I am) for the financial picture of our church to improve. ... Or it might be a relationship... in which you are waiting on God to affect tremendous change. (I am waiting for a certain person to turn back to the Lord and to be reconciled... and I pray for this to happen each and every day.)

No matter how impossible the circumstance may look... for what you wait on God for... our passage this morning will provide us with insight... about... **WHAT TO DO WHILE WAITING.** ... If you want some understanding... for how your faith might be renewed after some period of waiting on God... or how to keep your faith strong... then please key-in

with me on today's passage. ... As we go through it today... I would like to suggest six things of – **WHAT TO DO WHILE WAITING**.

Before we dive into the first 14 verses of Genesis chapter 17... I would like to give you the first thing we should do while waiting. It has to do with what I have already mentioned. God had Abram wait 13 more years... after Ishmael was born.

Why had Abram to wait all this while before the Lord appeared to him again? ... Why must so many years drag their weary course before Jehovah reveals Himself once more and makes promise of giving him Isaac? Is not the answer to be found in Romans 4:19? Here is what Paul wrote about Abram.

Romans 4:19 (ESV)

He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.

God was about to act in grace... but grace cannot be displayed in us... until we have first come to the end of ourselves. God's power is put forth in us... only when we learn our own impotency. For 13 years... God was showing Abram that he was as good as dead (unable to accomplish God's work with any of his own ability.) Abram had to reckon himself as dead to his own aptitude and capability – and then God would put forth His power.

(LISTEN!) ... This principle is all over Scripture. Not until Israel was driven to desperation and despair at the Red Sea... did the word come, "*Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.*" ... So here. ... It wasn't until Abram's body was "dead" would God fulfill His word and give him a son. ...

When you were baptized... you publicly declared your belief that you have died to yourself... and have been raised in Christ. Being dead to ourselves... is something that a believer must continuously recognize.

(At age 86 Abram was able to procreate... and he did... with Hagar! But now Abram is 99... and he can no longer father a child with anyone. He is dead to that... and now Abram can recognize that about himself. There is no doubt that it must be a divine act for the promise to be fulfilled.) If you remember this... it will make more sense to you later on... when we come to the sign of the covenant – circumcision. Circumcision cuts away part of the male organ for procreation. The symbolism depicts a deadness of themselves for fulfilling God's promise. Abram tried to fulfill God's promise with his own ability with Hagar. But relying on our own ability is not God's way. Circumcision (in part) will serve as a reminder of this.

God's opportunity does not come until man's extremity is reached. We are to recognize our own deadness for any kind of spiritual effectiveness. This is a lesson we sorely need to take to heart... for it is of great practical importance.

Not until man comes to the end of himself will God put forth His power. Not until our own powers are "dead"... will God act in grace. What is the great lesson of Psalm 107 but this? God brings us to an end of ourselves – and then He acts. (Listen to the excerpts from Psalm 107)

Psalm 107:4-6, 12-13, 23-28 (ESV)

⁴ Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in; ⁵ hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.

⁶ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

¹² So he bowed their hearts down with hard labor; they fell down, with none to help. ¹³ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

²³ Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters; ²⁴ they saw the deeds of the LORD, his wondrous works in the deep. ²⁵ For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. ²⁶ They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight; ²⁷ they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end. ²⁸ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

Ah! it is when we are at our "wit's end," when all our own devices have failed... and all our own efforts have come up empty... that we "cry out to the Lord in our trouble," and "**then**" He brings us out of our distresses.

Apply now this principle *to your own individual life*. Are you anxious about a delay of God? ... He has some wise purpose for it. He had with Abram... and He has with you. ... From seventy-five (which was his age when he left Haran) — to one hundred (which was his age when Isaac was born) — was a long time to wait... but it was all according to the Lord's wisdom.

God has more than one reason for His delays. ... Often it is to test the faith of His children... to develop their patience... (but perhaps as often as any reason — it is to bring us to the end of ourselves. His delays are in order... that when He does act... His delivering power may be more plainly evident. His delays are in order... that what He does... may be more deeply appreciated... and that the result might be for Him to be more impactfully glorified.

What should we do while we wait on God...? **#1. Recognize your deadness (your complete inability to affect a proper spiritual outcome).** Realize how dependent you are on God to work.

Now let's discover what else we should do while we wait on God.

