

Unlikely Heroes: Sarah

By Brian Flewelling

This is week two of our Unlikely Heroes series. It can be shocking to realize that God can have grace for someone and continue to use someone as dysfunctional as Samson. Pastor Brian shared a beautiful life illustration about kneeling down for a hug in his pressed suit and his daughter who had just been making whoopee pies out of mud in the front yard sprinting into his arms.

The Bible is brutally honest about mud in the lives of men and women that claimed to be followers of God. They did a lot of things wrong, and the scriptures don't edit that out. The scriptures don't try to whitewash their flaws or hide them behind the bushes.

Already, simply because these stories are included in the Bible, we've got a life lesson here.

What makes us believers is (is not that we are perfect) that our life direction is pointed in the right direction.

My heart and my life is on a journey to love Jesus and become like him. I'm not proud of my mistakes. I don't want to do that. I've got these habits I'm working through. But it's a part of the journey of growing up. When we fall, we get up, we don't assassinate one another. We dust ourselves off. We don't try to hide it in the bushes. We're not proud of it. But we repent of it. We learn from it, and we strengthen each other in community.

The Bible shares the mistakes of our heroes so that we learn from them.

Abraham and Sarah

Today we're going to learn a very important lesson from a failure in the life of Abraham's wife Sarah. Sarah went through a test that every person in this room will walk through, at one time or another.

If we're not careful, your response to your test can cause someone else's duress. When Jesus went through his test, people were blessed. I do confess that your test can bless instead of oppress. So let the caress of Jesus possess you so that you can address your mess with success. That might take a moment to digest.

Read Genesis 16:1-6

Genesis 16 is the first up close and personal picture that we get of Sarah. She's now 75 years old.

The Early Years, Qualities of Sarah

- Sarah's a strong woman. She and her husband were following a call from God to leave their home in Mesopotamia. That required faith. They left their support structure. Everything they knew. The most sophisticated civilization on earth.
- Some time later, at age 65, the Bible says
[The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land."](#) **Genesis 12:7**

- After 50 years of infertility, Sarah must have felt that promise was an answer to her prayers as well as Abrahams.
- As a woman struggling with infertility for 50 years, it would have taken courage to open your heart to hope again.
- Sarah would have carried the disgrace and the gossip of the entire community. As far as they were concerned, barren women were curse by, God had turned his back on her. She must have done something to deserve it. Maybe even those doubts.
- Sarah had to live with a significant wound she received from her husband. Her husband violated a foundational trust in their marriage. Every woman longs to feel protected and guarded and fought over by their husband. Abraham had a moment of weakness. Men we have our moments of weakness. Abraham had his moment of weakness. He uses his wife to shield himself. He tells the powerful Pharaoh “she’s my sister” instead of his wife, exposed her to the sexual conquest of this godless ruler. Abraham practically gave her away to protect himself. Sarah had to deal with that.

At 65 years old God promised Sarah she would have a child. Tentative exhilaration.
But then 7,8,9,10 years passed

Verse 1

Now Sarah, Abraham’s wife, had born him no children.

Sarah begins to feel...

- passed over; Forgotten; and that slow empty aching begins to settle into her heart.
- The dream they had dreamed, and then lost, and then dreamed a second time seemed to be slipping through their fingers.
- This God seems to be failing them just like the rest of them.

It takes courage to cling to God’s promises (when all the evidence points to contrary)

It takes courage to keep hope alive, and risk a broken heart.

I wonder if the Psalmist wasn’t thinking of Sarah when he wrote:

My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life. Psalm 119:50

It takes courage. Don’t grow weary.

Verse 2

- In verse 2 Sarah has come to the end of herself, and realizes she doesn’t have what it takes.
- That’s the point isn’t church. Isn’t God always showing us our need for him.
- Isn’t he always pushing us past our limits, out of our control, where only He is the answer. Testing us at higher levels. More difficult summits.
- We want to be in control. But he is trying to teach us that we can’t be.
- **Trust in the Lord with all of your heart and lean not on your own understanding... Proverbs 3:5**
- The only way he can birth a miracle is to push us past the natural.
- Sarah thinks she’s doing a selfless act by helping her husband. She’s sending in a pinch hitter.

Verse 4

- He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress.
- Hagar despises Sarah. “despise” disdain. This young outsider starts getting cocky. She becomes dismissive of Sarah. As if she’s stepping up to take Sarah’s place. As if Sarah the faithful, is old and used and unusable. “Move out of the way Sarah. There’s others of us that can do a better job.”
- How hard this must have been for Sarah, this dear woman, who has been faithful for all of these years.
- For 60 years she’s folded his laundry, she’s made his favorite meals.
- They have so much history together. They’ve traveled together.
- They shared so many quiet meals together.
- Nobody knows him like she knows him. And they’ve worked through their tensions.
- This cocky young outsider treats the wife of 60 years with a, “Move over Sarah and make room...”

