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How To Keep On Believing

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Have you ever been in a hurry to have something happen but God didn't seem to be in a hurry to make it happen? That's called being in **God's waiting place** and it's one of the most difficult places to be.' It's when you want something to happen but it's beyond your control to make it happen.' You keep praying for it to happen but it doesn't happen. There's a temptation when you're in God's waiting place to think that God has somehow messed up and He's forgotten you.' But that's never the case.' The Bible says, *'God does everything just right and on time, but people can never completely understand what He's doing.'* (Ecclesiastes 3:1 MESSAGE)'' When we think God has forgotten us, it's just because we don't understand what He's doing.' We wish he'd hurry up.' It's hard to keep on believing when you're in God's waiting place.' How do you do that?' How do you keep on believing while you're waiting on God?

There's a guy in the Bible named Abraham.' You may remember Abraham.' He had to wait on God for a long, long time.' God gave Abraham a promise.' God said *'Abraham, you're going to be the father of a great nation.'* Then God made Abraham wait until he was 100 years old before his son, Isaac was born.' That's a long time to wait on God.' What do you do while you're waiting on God?' What do you do to keep on believing?' The Bible teaches us there are **six phases to faith**. 'Knowing these phases will help us understand why God is taking so long.'

The FIRST of the PHASES OF FAITH is the DREAM PHASE.' It starts with an idea, an ambition; a goal.' God gives you a dream.' He puts the desire into your heart.' That's what happened to Abraham. When he was 75 years old God gave him a dream.' God said, *'Abraham, I am going to make you the father of a great nation.'* - Genesis 12:1-3'

The SECOND PHASE is the DECISION PHASE.' It starts when you make a conscious decision to trust God to fulfill the dream He's given you.' It's when you say, 'Ok God, I'll seek after your dream rather than mine.' 'It's when we take action to obey God.' It's when we make a move to do what God tells us to do. The Bible says, *'So Abraham left [where he was living] as the Lord had told him; [and] he set out for Haran.'* 'Genesis 12:4'

Once you decide to trust God, you enter **PHASE THREE** ' the **DELAY PHASE**.' That's when the real waiting begins.' Any dream God gives is never fulfilled instantly.' He has to prepare you to receive the dream.' He has to first help you to grow into the person who can handle the dream.' Eleven years after God gave Abraham the dream, Abraham was still waiting for his wife to have a child.' Abraham was getting old.' He was 86 now and the Bible says, '*Sarah still had not borne any children.*' *Genesis 16:1*' 'Can you imagine how discouraging this must have been for Abraham and Sarah?' They were tempted to doubt; tempted to despair; tempted to take things into their own hands.' That's exactly what Abraham did.' Abraham took his maidservant and had a son to her.' He named him Ishmael. God said, '**No, Abraham.**' **That's not the dream I gave you.**' **Ishmael is not the one.**' **You have to wait.**' It's a real temptation to take things into your own hands when you're waiting on God.

The **FOURTH PHASE of faith is the DIFFICULTY PHASE.** Not only does God make you wait, but He also lets you experience some problems while you're waiting.' Isn't that fun?' It's when things go from bad to worse and finally to impossible.' At age 99 Abraham still didn't have a son to Sarah.' Abraham asks God, '*How can a son be born to a man my age?*'" Maybe it wouldn't have been so bad if God hadn't changed Abraham's name from Abram to Abraham, which means, '**Father of a great nation.**'" Can you imagine Abraham meeting someone on the street and having the conversation go like this: 'So, what's your name?' 'Father of Many.'" 'Oh really?' How many children do you have?' 'Well, none yet, but I'm going to.' 'Really?' How old are you?' '99.'" 'That would have been embarrassing.'" Abraham's faith was really being tested. 'Our faith will really be tested in this phase too.

Eventually God fulfills His promise and Sarah gets pregnant.' By the time the child is born Abraham is 100 years old and Sarah is 90.' God made them name the child, Isaac, which means 'laughter' because Sarah laughed when God told her she was with child.' Sarah laughed because she didn't believe God and God made her name the boy 'Laughter' to remind her of what a mistake it is to doubt God.'

After Isaac was born things were looking pretty good.' Then came the most difficult PHASE of all ' **THE DEAD-END PHASE.** It's the phase where God appears to snatch your dream away from you by leading you down a dead end path.' God commanded Abraham, '*Take your only son, the one you love, to Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering.*' (Genesis 21:1-6, 22:1-12)' Abraham must have been thinking, '*How can this be happening to me?*'"

How do you know you're in the DEAD-END PHASE?' It's when you feel completely hopeless.' Some of you may be feeling you're in the dead end phase right now.' Maybe you're experiencing a dead end with your finances, or your career, or a relationship, or with your health or the health of a loved one.' Maybe you're asking, 'Lord, why is this happening to me?'" Everything seems to be spiraling out of control in your life.' If that's where you are then, CONGRATULATIONS!' God has brought you to the place where you can enter the FINAL PHASE ' THE DELIVERANCE PHASE.' God stopped Abraham from slaying his son.' He said, '*Don't hurt the boy I have provided a lamb [for the sacrifice].*' (Genesis 22:12-14)'

There's something you should know: the greater the dead-end, the greater the deliverance; the more hopeless the situation, the more awesome the miracle.' When deliverance follows the dead end phase, there's no doubt where the deliverance is coming from.' When the situation is so hopeless, it becomes crystal clear who to give the credit to for fulfilling the dream. '

God will take us through these **six phases of faith** over and over again in our lifetime.’ That’s how God keeps us growing in our faith.’ Some of you are in the dream phase.’ You’re getting an idea of what God wants to do through you.’ Some of you are in the delay phase or the difficulty phase or even the dead-end phase. ’Some of you are in the deliverance phase and we can recognize you by the smile on your face.’

