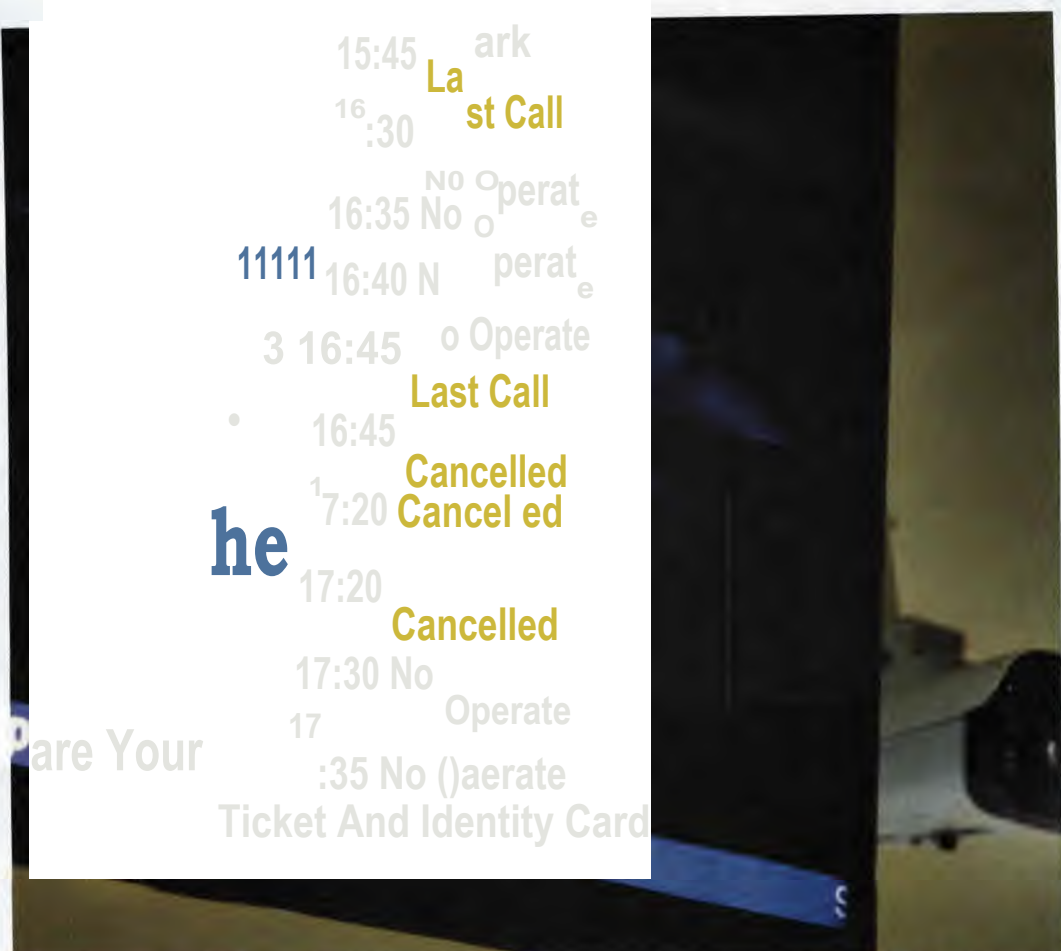


SESSION 4

Confidence in Seasons of Uncertainty



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QUESTION 1:

When have you seen the best-laid plans fall apart?

THE POINT

Trust God when you don't have all the answers.

THE PASSAGE

Genesis 15:1-6,13-16

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

The year 2020 started out pleasantly enough, but it became the unsettling year of uncertainty. It seemed our entire world came to a halt. Theaters, professional sporting arenas, schools, shopping malls, restaurants, and hair salons were among the many businesses that had to close their doors. Even churches stopped meeting in person.

As the pandemic continued to increase across the country, so did the spread of skepticism and division. The news we heard one day seemed to conflict with the news from the day before. It was hard to know what to believe or what would happen next. On top of the deadly virus, we saw 2020 add politics, racial tensions, disagreements over wearing masks, and debates over reopening schools.

The year 2020 created the perfect storm of uncertainty. When things in life seem to be blurry or unstable, how do we respond? Oh, if only our faith were strong enough to overcome the uncertainty of it all! We know Abram as a man of faith, but that faith did not prevent him from experiencing his own season of uncertainty. Let's learn some lessons from the life of Abram.

Genesis 15:1-5

1 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.

2 And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?

3 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.

4 And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.

5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.

