



WEEK 1

SERMON GUIDE

W A I T L I S T E D

THE BIG IDEA

God has a plan, but we might have to wait for it.

THE BIBLE

Genesis 12:1-3, 15:1-6, 16:1-6; Proverbs 3:5-7; Lamentations 3:25-26

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

QUESTION | What do you hate waiting for?

- For the next few weeks, we're going to be talking a lot about waiting . . . and waiting . . . and waiting.
- **What's something you hate waiting for?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give a few students a chance to share with the group and then share a response of your own.

IMAGE | Things You Need to Wait For

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Show a few images on screen of things you might need to wait for, like . . .
 - A ride at an amusement park
 - Concert tickets
 - Christmas morning
 - The "typing" icon when someone is sending you a message
 - Graduation day
 - Your coffee order
 - A vacation
- Sometimes waiting can feel like an eternity – especially when it is something we really want!

VIDEO | A Clip from "Magic for Humans"

- Has anyone ever heard of the Stanford marshmallow experiment? It's an experiment from the 1970s that studied delayed gratification. Here's how it worked.

- A kid was given a marshmallow.
- They were told they could eat the marshmallow, but if they waited and didn't eat the marshmallow immediately, they could have two marshmallows later.
- The kids in the experiment were then tracked over the course of years to see what kinds of decisions they made as they got older.
- The goal was to see if kids who waited for the second marshmallow had better lives and made better decisions than the kids who couldn't wait.
- The experiment had mixed results and its conclusions are pretty hotly debated, but it's so well known that it's often remixed and parodied.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Play [this video clip](#) from "Magic for Humans" featuring a variation of the Stanford marshmallow experiment.
- So what do you think . . .
 - **Could you have waited for the second marshmallow?**
 - **If marshmallows aren't your thing, which snack would have made this experiment really difficult for you?**
- I told you the conclusions of this experiment were controversial. Let me tell you why.
 - The designers of the original study thought they had things figured out. When a kid waited for a second marshmallow, they believed it was because that kid had great self control and would grow up to make better decisions and have a more successful life.
 - But in later versions of the experiment, something important was discovered. Many kids in the study ate the first marshmallow — not because they were impatient, but because they didn't believe the strange adult in the room would follow through on their promise to give them a second marshmallow later.
 - For many of the kids in the study, their decision not to wait for the second marshmallow wasn't based on a lack of self control, but on a lack of trust.
- Has anyone ever made you a promise that you then had to wait for? Maybe they promised to give you something, do something for you, help you with something, or simply show up and spend time with you.
 - At first, the waiting is kind of fun, right? While you wait, the anticipation builds because, when the waiting is finally over, you know you're going to get the thing you've been waiting for.
 - But what happens when that promise gets delayed? And delayed again? And again? And again? Soon, you start to wonder if it's ever going to happen at all, or if you should just give up hope.
 - It's a feeling a lot of us can identify with — and for some of us, it's because we've been waiting on God.

MUSIC | A Sound Byte from "Wait For It" (Hamilton)

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** The song "Wait for It" from Hamilton is not appropriate or relevant to play in its entirety, but this week of teaching will use the phrase "wait for it" often. Try pulling a two-second clip of [the phrase "wait for it"](#) from this song and playing it throughout your teaching time when you say the phrase. We've bolded it a few times in your outline to help you find it easily.

- In our lives and our faith, there are a lot of things we wish would happen instantly. There are some promised we want to be fulfilled right away. But instead, we have to **wait for it**.

SO WHAT? *Why does it matter to God and to us?*

STORY | Waiting On A Promise

- Waiting on a promise places us somewhere between “now” and “not yet.” While we wait, a lot can happen. We might . . .
 - Get frustrated.
 - Ask questions.
 - Wonder if the person who made the promise can really be trusted.
 - Be tempted to give up hope.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a personal story (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time you had to wait on God to fulfill a promise. This might be a promise that was unique to your situation (like a life event, big decision, or something you were praying for), or it might be the promise of something more universal (like healing, hope, deliverance, or God’s presence). Either way, share what was promised and how it felt to wait for that promise to be fulfilled. Don’t focus on the fulfillment of the promise – instead, focus on what you experienced during the waiting.*
- When we’re waiting on God to fulfill a promise, we might wonder . . .
 - Can God really be trusted?
 - Does God actually care?
 - Can God even see me?
 - If God really loves me, why do I have to **wait so long for it?**
- If you feel like you’re waiting on God right now, the good news is that you’re not alone. The Bible is filled with stories of people who had to wait on God for a long time.

VIDEO | “How to Read the Bible: Character” (The Bible Project)

- For the next few weeks, we’re going to explore four stories from Scripture about people who had to wait on God.
 - If you didn’t grow up going to church, these stories and characters might be brand new to you! Don’t worry – we’ll catch you up.
 - If you grew up going to church, you may have heard these stories as a kid – but that doesn’t mean you really know them. We often tell simplified versions of these stories to kids, but as we get older we need to revisit these stories. The older you get, the easier it is to see these stories are more interesting, complex, and full of tension than we may have realized when we were little.
- Before we check out our first story of this series, let’s take a minute to learn about how and why the Bible includes these kinds of stories.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Watch [this video](#) from *The Bible Project*.
- “Most Biblical stories highlight the moments when characters fail and come to the end of themselves.” Today, we’ll see how an important biblical figure named Abram waited on God, then gave up waiting on God, and eventually learned something vital about God’s character.

