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Death to Self

When I first realized that I was called to preach it was such an exciting day for me. At that time in my life I was doing my best to serve God and I was searching for direction. I wasn't raised in church, so the idea of becoming a preacher seemed so foreign to my mind. I didn't know how I was get to the place that I was going to do what God called me to do. However, when He spoke to me that I was called into ministry, I had a hope that He could also help me to get there. The promise that He made with me that day was that He would walk with me into my calling if I followed Him.

He asked me to follow Him down a path that would end in me fulfilling the calling that He gave me. When we start to follow God it is always exciting and filled with such hope. Yet as time goes by, it can seem that it is such a long path from the moment we start, to the finish. There are times when it feels like God has left us in those moments, and it can feel lonely and hopeless. The distance that we travel from when God gives us a dream, to when that dream comes to pass, can seem never ending.

Most believers give up before God has a chance to finish what He has started. As I look at the body of Christ today I find many people have lost their way and have given up on truly trusting God to lead them. In Genesis 12:2 God made a promise to Abram and he was 75 years old, *"I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing."* Abram and his wife Sarai had already tried unsuccessfully to have children their whole life but now they had a promise from God.

If Abram was at all like me, then I am sure that he was expecting Sarai to become pregnant very soon - after all she was already 65 years old. After **ten years** of trying and trusting in the word that was spoken to him nothing had happened. This is the same place on the path that many Christians struggle with just as Abram and Sarai did. When nothing seems to change, we can lose our hope, and struggle with believing that God is still leading us.

This is what happened to Abram and Sarai. They stopped believing that God was going to make things come to pass and they took the matter into their own hands. Geneses 16:1-4, *"Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; so she said to Abram, 'The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.' Abram agreed to what Sarai said. So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. He slept with Hagar, and she conceived."*

In that day if you owned a slave then you also owned everything that was part of that slave, including the children. So it made sense to them that this must be how God wanted to bring about His promise of a child. Many of God's children today are striving to make God's calling to them come to pass by using their own ability and strength and they are doing the exact same thing that Abram and Sarai did. Lack of hope, and lack of patience, will push us to striving into our own wisdom, and take us off of the path that God has us on.

All of my Christian life I have heard about Ishmael the son of Abram and his wife's servant. I was told to always watch out because the devil will always send an Ishmael before an Isaac can be born. There is much truth in this statement that we must be careful to avoid Ishmael at all cost. However, as I studied these scriptures it is very clear about who created Ishmael and it was not the devil. It was Abram and Sarai's lack of faith that caused them to create an Ishmael. It was man's attempt to make the promise of God come to pass with man's plans and ability. If you notice with me at the age of 86 years old Abram still had the natural ability to make a child but Sarai did not.

I also want you to notice that Abram believed that Ishmael was the answer to God's promise even though it brought strife into his family. For thirteen years he thought that God's promise was being fulfilled through his plan, and yet it was not true. Many believers today are striving and trying to please God with their good works and good intentions, but yet it still is only an Ishmael to God. In Galatians 4:22-23 it says, *"For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise."*

God changed the names of Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah, and once again began to speak to them about the promise of being the father of many nations. At this time Abraham was puzzled because he was almost 100 years old now and his wife was almost 90 years old. He even asked God, *"If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!"* but God would not accept Ishmael. He wanted an Isaac; a son born of faith and not of the flesh. It's amazing how he thought that the promise of God was fulfilled but it was not. How many believers are in the same deception as they work tirelessly in their own ability to please God?

Why did God wait until Abraham was 100 years old to fulfill the promise He made all those years earlier you might ask. I have a simple answer for that. It was because He was waiting for Abraham to lose his natural ability to produce by his flesh. He even laughed at God and said, *"Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?"* It was now impossible for man to make the promise of God come to pass and there was only one true way for Abraham to bring a child into this world and it was by Faith.

Abraham's path took many years to complete because it took that long for him to lose his ability to fulfill God's promise in his own flesh. It was after he had no possible way of making it happen that God was able to accomplish what He wanted by faith. I believe that this is the same path that the Lord has for you and for me. It may seem that God's promise to you is taking too long, and it may seem that He has abandoned you on the very path that He has placed you on.

God believes in you and I know that you believe in Him, that is why you started on the path of obedience. Don't give up, don't stop, and don't quit praying. There are incredible things in your future, promises that can only be accomplished by faith in Him. As your flesh loses its abilities, be encouraged that you are getting closer to that promise being fulfilled in your life. God is amazing and He believes in you. Keep trusting in Him.

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