Hardship:

- This is the moment of her test. There are defining moments in life. Life-crisis moments.
- Moments when the Hardships are so loud they knock you to the ground. They are abusive and painful. They leave you feeling stripped of your defenses and vulnerable.
- When your family tapestry starts unraveling.
- When your life dreams disintegrate.
- When your financial security evaporates.
- When you get the medical report and you have to call a family meeting...
- She has reached a breaking point. I imagine she feels, her whole identity, her worth, her life history teetering uncertainly in front of her.
- The pressure, the years of pain. The feeling of helplessness. She’s tried to fix it, and she’s made it worse. She’s tried to control it. It slips through her fingers. She’s tried to help God out.

We think the test is about getting through the circumstance. Succeeding. Not giving up. It’s about becoming more than conquerors right?

Wrong, the hardship is just the heat that exposes the heart.

The test is, where does my heart turn?

Where do I find my identity and security?

- Crisis *can* turn you against God, and against the people you love.
- In verse 5 Sarah accuses Abraham.
- “You did this to me.” “You are responsible for this...”
- In Verse 6 Sarah mistreated Hagar; so she fled.
- I can’t imagine what went down between them, but it was bad enough to cause a pregnant woman to start hitchhiking home to Egypt through 200 miles of some of the most desolate wilderness on earth. **Slide: of Sinai Peninsula**

- Poor Sarah, Faithful Sarah. Strong Sarah. She's trying so hard. She doesn't realize she's always kept a plan B in her pocket. Trust in the Lord...but keep a plan B. And now that plan B has destroyed her secret dream, her hope, her identity.
- I think Sarah felt lonely. Felt abandon.
- When God doesn't come through the way you expected him. When people let you down.
 - God how could you let this happen to me?
 - Where were you? I was there, you didn't show up.
 - Why didn't things happen when I prayed?

It takes courage to cling to God's character.

To not try to figure him out.

It's easy, when things are going well, to say "Trust in the Lord with all of your heart..."

Trust in the Lord will only come out in the Tests of the Lord. And the test is exactly when things are not going well.

- What blessings have become more of a comfort to me than God.
- What strengths has he given me that I learned to trust more than him
- What dreams do I have that I've treasured more than God.
- The tests of God are to lay our Isaac's on the altar.

So what's the answer? But how do I deal with this turmoil and stress and pressure inside?

The Apostle Paul

2 Corinthians 12:8-10

Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

The answer is not to escape the hardship, but to trust God through it.

When you are in the place of testing, go low.

Lay your Isaac's on the altar.

God is examining your heart. Look for Jesus. Don't cling to pride. Or your dreams. Or your career. Or anything else you love or identify with.

Allow yourself to be broken. Cling to Jesus. **It Takes Courage to Cling to Jesus in Brokenness.**

This is an ancient truth.

- I embrace my humiliation to inherit his glory.
- I embrace my disgrace to inherit his honor.
- I embrace my death to inherit his life. I embrace my weakness to inherit his power.



Discussion Questions:

April 30th 2017

Unlikely Heroes: Sarah

Message by Pastor Brian Flewelling

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. On Sunday Pastor Brian said, "It takes courage to cling to God's promises. It takes courage to keep hope alive, and risk a broken heart."
 - What is a dream you've had that you are on track to fulfilling?
 - Is there a promise that you've watched God fulfill after a period of delay?
 - Is there a promise you're still clinging to that has yet to be fulfilled?
2. **Read Genesis 16:1-6; then read Genesis 18:9-15**
 - If you were to rate Sarah's response to the visitor in 18:12-15 on a scale of 1-10 (1 being worse) how well do you think she responded to God's announcement?
 - What emotions do you imagine she was feeling that made her laugh and say "*after I am worn out...will I now have this pleasure?*"
 - The visitor's response, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" seems to indicate Sarah's lack of belief. Is there a way to tell when we've heard God correctly and just need to wait (regardless of how drastic it looks), and when we haven't heard God correctly and waiting isn't going to help?
 - In Genesis 16 we see Sarah trying to help God fulfill His promise. Once we are certain of God's promise, how do we discern when God wants us to trust and wait on the miraculous, and when He wants us to be reasonable and work hard towards the fulfillment of the promise? In other words, when does God want us to "be still" and when should we "act"!
3. Getting through your hardship is not the test. The test is, where does your heart turn to find identity and security? It's so hard to discern how much you trust God. That's why He tests us; so that we can see how well we trust Him or not.
 - Do you have a testimony of a life-crisis moment that tested your heart? On a scale of 1-10 how well do you think you responded and trusted in God?
 - What could you learn from that test in order to trust God more?
 - What do you think are some of the indicators that you're clinging to something else for security and identity instead of God?
4. Is it encouraging or discouraging for you to know that even the greatest heroes in the Bible were deeply flawed throughout their life journey? Why?

Ministry: [15 min]

Take some time for the group to meditate on Psalm 37:3-7 together. The goal of this exercise is to let the truth of God's commands and promises sink deeply into our hearts. Have everyone start in a

posture of listening-prayer and meditation. Tell them to visualize God himself saying these words directly to them. Then begin by the leader reading one phrase at a time, "*Trust in the Lord and do good*" pausing for about a minute to allow people to meditate on the truth of what God is saying. Then move onto the next phrase until you have completed all five verses.

When you have finished with the verse 7 wrap up with a prayer. Then take some time to discuss what each person experienced during the time of prayer and meditation. What was most meaningful? What did God speak to them specifically?