SCRIPTURE | Genesis 12:1-3

- Abram (later named Abraham) is known as the “father” of Judaism and Christianity. He’s the guy God worked with thousands of years ago in order to set a huge plan and promise in motion.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Genesis 12:1-3.*
- Abram was an ordinary guy, but this wasn’t an ordinary promise.
 - **This was a big promise for Abram.** In those times, having children was seen as a sign of God’s blessing. So when God promised Abram a son, it was one of the greatest promises that Abram could have received.
 - **This was also a big promise for the world.** God promised to make Abram’s descendants God’s special, chosen people – the people through whom God would work and be revealed in the world.
- But there was a problem. Abram didn’t have any descendants. His wife Sarai was unable to have any children and they were both pretty old!

SCRIPTURE | Genesis 15:1-6

- Abram and Sarai obeyed God by packing up their lives and hitting the road. But that promise about babies? That was hard for them to trust.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Genesis 15:1-6.*
- Abram was stuck waiting to receive what God had promised. He didn’t have a timeline or a plan – just a promise. He was officially waitlisted.

POLL | What would you be thinking?

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Share a few questions that Abram and Sarai might have been asking while waiting on God and ask students to vote on the questions they most identify with, like . . .*
 - *What’s taking so long?*
 - *Did I hear God correctly?*
 - *Is there something else I need to do?*
 - *Does God need my help to make this happen?*

SCRIPTURE | Genesis 16:1-6

- After ten years of waiting for a promise from a God they were still learning to trust, I’m sure Abram and Sarai felt discouraged and impatient. Discouragement can lead to doubt, and doubt can make us do questionable things sometimes – like take matters into our own hands.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Genesis 16:1-6.*
- Remember how we said the Bible tells us about people who failed in big ways, and that you shouldn’t necessarily imitate the actions of biblical figures? Yeah, this would be one of those times. We’re talking . . .
 - Disobedience.
 - Lack of trust.
 - Mistreating Hagar.

- And, oh yeah — that whole sleeping-with-an-enslaved-woman-in-order-to-have-a-baby thing.
- (See? I told you these stories were more complicated and less kid-friendly than you may have thought.)
- But you know what? I get it! I don't know that Sarai was *trying* to disobey God. She probably had good intentions.
 - She likely thought, "Well, I'm too old to have a baby. It doesn't make sense for God to use me, so maybe God's waiting on me to come up with another plan."
 - Sarai may have thought was just helping God out, but when her plan came to fruition, it didn't only end in a baby. It ended in jealousy. When Hagar became pregnant with a son named Ishmael, Sarai struggled with jealousy, and that jealousy led to her cruelty toward Hagar.
 - Ultimately, Sarai's plan backfired. God had promised her tons of marshmallows (I mean, descendants), but she didn't trust God would come through on that promise.

SCRIPTURE | Genesis 17:1-21

- After 25 years of waiting for God's plan to come to pass, Sarah gave birth to Isaac, their promised son! But here's what's really amazing. God didn't only fulfill the promise made to Abram and Sarai — God even showed them grace by blessing the son Abram had fathered in disobedience.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read or summarize Genesis 17:1-21.*
- God could have punished or abandoned Abram and Sarai (I mean, Abraham and Sarah), but instead God covered them in grace. It's kind of like they ate their first marshmallow, but God gave them two more anyway.
- The Bible doesn't spell out every detail for us in this story. It leaves room for us to ask questions and wonder. So I wonder . . .
 - Like those kids in the marshmallow experiment, did God understand that Abram and Sarai's disobedience wasn't because of a lack of self control? Did God see it was because they weren't sure if God could be trusted?
 - Is that why God chose to show them grace instead of judgment — because what they really needed wasn't punishment but assurance that God could be trusted?

SCRIPTURE | Proverbs 3:5-7

- I don't know what promises you're waiting on God to fulfill right now, or which promises you'll need to wait for in the future, but here's what I do know: God can be trusted.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Proverbs 3:5-7.*
- Like Abraham and Sarah, who waited for years for God to give them a child, here's the message you and I often need to hear: **God has a plan, but we might have to wait for it.**

NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?*

VIDEO | A Creation In Progress

- When God makes a promise, the plan God has in mind is better than anything you or I could imagine, but sometimes it's difficult to see where things are headed while we wait for that plan to be completed. We might think we know what's best or what's next, but we often have no idea.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Play a time-lapsed video of a creation in progress with an unpredictable ending, like one of the clips from [this weird collection of recipes](#).*
- God's plans and promises are a lot better than the plans that video-creator had in mind, but we often have to wait for what God has in mind.

OBJECT LESSON | Hourglasses

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, order enough [pocket-sized hourglasses](#) for each student. Print the stickers provided in your Week 1 folder onto [3/4" circular labels](#) and place them on the ends of each hourglass so one end says "God has a plan," and the other says, "Wait for it." You may also want to have a [large hourglass](#) for yourself that you hold and turn as you teach.*
- So what are you waiting for?
 - Something to change in your life?
 - Something to change in your heart?
 - A new opportunity?
 - A prayer to be answered?
 - A problem to be solved?
- Waiting is often difficult and it usually goes on for much longer than we'd prefer. But here's what we can learn from the story of Abraham and Sarah: while we're waiting . . .
 - God can be trusted.
 - We don't have to figure it all out.
 - God knows the future better than we do.
 - God's plans are better than anything we can imagine.
 - Even when we get tired of waiting, God never gets tired of being gracious and compassionate toward us.
- No matter what you're waiting for, I hope this hourglass is a reminder to you that while you wait, God can be trusted. The same God who was so patient, gracious, and trustworthy to Abraham and Sarah is patient, gracious, and trustworthy to you and me.
- We won't always know why God wants us to wait or how long we'll need to continue waiting, but we know **God has a plan, even if we have to wait for it.**