Genesis 17:1-2

The normal Hebrew word the Bible uses for making a covenant is "karat." In Genesis 9... when God made a covenant with Noah the Hebrew word "karat" was used. When God first made His covenant with Abram... "karat" was used there as well. It means "to cut." God "cut" a covenant. But here in Genesis 17... a different Hebrew word is used. (It is "natan.") ... "Natan" is not used for initiating a new covenant... but for establishing a covenant that has already been cut... (In this case it is the covenant that promised a son to Abram.) God will make (in terms of establishing it.)

The time had come for Isaac to be born. But before that could happen... faith had to be exercised... so God made a new revelation to Abram to give faith its opportunity. God will give Abram an enlargement of the details about the covenant which has been the subject of previous revelations.

God did not reveal everything to Abraham about the covenant the first time He spoke about the covenant. ... Abraham learned about the covenant as we learn about subjects in school — it is *"precept upon precept; line upon line... here a little, and there a little"* (to quote Isaiah 28:10). ... We do not learn calculus in our first day in first grade... but we must go to class day after day and year after year to learn it. (Or so I am told by those who have learned it...) The same is true in spiritual learning.

The new revelation to Abram included a new name for God (“El Shaddai.”) *El-Shaddai* signifies God's power (omnipotence) and sovereignty. The rendering "*Almighty*" is the best English translation of this name because it describes the God who makes things happen by means of his majestic power and might. ... It is the name by which the patriarchs came to know God. ... As God later explained to Moses, "*I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty*" (Exodus 6:3). ... It is the name that is used some thirty-one times in Job to encourage that servant of God... in the midst of his severe trials... as he waited on God ... Here in Genesis the name will be used regularly. But in Genesis 17:1 we find the Bible's first use of it.

God was saying... by this initial invoking of his name *El-Shaddai*, "I am able to fulfill the awesome hopes that I have set before you of a *people* and a *land*. There is no need to let go of the promise because of your old age. ... There is no need to succumb to passive desperation. ... There is no need to scale down the promise to match your puny thoughts. ... There is no need to resort to fleshly expedience... in trying to help Me fulfill My Word. There is no need of trying to fulfill any of My promises in a second-rate way. ... I am God Almighty!"

Christians... it is the same for us. ... (LISTEN!)... The way we live is determined by what we think of God. If our God is *El-Shaddai*... (the awesome... mighty God... of this Bible narrative)... then our lives will live out the fullness of God's promises to us. What you truly believe about God is the most important thing in your life. Any thoughts of a God

less potent than the God of Abram... will shrink your soul... and stagnate your faith.

What should you do while you wait on God? **#2. Is saturate you heart and mind on God as El Shaddai.** ... This is what God had Abram... and many of the Patriarchs... **and Job** do. #1. Is Recognize your own deadness ... and #2. Is saturate your heart and mind on God as El Shaddai.

We do not have to leave verse one... before coming to the third thing we should do while we wait on God. The Lord told Abram to “Walk before me and be blameless.” The third matter to occupy our time... while we wait on God... **is to continually live our lives as though God is watching us** (because He is)**... and actively pursue blamelessness.**

When one walks before someone... he/she is walking in the sight of that person. That is the picture here. It is to walk with a continual awareness of God seeing all that we do. It is to be always aware of God's presence... His power... and His security. ... (conscious that He can see us and that He has the power to look after and care for us... or discipline us as His children... when we sin.)

Now... as for this word “*blameless*.” In Hebrew it is the word “*Tamin*” and is most often translated as “*perfect*” or “*without any blemish*.” The same word is used... for example in Psalm 19:7.

Psalm 19:7 (ESV)

The law of the LORD is perfect, (there is our word “tamin”) reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;

Then... is God saying to Abram... “*Be perfect, Abram*”...? ... You may not like my answer. (I’m not so sure that I do...)

Yes. I believe the command is for Abram to chase after it. And do you know what. I think God gives us the same command. ... All through the Scriptures... the standard of *perfection* is set before us. ... The law required that Israel should love the Lord their God with (*as much of their hearts as they could...?*) – No! ... with **all** their hearts. ... Then Jesus commanded His disciples

Matthew 5:48 (ESV)

You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

1 Peter 2:21 (ESV)

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

Here is what I am saying: Perfection is the standard that is set before us. It is what we are to continually strive after. This means that we can never be content with our level of spiritual maturity. ... “*Well now... I have arrived! I don’t need to pursue any more holiness in my life...*” ... Instead we need to be like the Apostle Paul... who wrote...

