

Sarah's Disappointment
Genesis 18:9-15

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Disappointment! How well do you handle it? What do you do when your hopes and dreams get shattered? What do you do when you throw your heart into something; and then it fails? How do you process a disappointment and come out on the other side unscathed?

I want to begin, this morning, by looking at **Disappointment in Sarah's life.**

After she is briefly introduced as Abraham's wife, the disappointment is stated in these simple terms. Genesis 11:30, "*But Sarah was barren; she had no child.*"¹ Those are very easy words for us to read. We can never fully know the pain that someone is experiencing because of such events in their lives. We can have compassion toward the person, because we have our own pain to deal with. But I think that was a heavy experience for Sarah to bear. I can imagine her wedding day. I can imagine the high hopes that filled her heart—hopes of a home filled with laughter; scenes of little ones running about the house playing their games; the expectation of a hug and the words, "Goodnight Mommy." But none of that had happened by the end of Genesis 11.

Then a wonderful thing did happen. God spoke to Sarah's husband and gave them a promise—a promise that they would become a great nation—a promise of offspring. Imagine the joy that flooded Sarah's heart when Abraham gave her the news. This is what she had been praying for. This would be the turning point of her life. God would heal her barrenness. She would have a child! I want you to feel the ups and downs Sarah experienced, because we feel them in our own disappointments. According to Webster's dictionary, disappointment is the failure to meet an expectation.² Disappointment is the difference between what is and what was hoped for. Sarah's hopes are sky high in Genesis 12.

Now with that promise, God gave a command. They were to leave the comfort of their home town, Ur, and strike out on a journey into a new land. Going into the unknown usually had two sides to it. On the one hand, it can be exciting to do something new. On the other hand, it can be a bit scary, as well. Travel was not near as safe as it is for you and me. You pretty much had to defend yourself against terrorists and robbers. You are now going into other people's turf. The welcoming committee may turn out to be a lynch party.

Leaving the security of home is usually harder for the woman than the man. Travel via camel was without air conditioning and probably pretty bumpy. But Sarah did what needed to be done. She stood by her man and off to Canaan land they went.

In order to understand Sarah's emotional state later in the story, we must know this move was an act of faith and obedience. This is Abraham and Sarah doing the will of God as fully as they knew how to do it. In the first part of Genesis 12 they are building altars to the Lord and worshipping God as their first priority. These are people who are serving the Lord with all they've got.

¹ All Scripture quotes are from the New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

² This is not exact. Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th ed. Defines disappoint as "to fail to meet the expectation or the hope of." If our expectations are unrealistic, of course, we will experience disappointment. But even when expectations are reasonable, we may still experience disappointment at times.

In about the middle of Genesis 12 they hit a problem. Perhaps it's their first disappointment after this great promise from God. Instead of the land flowing with milk and honey, there is a severe famine in the land. Why would God lead this precious couple into the middle of a draught and famine? I won't try to answer that right now; but I will say this, the famine was probably a big disappointment.

That's OK; Abraham and Sarah came up with a solution to the problem. They made their way into Egypt where there were provisions.³ However, that led to another problem. We usually look at this from Abraham's standpoint. But let's see it from Sarah's perspective. As they are approaching Egypt, her husband tells her to lie about being his wife. Now that's an awkward place to be in. On the one hand, she is to be faithful to her husband; but, on the other hand, she cannot say that she already has a husband. And all of that is on her. It is a stressful situation.

This journey is already turning out different than she thought it would be. Since They were obeying when they left Ur, surely it will be an easy journey. No, there is famine; and now she has to deal with the advances of the Egyptians. Well that episode concluded with God sending a plague on Pharaoh and him telling Abraham and Sarah to leave.

Back in Canaan, it doesn't get much better. Abraham's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen get into a big fight; and that conflict has to be resolved. Later, Lot gets captured by an enemy force and Abraham has to fight a battle to get him free. Then you wonder if those kings Abraham defeated are going to retaliate. I'm just saying, the journey had its snags along the way. And God speaks to Abraham and gives him assurances during these trials. But Sarah has to get all that second hand. She has to get the assurances from Abraham. Is anybody getting some sympathy for Sarah?