Everyone has experienced waiting on God. ’How do you keep on believing when you’re waiting on God?’ How do you keep the faith?

FIRST, REMEMBER WHAT GOD CAN DO.’ The situation you’re in may be out of your control, but it is never out of God’s control.’ Don’t focus on what you CAN’T do but on what God CAN do.’ God can do anything.’ Abraham kept on believing by remembering what God can do.’ The Bible says, *’Abraham believed in God who gives life to the dead and who creates something out of nothing.’* (Romans 4:17) ’That’s the definition of a miracle.’ A miracle is when God gives life to something that is dead or creates something out of nothing.’ Folks, God is still in the business of doing miracles.’ Jesus said, *’Anything is possible if you have faith.’* ’Why?’ - Because nothing is impossible for God.’ He can bring life to what is dead and He can create something out of nothing.’

Abraham kept on believing because he put his faith in God, not in himself.' He didn't put his faith in the power of positive thinking.' Positive thinking can only help in situations where you have some control.' He didn't put his faith in other people. He didn't put his faith in his wealth. He didn't put his faith in anything but GOD.' When you find yourself in the dead-end phase, where you have no control over the situation, the only thing you can do is depend on God, and that's precisely what God wants you to do.' He wants you to depend on Him and Him alone.' When things are out of your control, and most of life really is, God wants you to depend on Him.' He wants you to remember '**What is impossible for man is possible for God.**' (Luke 18:27)' For '**with God all things are possible.**' (Matthew 19:26)

The SECOND thing to do is: RELY ON GOD'S WORD.' If you want to survive God's waiting place then you'll need to rely on God's Word.' That's how you keep the faith 'faith in God who makes Himself known to you in his Word.' In the Bible we find words of encouragement and words of hope.' We find real life examples of people who kept the faith, people like Abraham.' The Bible says, '**When hope was dead within him, Abraham went on hoping in faith. He relied on the word of God.**' Romans 4:18' 'Think about that.' It says, '**When hope was dead within him.**' Have you ever felt like that?' When you do, you've got to rely on God's Word.' That's where you learn what's really important.' In Galatians 5:6 it says, '**The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.**' 'The way to build up your faith is to get into God's Word and learn to rely on His promises.

Abraham came to a dead-end and he turned to God's promises.' The Bible says, '**While God was testing him** (and that's what being in God's waiting place is) **Abraham still trusted in God and His promises so he offered up his son Isaac.**' (Hebrews 11:17)' When Abraham was hiking up Mount Mariah to sacrifice Isaac, his servant asked him, '**Master, where are you going?**' Abraham answered, '**We'll be back.**' He didn't say '**I'll be back.**' He knew God would make a way for Isaac to return with him.' When Isaac asked, '**Father, where is the lamb for the sacrifice?**' Abraham replied, '**God will provide.**' Abraham refused to doubt God.' Instead, He chose to rely on God's Word.' And guess what - God came through for Abraham.' The Bible says, '**Though it seemed Abraham's hope could not be fulfilled, he became the father of many nations exactly as God had promised.**' Romans 4:18 Things are never as bad as they seem if you look at them from God's perspective.' God's Word enables us to see things from His perspective.'

The THIRD thing to do while you're waiting on God is: RECOGNIZE THE FACTS WITHOUT WEAKENING IN YOUR FAITH.' That's what Abraham did.' He faced the fact that he and Sarah were too old to have children but he still chose to trust God.' The Bible says, '**Without weakening in his faith [Abraham] faced the fact that his body was as good as dead and Sarah's womb**

was also dead, yet he did not waver with unbelief.” Faith enables you to face the facts. ‘Faith doesn’t ask you to ignore the facts.’ Faith doesn’t ask you to pretend your problems don’t exist.’ Faith doesn’t ask you to deny reality.’ Faith enables you to face the facts without being discouraged by them.’ Faith is confidence in the character of God.’ He will always keep His promises. ‘Faith enables you to face anything that comes your way knowing God will deliver you.’

Faith is not wishful thinking and it does not deny reality nor is it foolish stubbornness.’ If you’re still waiting for 8 track tapes to make a comeback, let it go.’ If you want things to be the way they were fifty years ago, let it go.’ Grieve deeply if you must but let it go.’ You can’t go back.’ What was back there back then is gone. God is doing something new and he wants to do it through you.

When things aren’t going the way you dreamed they would go, don’t get discouraged.’ Realize that God has a better plan for your life.’ That’s what faith enables you to do - **FACE THE FACTS WITHOUT GETTING DISCOURAGED.**

There is one more thing to do while you're waiting on God. **REJOICE IN ANTICIPATION.** "Joyfully look forward to God's deliverance because it will come.' The Bible says, '*Abraham* *did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.*' *This is why it was credited to him as righteousness.*' (Romans 4:20-21)'" When you thank God for something after it happens and after you receive it, that's gratitude.' When you thank God for something before it happened, that's faith.' Faith enables you to joyfully anticipate God's deliverance.

'There are three kinds of deliverance to anticipate.' There's **circumstantial deliverance** where God intervenes to change the situation around you. There's **personal deliverance** where God changes you ' your heart, your character, and your attitude.' There's **ultimate deliverance** where God takes you home to heaven.' Only in heaven will there be complete deliverance, complete healing, no more sorrow, no more suffering, no more tears and no more sadness.' The apostle Paul encourages us, saying, '**Let your hope keep you joyful, be patient in your troubles, and pray at all times.**'" Romans 12:12