Philippians 3:12-14 (ESV)

¹² *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.* ¹³ *Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,* ¹⁴ *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

God gives us high standards. Men are forever trying to lower the standard. You may not reach the standard but you are to strive for it. This standard

says we can always do better. Never be satisfied with your dedication and devotion to God. Strive to do better. Perfection is the goal and that goal must keep us ever striving.

What should we do while we wait for God...? #1. Recognize your own deadness ... #2. Saturate your heart and mind on God as El Shaddai. #3. Live as though God is watching and set your bar no lower than perfection as your goal.

Genesis 17:3

Abram bowed quickly... once he learned that it was God speaking to him. He fell on his face... in the lowliest form of reverence. ... And do you know what...? The way this is written is that Abram stayed in that position... the whole time God spoke to him. He didn't bow and get right back up. He kept leaning on his knees and elbows... with his forehead approaching the ground... listening intently to God.

Have you ever prayed (in such a position)... that way to God? ... Only do it as a way of showing greater reverence to Him. Don't do it as a means of trying to earn greater favor from Him. And don't do it to try to show off your keen spirituality to others. Do it for the exact opposite reason (for humility's sake.) Because it can help us to focus our heart on acknowledging our position of being in total submission to Him. We are nothing. He is our Master... and we are His slave.

The fourth thing to do while waiting on God... is to recognize your abject position before God. He is your Master and you are His slave.

Acknowledge that it is all about **Him**... **His** sovereignty... **His** plan (not yours.) Falling on your face before Him can help facilitate this.

Right after Abram bowed before God... our text says God spoke to him. You will not get much revelation from God without this kind of reverence for God. If we want God to speak with us and instruct us... as God did to Abraham here... we must respect Him as our Master... and be willing to obey Him and submit as His humble servant. Jesus said in John 17:21 that God will reveal Himself to those who are willing to obey.

What should we do while we wait for God...? #1. Recognize your own deadness ... #2. Saturate your heart and mind on God as El Shaddai. #3. Live as though God is watching and set your bar no lower than perfection as your goal. #4. Submit all your own plans... desires and ways to God... as your Master.

Genesis 17:4-8

This is an eternal covenant that is tied to the land God had Abraham previously walk around. This eternal covenant is with the Jewish people who will (during the Millennial time that is to come) occupy every bit of this land.

Just think of it... from where we sit today... about four thousand years after God speaking to Abraham... there have been two great lines -- the line of Ishmael... and the line of Isaac -- and there have been millions in each line. What a family! ... Added to that... Abram also has even more spiritual descendants... because we Christians are called the children of Abraham by faith in Christ. In Romans 4:16, speaking of Abraham, Paul says, "...*who is the father of us all*" -- that is... of believers... of the nation Israel... and also of the Arabs. ... Just think of the millions of people! God says here, "I

am going to make you a father of many nations," **and He has made that promise good.**

That is from our perspective. ... Now think of it from Abram's. ... Think how it would have affected Abram to have his name changed. ... Up to this point his name was Abram. ... Now it is changed to Abraham. Abram means "high father," and Abraham means "father of a multitude." ... This new name (which was most fitting for the covenant promises)... would... however... be hard to wear at that time. ... Men could easily mock... laugh... and ridicule Abraham when he informed them of his name change.

He had only one child (Ishmael), and that was not by his wife Sarah but by Sarah's maid... Hagar. ... So "father of multitudes" would be a joke as far as others were concerned. ... Abram probably encountered disbelief and concealed smiles when he instructed his servants to call him "*father of a multitude.*"

How many times did that happen each day? ... Fifty? ... A hundred? ... "*Good morning, father of a multitude.*" ... "*Here's lunch, father of a multitude.*" ... "*Good night, father of a multitude.*"

But Abraham knew that God had not deceived him. ... His new name was a perpetual reminder of God's **sure** word.

Are you willing to be ridiculed for the sake of believing God's promises to you...? As a believer... you too have been given a new name. It has Christ's Own Name in it – "Christian." Are you willing to suffer ridicule for wearing it... or do you hide it...?