Since the time God first called Abram and promised him land, offspring, and blessing, the patriarch had encountered a lot. Abram had endured a trip to Egypt to escape a famine, and then being kicked out of Egypt by Pharaoh. He had successfully managed relational tensions with his nephew, Lot, and he had defeated invading kings.

After all this, things may have seemed a little unclear to Abram. All these events and circumstances didn't seem to be leading to the promises God gave Abram. "After these things," God came to Abram again and spoke to him, saying "Fear not." He reminded Abram that He was his shield. God's divine protection would ensure his prosperity and blessing. "[I am] thy exceeding great reward." But Abram couldn't see it.

Abram only saw the situation right in front of him. "Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?" Since Abram had not yet

received the heir God had promised, he may have been considering a practice that was common in Mesopotamia: an adoption to ensure that he would have an heir. But whether or not Abram was going to adopt Eliezer in the strictest sense of the word, Abram assumed this servant would inherit all he had. However, Abram's assumption was not the method God would use to fulfill His promise.

Uncertainty can have the power to manipulate us and tempt us to take matters into our hands, instead of trusting in the hand of God. When we become overwhelmed with worry, we can foolishly try and attempt to force the hand of God—which never works. Uncertainty can cause us to worry, but worry just makes us blurry. By that, I mean worry can cause us to react irrationally without sound judgment.

QUESTION 2:

How do we determine the difference between worry and legitimate concern?

Uncertainty has a way of making us forgetful. God lovingly corrected and reminded Abram of His promise. Earlier, God had promised Abram, "I will make of thee a great nation" (Gen. 12:2); now He stretched Abram's mind with an impossible math problem to show just how great the nation would be that he would father. Picture Abram squinting his eyes and trying to do the impossible when God told him, "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them." Of course, even counting the stars would miss the point. God wanted Abram to realize that, in spite of how circumstances seemed at the moment, he would have so many descendants—a great nation—they couldn't all be counted. Abram couldn't count them, but God could—and even more so, He would know each one by name.

This was not the first time God gave Abram such a math problem. Earlier, God had given a similar impossible one. "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number

the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered" (13:16). I think of how many times God has to "repeat Himself," reminding me of His promises. He graciously did it with Abram, and He does it graciously with us as well.

QUESTION 3:

What obstacles get in the way of trusting in God?

Genesis 15:6

6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

KEY WORD: Righteousness (15:6)—To be righteous is to measure up to God's standard. Righteousness is credited to a person who trusts in Jesus for forgiveness and salvation.

After God told Abram to count the stars, "he believed in the **LORD**." God did not give Abram any details concerning how He would deliver on the promises, but Abram trusted the word God spoke to him. He believed. We see evidence of trust earlier in Abram's life, as he responded in obedience to God's initial call and promise (Gen. 12:1-4). Abram chose to believe God even when the future seemed uncertain. The one thing that was certain was that Abram chose to trust and believe.

With this act of trust, God "counted it to him for righteousness." The idea behind *counted is* to assign value to something. Abram's belief was valued as righteousness. Abram did not have to do anything to be credited with righteousness except believe. Abram believed God's promise that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars; in turn, God counted that belief as righteousness.

To have righteousness credited to one's account means to be made right with God, to be in a right standing with Him, and to be accepted into a relationship with Him. This was not only a benefit to Abram; it set the entire stage for all humanity to receive the very same benefit.

"Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Rom. 4:23-24).

It's critical that we note that the word used is *believe*, not *behave*. From the time of Abram all the way to the present, the great deceiver has used the deadly trap of a works-based faith to infiltrate and sabotage the hearts of many souls. While 54 percent of Americans acknowledge that faith in Jesus is all that is needed to remove our sin, 52 percent believe we have to do something to earn our salvation.' Human nature is mistakenly drawn to the idea that we need to step in and help fix our sin problem.

If we believe our relationship with God is based solely on our behavior, then our relationship with Him will be constantly filled with uncertainty. *Have I done enough? Have I said enough? Have I repented enough?* For those who think they need to work or contribute to their salvation, Paul said trusting in laws or works makes faith empty and God's promise unnecessary (Rom. 4:14).

Securing salvation on God's promise that we are made right by our faith in Christ alone propels us through other unknowns. Faith provides us with a foundation that is certain and stable. Faith helps give us an eternal perspective to see the world through the eyes of God, so when everything around us seems to be crumbling, we can stand confidently. No matter the outcome, when we trust Christ alone for salvation, we are made right with God and are secure in Him.

