

**We Have This Hope**  
***Hope That Lasts a Lifetime***  
**1 Timothy 6:17**  
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*“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”* That statement, written by the author of Hebrews, is the theme verse for this series on hope, and the anchor is our symbol. In last Monday’s 50 Days of Hope devotional Kathy Stutzman wrote this about anchors, *“An anchor connects a vessel to the seabed to prevent the craft from drifting due to wind or current.”* I love the picture of Jesus as the anchor that holds us fast as the storm winds of life batter us and as the currents of life seek to pull us in their direction.

The author of Hebrews begins the section where our theme verse is found with these words, *“When God made his promise to Abraham...he swore by himself, saying, ‘I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.’ And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.”* Hebrews 6:13-15 Abraham and his wife, Sarah, are the first people we’ll study in our series on hope. Abraham and Sarah’s journey with God is recorded in Genesis chapters 11 through 25. If you’re not familiar with this couple, I encourage you to take 20-30 minutes to read their story.

Abraham’s family, like all of the people around them were polytheists. They worshipped a pantheon of gods and goddesses associated with elements of nature like the sun, moon, earth, sky and rivers. We’re not given details, but somehow God grabbed Abraham’s attention. He called Abraham to leave his people and his country and go to a land God would show him. In the ancient near east, leaving one’s tribe was pretty much a death sentence. The cruel climate and the danger of marauding tribes made going it alone a sure recipe for disaster. In addition to calling Abraham away from his people, God promised to make him into a great nation, through whom all the peoples of the earth would be blessed. God gave Abraham this amazing promise...

I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. Genesis 12:2 & 3

The problem was Abraham and Sarah had no children, and they weren't getting younger. Abraham and Sarah were 75 years and 65 years old respectively, when God made his promise to them and they waited a long time—as in 25 years—for God's promise to be fulfilled, but I'm intrigued by the statement in verse 15 where we're told: ***“And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.”*** Over the next 25 years God appeared to Abraham on numerous occasions and confirmed his promise, but Abraham and Sarah remained childless. In the New Testament the Apostle Paul tells us *“Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness,”* and while Abraham is pointed to as the Father of Faith, Abraham and Sarah's journey of faith and hope was anything but smooth.

It wasn't until Abraham was 100 years old that he and Sarah had a son, whom they named Isaac. 25 years is a long time to wait for any promise to be fulfilled, but it's interminably long for a 75 year old man and a 65 year old woman awaiting the birth of their first child. Abraham and Sarah waited a long time for God's promise to be fulfilled, but to characterize their waiting as *patient*...well, let's just say the author of Hebrews and I have a different definition of patient. Abraham and Sarah's waiting wasn't a smooth, turbulence-free ride. I want to quickly recap some of what Abraham and Sarah did as they quote, “waited patiently” for God's promise to be fulfilled.

- On 2 occasions, as Abraham and Sarah traveled in foreign countries—remember, they were basically alone and vulnerable—Abraham told Sarah to tell anyone who asked that he was her brother. Abraham did this, because he suspected that he might be killed, so beautiful Sarah could be taken as someone's wife. Twice she was taken into a king's court, but each time God intervened and informed the king Sarah was actually Abraham's wife and should be returned to her husband. Abraham put Sarah at great risk to protect himself...not the kind of faith and hope we'd expect from someone renowned for placing their hope in God.
- Another time, after having waited over ten years for God to fulfill his promise of a son, Sarah who was still childless, told her husband, *“The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.”* Abraham followed Sarah's suggestion and her slave, Hagar, bore Abraham a son, named Ishmael. God thanked Abraham and Sarah for helping Him out, since He was obviously struggling to keep his promise. I'm joking. God said He would bless Ishmael, but he reaffirmed that Abraham and Sarah would conceive and birth a son.
- In Genesis chapter 18 we read that 24 years had passed and still there was no Abraham, Jr. One day 3 visitors stopped by Abraham and Sarah's tents. They were divine visitors with a message from God who told Abraham that in a year Sarah would have a son. Sarah was eavesdropping from inside her tent and when she heard the visitor's words she laughed. The Lord asked Abraham why his wife

laughed at this news. He said, *“Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”*

Do you see why I question referring to Abraham and Sarah’s waiting as “patient”? When I think of placing faith and hope in God, I think of rock-solid, steady hope that doesn’t waver, but maybe God has something different in mind? Maybe He extends more grace to us than we naturally extend to ourselves? Abraham and Sarah are held before us as paragons of faith and hope, but they clearly stumbled, slipped, and fell along their faith journey.

