

GENESIS 12; 15–18; 21

Sarah: Waiting on a God Who Never Wastes Our Wait

Lesson at a glance

Sarah's story stretches over ten chapters and twenty-five years. Almost every woman in the room will see herself somewhere in the long wait. The lesson moves through Sarai's role in the call, the failure of the Hagar plan, the renewal of God's promise, the laughter behind the tent flap, the keeping of the promise, and finally what the New Testament does with Sarah in Hebrews 11, Galatians 4, 1 Peter 3, and Romans 4. The thread that runs through it all is the question God Himself asks in Genesis 18:14: "Is anything too hard for the LORD?"

Goals for this session

First, that each woman would see her own seasons of waiting in Sarah's twenty-five years, and would be helped to trust God's timing where she has been quietly losing patience.

Second, that each woman would recognize her own "Hagar plan," the workaround we reach for when God's timing feels too slow, and would be honest about the long-term damage such workarounds cause.

Third, that each woman would hear God's question, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" applied to her own situation, not as a rebuke but as an invitation.

Fourth, that the group would deepen its trust with one another by hearing each other's waits, named honestly and prayed over.

Preparing to lead

Read all of Genesis 12 to 21 in one sitting earlier in the week. The lesson covers selected passages, but the whole sweep will feed your leading. Read Hebrews 11:11 and 1 Peter 3:1 to 6 alongside.

Pray for each woman by name. Pay particular attention to any woman in your group who has walked through infertility, repeated loss, or a long unanswered prayer. Pray that this week would not be more salt in a wound, but balm.

Memorize Genesis 18:14 ("Is anything too hard for the LORD?"). You will likely use it more than once in the hour.

Sensitive topics in this lesson

Infertility and longing for a child (questions 4, 5, 10, 13). Sarah's story can sit heavily on women who are walking, or have walked, through infertility, miscarriage, the loss of a child, or the long ache of childlessness. Do not skip the lesson, but move tenderly. Let those who want to share share, and let those who need to listen, listen.

Marriages under strain (question 3 on Abram's failure; question 12 on 1 Peter 3). Sarah's husband was not always brave. Some women in the room are living with husbands who fail them. The lesson does not ignore that, and you should not either. Lead with what Scripture says about how godly women live in imperfect marriages.

Workarounds we cannot undo (questions 4, 5). The Hagar plan has consequences that ripple through Genesis and into the present day. Some women in the room are still living with the consequences of a Hagar plan of their own. Make room for that honesty. The gospel is bigger than our worst decisions.

Unanswered prayer (question 13). Be careful not to glibly assure women that their prayer will be answered the way they want. Sarah's was answered. Others in Scripture (Paul's thorn in 2 Corinthians 12; Jeremiah's long ministry of weeping) were not. Our confidence is in God's faithfulness, not in any particular outcome.

Suggested 60- to 75-minute schedule

Five minutes: welcome, gather the group, and re-introduce any names that need it from last week.

Five minutes: open in prayer. Read Genesis 18:9 to 15 aloud.

Five to ten minutes: warm-up. Ask each woman to share the longest she has ever had to wait for something important and how that wait changed her.

Thirty-five to forty minutes: discussion. Choose six or seven questions in advance.

Five to ten minutes: "Your response" reflection (questions 13 and 14). Allow time for women to write before sharing aloud.

Five minutes: closing prayer.

Discussion priorities

If you can only cover a few questions, make sure these are among them: 3 (Abram's failure in Egypt), 4 and 5 (the Hagar plan), 8 (Sarah's laugh and God's question), 11 and 12 (Sarah in Hebrews 11 and 1 Peter 3), and 13 (what each woman is waiting on).

Notes on key questions

Question 3. Abram's plan to pass Sarai off as his sister put her in real danger. The text records this without comment, but it does matter that even faithful men can fail their wives in the moments their

wives most need bravery. Encourage the women to be honest about the disappointment, without slipping into husband-bashing. The bigger point is in the For Thought and Discussion box: God can keep His promises in spite of human failure (Romans 8:28).

Questions 4 and 5. The Hagar plan is the most pastorally rich part of the lesson. Sarai's logic was culturally reasonable in her day, but it skipped over the God who had personally promised her a child. Help the women name the pressures that lead us to reach for workarounds: cultural expectation, internal disappointment, the loss of dignity that childlessness brought in that culture (and that other unmet hopes bring in ours). The consequences in 16:4 to 6 are immediate and ugly. Make sure the application question lands: where am I currently building a Hagar plan?

Question 7. Name changes in Scripture come with new callings. Abram becomes Abraham before he is the father of many; Sarai becomes Sarah while her cradle is still empty. God speaks into us who we will be before our circumstances catch up. This is encouragement for any woman who feels stuck where she is.

Question 8. Sarah's laugh in 18:12 is the laugh of disbelief; Isaac's name ("he laughs") becomes the laugh of joy when she holds the promised son in 21:6. The God who hears the cynical laugh is patient enough to carry her from one to the other. God's question in 18:14 ("Is anything too hard for the LORD?") is one of the great hinge questions in the Bible. Linger here. Invite each woman to silently apply it to the situation she is most afraid about.

Question 11. Hebrews 11:11 says Sarah herself "received power to conceive" because "she considered him faithful who had promised." Her faith was imperfect (the laugh in 18:12 makes that plain), but it rested on a faithful God. Help the women see that Scripture's standard for "faith" is never sinless certainty, but trust in a trustworthy God, even through doubts.

Question 12. 1 Peter 3:1 to 6 is sometimes read flatly as a call to passivity. Note that Peter calls Sarah's daughters those who "do good and do not fear anything that is frightening." Quiet and gentle in Peter's vocabulary is not the same as weak. Sarah ran a sizable household, traveled across the ancient Near East, and held her own. Be careful not to let this question slide into a cultural argument; let Peter describe his own vision in his own words.

Question 13. Personal response. Do not steer toward a "right" answer. Give the women time to write before sharing. Some women may tear up; that is fine. After the sharing, pray Genesis 18:14 over each named situation by name.

About the Study Skills in this lesson

Two Study Skills appear in Lesson 2. The first, Comparing Translations, will pay dividends for the rest of the study. Encourage each woman to bring at least one second translation to the table when she studies. The second, How the New Testament Uses the Old, sets up a habit the women will need every week. Take a moment to explain that the Bible is one story, and that the NT does not invent a new religion; it unfolds what the OT had been pointing toward.

A suggested closing prayer

Pray your own prayer. The following is a sample if you would like a starting point.

"Father, You are not slow as men count slowness. You kept Your promise to Abraham and Sarah after twenty-five years. Help us to believe that nothing is too hard for You, especially in the places we are most afraid You have forgotten. Teach us to wait without building workarounds. Teach us to laugh, not at Your promises, but at our own fears, once we see them in the light of who You are. Thank You for sending the Offspring promised first to Eve, born centuries later through the line of Sarah, raised on the first day of the week. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."

Looking ahead to Lesson 3

Next week is Hagar, Genesis 16 and 21:8 to 21. This is a shorter but emotionally weighty story. Hagar's experience with Sarai in this week's lesson will set up next week's lesson cleanly. Encourage the women to read both passages carefully, and to read Galatians 4:21 to 31 as well.