The great need of the hour is for believers to humble themselves before God and remember the great name He has given to us... (the name of *Christian*.) ... The name should remind us... of our conversion experience... of other deep experiences with God... of God's great call to us... the great task He has given each of us to do... and of God's promises (and His assurance to fulfill the promises made to us.)

What should we do while we wait for God...? #1. Recognize your own deadness ... #2. Saturate your heart and mind on God as El Shaddai. #3. Live as though God is watching and set your bar no lower than perfection as your goal. #4. Submit all your own plans... desires and ways to God... as your Master. #5. Fearlessly wear the name of Christ. Don't hide or shy away from being known as a Christian.

Genesis 17:9-14

Circumcision is the **badge** of the covenant. The Israelites did not circumcise themselves in order to **become** members of the covenant. They did this because they already **had** the covenant from God. Circumcision occupied the same place that good works occupy for the believer today. You do not perform good works in order to be saved. You perform good works **because** you have been saved. That makes all the difference in the world.

When I was in Jr. High I hung around with a neighborhood group of kids. We all lived on the same block... and were all the same age. We used to go out at night and play mean pranks on people and vandalize the neighborhood (things of which I am not proud of... and have since

apologized to a lot of people.) ... One thing that kept me from becoming an absolute renegade... was the thought of my dad. My dad was our city's mayor. I thought to myself, "*Because I'm a son of my father, I won't do this or enter into that.*" (I refrained from things because of my dad. ... Especially after one night... when I got caught and the police had to call the police chief out of bed and into the station... to call the mayor about his son.) Now, I did not become his son because I decided to clean up my act. I already was his son. But because I was his son, I cleaned up my act and no longer did them. ... The badge of the covenant was circumcision. The thing that put them under the covenant wasn't circumcision... but circumcision was the badge of it... the evidence of it.

Again... circumcision is the badge of the covenant. They did not have to do this... in order to get the covenant. ... God had already made the covenant with them. ... The same thing is true today. ... A great many people think that... if they join the church or are baptized... they will be saved.

No... you don't do those things to **get** saved. (If you are saved... I think you will do both of them -- you'll join a church... and you'll be baptized) -- but you don't do them to get saved. ... First we accept God's salvation as a free gift... and then... because we are God's children... we start cleaning up our act.

Now... with regard to circumcision... we need to acknowledge something important here... Once Abraham and his household circumcised **THEMSELVES**... parents were to administer it on their children – without giving their children a choice. Male children who were 8 days old were to be passive recipients of the sign of the covenant.

Hereby is taught the lesson of parental responsibility and parental hope. It was not intended to be an expression of *saving* faith on the part of the child... but of *submissive* faith on the part of the parent.

This is the **first** formal step... in a spiritual education... in which the parent acknowledges his obligation to perform everything that is involved in teaching the child about God and His ways. It expresses the formal (and permanent) entrance of the believing parents' children... into the community that is identified with Jehovah God. This sign of admission cannot be reversed... It can only be denied by the deliberate rebellion of the child.

Now here is our sixth thing we should do while we wait on God. **#6. is actively involve yourself educating others about the Lord.** Present them with the eternal truths of God... and let it impact their lives forever. Get involved in AWANA... KIDS Church... or home group Bible Study. Let God use you to bring others into a saving faith where God Himself will set His Own seal on their hearts – to signify His covenant with them.

... ..

In many ways... Abraham was called upon to look foolish... in order that God's greatness might be manifest. ... Are Christians still called on to do that? ... Certainly!

We may be enduring great personal suffering... but we are asked to praise God... and test him. ... The world often appears to be in the hands of mad men... and Christians are called upon to say... '*God is in control!*'

If you feel somewhat frustrated... so did Abraham. ... But by loving and trusting God... Abraham was ultimately validated... and God was glorified. That promise is no less certain for us.

But you may be having to wait on God... for the moment. Here is what to do while you wait:

#1. Recognize your own deadness.

#2. Saturate your heart and mind on God as El Shaddai.

#3. Live as though God is watching... and set your bar no lower than perfection as your goal.

#4. Submit all your own plans... desires and ways to God... as your Master.

#5. Fearlessly wear the name of Christ.

#6. Actively involve yourself (or keep at it... if you are already doing it)... in educating others about the Lord.