Before we go further, I want to point out something important you may not have noticed before. As Paul and other 1<sup>st</sup> Century followers of Jesus were preaching the Gospel, planting churches, and writing letters that now comprise our New Testament, Jews continued to look to Moses as the father of their faith, because it was Moses to whom God gave the Law—containing the 10 Commandments—and the covenant for the Jewish people. Moses was their George Washington, the deliverer who brought God’s people out of Egypt and led them toward the Promised Land where they settled and grew into a nation as the people of God. However, as the Apostle Paul explained that Jesus was God’s promised Messiah, based on God raising Him from the dead, **Paul made a trade. He inserted Abraham into the slot reserved for Moses as the Father of Faith, and to make that switch, Paul emphasized Abraham’s faith in God and his hope in God’s promises.** Up to that point, Moses was viewed as the Jewish Father, because God’s law had come through him, but Paul replaced Moses with Abraham and pointed out that it was only by God’s grace—not our success in keeping the law—that we’re able to place our faith and hope in Jesus. I share that with us, because it’s a critical truth for us to remember: **We tend to judge our faithfulness by how well we do at following God’s Word and keeping his commands. God judges our faithfulness through the lens of his grace and the faith we place in Him as we maintain hope throughout the ups and downs of life.** Abraham and Sarah are such great examples for us, because in spite of their stumbling and slipping and falling, they continued to walk with God in faith and they placed their hope in Him.

I mentioned last week that there are 40 or so verses in the Bible that speak about hope and our kids did a great job in the video of declaring some of those verses for us. Here are four of those verses about hope that are especially apropos for us today.

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” Hebrews 11:1

“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” Romans 15:4

“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.” Hebrews 10:23

“But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” Isaiah 40:31

Hope is for the long haul. It’s not a quick fix. It’s not, *“I accepted Jesus into my heart and therefore I’ll be filled with faith and embrace hope for the rest of my life.”* Hope in Jesus is held onto maintained when the evidence we see points in a different direction; hope is maintained through endurance and meditation on the truths of Scripture; hope requires us to hold on unswervingly; and, hope renews us and provides us with strength.

So far, I’ve emphasized the fickleness of Abraham and Sarah’s faith, but there’s an event, amidst all the ups and downs, that demonstrated their hope was in God and in his faithfulness to fulfill his promise of providing them with a son, so they would be the father and mother of nations. The story I’m referring to is found in Genesis chapter 22. I invite you to follow along as I read verses 1-14.

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied.

Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied. “The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.

"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." Genesis 22:1-14

God's test of Abraham raises a lot of questions I don't have answers for, but I want to focus on the hope in God Abraham displayed. Abraham and Sarah waited 25 years for a baby to be born and now, sometime later—we don't know how old Isaac might have been, but he was old enough to carry a load of wood—God asks Abraham to sacrifice the son who had been promised to them. Child sacrifice was a common practice in the ancient world, but it was a practice God made clear was not to be part of his people's expression of worship. I can't imagine the emotions Abraham must have felt as he walked with his son to the place of sacrifice, but hope is evident several times in Abraham's responses. When Isaac asked where the lamb for the burn sacrifice was, Abraham replied, "*God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering.*" And after God called a halt to the sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham named the place, "*The Lord will provide.*"

Chapter 11 of Hebrews gives us a clearer picture of the faith and hope of Abraham when it says, "*By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God has said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.'* Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death."

Hebrews 11:17-19

The author of Hebrews praises Abraham's faith by pointing out that while Abraham didn't know exactly how God would work in the situation, he was confident God could raise Isaac from the dead, even if he was sacrificed. That's amazing faith and hope! As we consider Abraham's faith in God and the hope he had in God fulfilling his promises, there's another scripture I want us to consider. Near the end of Paul's letter to his protégé Timothy he wrote,

“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.” I Timothy 6:17

Paul instructs Timothy to teach followers of Jesus who are rich not to put their hope in wealth, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. In other words, don't substitute wealth or things of this world for God as the objects of our hope. Those substitutes—whatever they might be—become idols that we worship in place of God. Going back to Abraham and Sarah, God's test for Abraham was, *“What does your hope rest in...God and his promises or Isaac?”* Isaac was the child of promise—given to Abraham and Sarah miraculously by God—but Abraham and Sarah's hope was in God, not Isaac. And this is where I believe the rubber meets the road for us. Most of us here this morning would readily say, *“My faith and hope is in God,”* and yet, everyday throughout the day, we're faced with the choice, *Will I maintain my hope in God or will I place my hope in other poor substitutes—relationships, wealth, job security, our nation's president or our perceived military might, my comfort ?”* You fill in the blank for yourself.

As we move into our time of response in singing, I want to read again 3 verses I've shared today. I invite you to posture your heart to receive these truths and allow the Holy Spirit to apply them to your life...

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