In Genesis 16, ten years have passed since Sarah and Abraham have left Ur. Ten years have passed since God promised Sarah a child. And nothing has come of it. "I wonder if we heard God right to begin with? This is not working? In fact, the older we get the less likely it will ever work." Maybe that is what Sarah was thinking when she proposed to Abraham that he take Hagar and have a child by her. I think I can feel some of the pain in Sarah's voice in Genesis 16:2, "*So Sarah said to Abram, 'See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her' ...*" She knew the ability of God to do this thing. The painful part was, "Why didn't He do it?" "*...the Lord has restrained me from bearing children.*" "I thought He said He would do that for me. I guess not. I must have missed it." Part of the pain was being childless; but part of the pain was that the Lord (whom I trusted) *has restrained me from bearing children.*

So the result of all this was Ishmael and the conflict that followed between Hagar and Sarah. We celebrate the end result of Sarah's journey. But have you considered the difficulties she encountered along the way? Why do I want you to do that today; because difficulties in your journey does not mean the end result is spoiled. I would be surprised if you're not having difficulties in your journey; I am. The people in the Bible had their difficulties. Some were stoned; some were sawn in half; some wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented. That's what Hebrews 11 says about the heroes of faith. Peter put it this way to the first century Christians, "*Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery*

³ In Scripture Egypt is often symbolic of the world. The decision to go to Egypt at this time was probably a mistake. Perhaps they should have stayed in the land God had sent them to and trusted Him to provide. The next problem may have never occurred. However, this is not the subject that we're dealing with in this message.

trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you (1 Peter 4:12). Don't think you're the only one. Don't think this is not part of God's overall plan. He will get you to the destination. But along the way He will prepare you for the arrival.

At least 13 more years passed after Ishmael was born.⁴ Sarah is still barren. She has given up on her dream. In many ways, her dream has become her nightmare. Nothing is working out. She is living with Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael. Think about what Sarah's life must have been like.

Then one day three angels came to their tent. As they sit at a meal with Abraham, they ask him where Sarah is at. Let me begin reading at Gen 18:9 *"Then they said to him, 'Where is Sarah your wife?' So he said, 'Here, in the tent.'* 10 *And He said, 'I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.'* (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.) 11 *Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing.* 12 *Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"* 13 *And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?'"* 14 *Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son."* 15 *But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh!"*

Sarah's laugh here is not one of joy. It is an expression of her pain. "Oh, sure, now after all these years, I'm going to have some joy." It was an incredulous chuckle in her soul. She didn't make any noise; but the Angel knew what was going on in her heart.

I think the pain of the disappointment in Sarah was so deep; she did not even want to entertain the thought anymore. Years ago she was elated at the prospect of having a child. Years and years of hoping and praying had worn this lady down. Part of it was the sheer impossibility of it even happening now. Some of you women know what it takes to have a baby. How would you like to do it at 90 years old?

What I'm really focusing on though is the years of disappointment this mother of faith experienced. The day finally came when God fulfilled His promise. When Isaac was born Sarah said, *"God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me"* (Gen. 21:6). This time it was joyous laughter. This was an altogether different kind of laugh than the one we talked about earlier. In fact, this was so central to the event that she named her son *"Isaac"* which means laughter.

I share Sarah's story because your story is probably not very different. God is faithful. But if you think it all comes quick and easy, think again. Now, why wouldn't God bring it all about quick and easy; because He uses the journey to prepare you for your ultimate destination. He drags you through experiences that will knock off the rough edges and develop His character in you.⁵ The journey is more about who you are becoming than it is about where you are going. Most Christians are just trying to get to a place call heaven when they die. God is trying to get you ready for the place He has prepared for you.

⁴ Genesis 17:25

⁵ Romans 8:29

How do I deal with disappointments?

(1) Realize you're not the only one. Research has shown that using Facebook actually depresses people.⁶ There is a momentary lift when we first scan through our Facebook friends. But later we feel more disappointment because our life doesn't seem as fun as their lives. Yet when they look at my posts, my life looks more fun than theirs to them. Why, because I only show them that side of my life. Most people are putting on a happy face. They have their struggles just like you have yours. That's why they don't stop everything and focus on you. They're pretty busy with their own problems. Of course, there are times when we need to rally around someone;⁷ but keep your expectations realistic. More often than not, they do care; they just have their hands pretty busy already.

(2) Realize that God is using your journey to mold you and shape you for eternity. Fiery trials refine our faith.⁸ What you think is important and what He thinks is important are not always the same.⁹ A good father gives his children what is best for them. They might want only dessert for supper; but he knows they need more nutrition than that.