QUESTION 4:

What are some things that help us build trust in God?

Genesis 15:13-16

13 And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;

14 And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.

15 And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age.

16 But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.

Almost every time I receive some great news, certain thoughts enter the back of my mind: *It must be too good to be true. What's the catch?* I think I've had enough letdowns over the years that I've become hesitant to get my hopes up. Years ago, I was a lead singer in a band. On one occasion, we were asked to open for a famous band we all admired. The other band members were excited, but I wasn't falling for it. I wouldn't celebrate until we had the final contract signed. Perhaps this was how Abram felt. Abram believed God regarding offspring, but he asked for confirmation regarding the land: "Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" (Gen. 15:8).

God responded to Abram with an oath using animal sacrifices that were to be cut down the middle. Ritual sacrifices to confirm an agreement were not uncommon in the ancient Near East, but this particular sacrifice was uniquely directed by God. In the middle of this oath ritual, Abram fell into a dreadful, deep dark sleep. In that

moment, God gave Abram an idea of what would happen with his descendants. Before Abram's offspring would occupy the promised land, they would be oppressed in slavery for four hundred years in a foreign land. They would inhabit this land, but not before they faced great challenges.

While God confirmed His promise of descendants and land, it was clear the fulfillment of receiving the land would be a long time coming. This was news Abram surely was not expecting. God's timing is not always our timing. It is in these moments when we will truly be tested. In the moments of uncertainty when God's plan and timing do not match up with ours, we have a choice. We can choose to either trust or reject His promise. We will either lift up a fist in anger or lift up a hand of adoration.

Having delivered His word to Abram, God continued with the oath, and He made a covenant with Abram: "behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces" (v. 17). Smoke and fire appear often in Scripture to indicate the presence of God (Ex. 3:2; 14:24; 19:18). As God confirmed His covenant with Abram, He underscored it with a manifestation of His presence. This surely was a comfort for Abram. Fire can be ferocious, consuming all it touches. Fire can also be comforting; it warms us, lights our way, and serves us in a variety of ways, such as cooking food. I would think seeing the fire pot and torch appear would be a fear-inducing sight, but the fear of God also carries with it the comfort of His presence and goodness. "The fear of the **LORD** tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil" (Prov. 19:23).

As a part of a covenant ceremony like this, the ones who walked through the cut animals were responsible for upholding the agreements of the covenant. The reason for passing through the cut animals was a way of saying, "If I fail to uphold to arrangements of our covenant, may the same happen to me." Because Abram was asleep and the Lord alone passed through the animals, the Lord took it upon Himself to uphold the agreements of the covenant. The Lord

was taking sole responsibility for bringing about the promises of the covenant. Abram simply had to believe and trust God.

Things may not occur in the time frame we think they should, but God's timing is always perfect. He is always "right on time." We can be confident in seasons of uncertainty because we do not have to face them alone.

QUESTION 5:

When have you experienced the reliability of God's timing?

ENGAGE

Evaluate yourself by considering how seasons of uncertainty impact your life. For each statement, circle an answer that best reflects your experiences. Then talk with a partner about how you answered.

"The older I get, the more difficult the struggles of life are."

Definitely **Somewhat** **It depends** **Not really**

"My faith and trust in God have matured with my age and experiences."

Definitely **Somewhat** **It depends** **Not really**

"During seasons of uncertainty, my prayer life is more active and I try to rely on God more than my own strength and capabilities."

Definitely **Somewhat** **It depends** **Not really**

"During seasons of uncertainty, I typically reach out to others for prayer and spiritual guidance."

Definitely **Somewhat** **It depends** **Not really**

LIVE IT OUT

We should trust God when we don't have all the answers. Choose one of the following applications:

Look at your hands. Uncertainty has the ability to make us act irrationally and take matters into our hands. Take some time and evaluate where you might need to let go and place something back into the hands of God.

► **Look at the stars.** Uncertainty can make us forgetful. Before the day is over go outside if possible and look up in the sky. Be reminded of the many promises of God that you may have forgotten over time.

► **Look at your faith.** Uncertainty in our faith affects the way we respond to uncertainty in life. Take some time and assess the foundation of your faith. Then share your faith with someone else.



END NOTES

1. Bob Smetana. "Americans Love God and the Bible, Are Fuzzy on the Details," LifeWay Research, September 27, 2016, lifewayresearch.com/2016/09/27/americans-love-god-and-the-bible-are-fuzzy-on-the-details