(3) Express your disappointment appropriately. In 1858 Abraham Lincoln was asked how it felt to lose the Senate race to Stephen Douglas. He answered, "I feel like the boy who stubbed his toe: I am too big to cry and too badly hurt to laugh."¹⁰ Sometimes silence is golden. David learned how to encourage himself in the Lord during the hard times. At Ziklag he and his men return home to find their goods plundered and their wives kidnapped. It's great to be a leader when everything is going well because you get more credit than you deserve. For that same reason, it's not so great to be the leader when things are not going well. The men were thinking about stoning David. I guess that might have given them a temporary outlet for their frustration. 1 Sam 30:6 says, "...but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God" (KJV). There will be times, perhaps many, when you will have to find your encouragement in the Lord. David knew how to talk with God about his struggles. You see that in the Psalms.¹¹

(4) Learn to adjust your perspective. Disappointments can throw us for a loop. Disappointments can warp our perspective. Disappointments can turn our thinking negative, if we're not careful. Sometimes we need a friend to help us do that. But we have know how to manage our emotions and think objectively even when everything around us seems to be spinning out of control. No matter what it looks like, God is still on the throne. He is still directing our steps.¹² He is still working out His plan for our lives. When the problems get overwhelming, it is time to stop and count our blessing.¹³ Broaden the focus. Yes, there is a

⁶ Megan Moreno, Dimitri Christakis, et al., "A Pilot Evaluation of Associations Between Displayed Depression References on Facebook and Self-Reported Depression Using a Clinical Scale," *Journal of Behavioral Health Services and Research*, 2011, 295-304, accessed 2-6-16 at <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11414-011-9258-7#page-1>. A subsequent study by Mai-Ly Steers found the link to be associated with the comparisons people make between themselves and friends.

⁷ Galatians 6:1-5

⁸ Job 23:10; Mal. 3:3; 1 Peter 1:7

⁹ Isaiah 55:8-9

¹⁰ A.O. Goldsmith, "History Can Be Funny," accessed at <http://www.dddnews.com/story/1040519.html> on 2/6/16.

¹¹ For example Psalm 10 and Psalm 42-44.

¹² Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 37:23

¹³ Psalm 103; 105; Col. 4:2

problem; there may be many problems. But there are many things that are right that could be wrong.

(5) Know that the Lord is with you. Heb 13:5 *“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”* Isa 43:1-2 *“But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.”*

(6) Consider how your actions affect others.

David’s bold action of faith against Goliath energized the whole Israeli army. Paul’s faithfulness even when imprisoned encouraged others to step out and preach the gospel.¹⁴ But it can go the other way as well. God gave Israel instructions for how to conduct war. Deut. 20:8 says, *“The officers shall speak further to the people, and say, ‘What man is there who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest the heart of his brethren faint like his heart.’”* In other words, one guy backing off discourages the others. The double-mindedness of that one soldier could cause several others to lose heart and run as well. So don’t minimize the importance of what you’re doing in the place God has given you.

(7) Stay faithful even when life is not going the way you hoped it would. Sarah got discouraged and she made mistakes. But she kept on with the Lord anyway. Hebrews 11:11 says, *“By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judge Him faithful who had promised.”* Do not allow disappointments to get you down. Keep looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of your faith.

Ignace Jan Paderewski, the famous pianist, was scheduled to perform at a great concert hall in America. It was a high-society extravaganza. Present in the audience that evening was a mother and her fidgety nine-year old. She had brought him in the hopes that when he heard the great composer play, he would be encouraged to practice.

As the mother turned to talk with some friends, she slipped away and was strangely drawn to the grand Steinway piano on the platform. Staring wide-eyed at the keys the boy sat on the stool; placed his small fingers on the keys and began to play “Chopsticks.” The roar of the crowd came to a hush as frowning faces pointed in his direction. Someone began to shout, “Get that boy away from there!” “Where is his mother?” Somebody get that kid.”

Backstage the master composer overheard the sounds out front. He quickly realized what was happening and hurried toward the stage. Without one word of announcement, he stooped over behind the boy, reached around on both sides, and began to improvise a countermelody to harmonize with and enhance “Chopsticks.” As they played together, the composer kept whispering in the boy’s ear, “Keep going; don’t quit. Keep playing; don’t stop. Don’t quit....”

¹⁴ 1 Sam. 17:52; Phil. 1:14

It is the same for us as we work for the Lord. Our playing of “Chopsticks” may not be impressing anyone. But about the time we’re ready to give up, we hear the Master say, “Keep going; don’t stop; don’t give up.”¹⁵

And this is what the Lord is saying to us this morning. “Don’t give up. It doesn’t matter what others think about what you’re doing. Do it with all your heart unto Me and I’ll help you.”

Disappointments can turn into victories when the Master steps in and begins to play the counter melody.

Pray

¹⁵ Charles Swindoll, “Don’t Quit,” *Stories for the Heart* compiled by Alice Gray (Sisters Oregon: Multnomah Books, 1996) p. 39-40.