

How Long Before You Do What You Promised?

A Bible study on waiting, asking God honestly, and refusing to manufacture the promise.

Key idea: Asking God “How long?” is not unbelief. The danger begins when we stop asking God and start answering the question ourselves.

Genesis 16:1 creates the tension

God had promised, but Sarai still had no child.

**Promise real.
Problem still present.**

The promise was not cancelled because the circumstances had not yet changed.

This is the spiritual pressure point in Genesis 16.

“Now Sarai Abram’s wife bare him no children...”

Genesis 16:1

“He that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.”

Genesis 15:4

The Bible gives language for waiting

God's people do ask: "How long?"

**"How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD?
for ever?"**

Psalm 13:1-2

**"O God, how long shall the adversary
reproach?"**

Psalm 74:9-10

**"How long, LORD? wilt thou be angry for
ever?"**

Psalm 79:5

**"How long, LORD? wilt thou hide thyself
for ever?"**

Psalm 89:46

"Return, O LORD, how long?"

Psalm 90:13

Prophets also asked “How long?”

This question is not confined to private struggle.

“O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear!”

Habakkuk 1:2

“O LORD of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem...?”

Zechariah 1:12

Waiting can become a prayer, not a rebellion.

Abram had already brought delay back to God

This is why Genesis 16 is so striking.

“Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?”

Genesis 15:2-3

“Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?”

Genesis 15:8

Before Sarai gave Hagar to Abram, Abram had already shown that it was acceptable to ask God honest questions about the promise.

Genesis 15: asks God

Genesis 16: acts without asking

Not always “How long” — but the same heart

The Bible also teaches us to bring God's word back to Him.

**“Remember the word unto thy servant,
upon which thou hast caused me to
hope.”**

Psalm 119:49

**“Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying,
When wilt thou comfort me?”**

Psalm 119:82

This is a faithful prayer:

“Lord, remember what You promised me.”

Revelation 6:10 — “How long, O Lord?”

Even in apocalyptic vision, the cry for God to act is heard.

**“How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and
avenge our blood...?”**

Revelation 6:10

**This is not a model for personal revenge. It is a cry that God’s holy
justice will finally put evil right.**

**Stephen shows forgiveness toward his killers. Revelation shows that
injustice is not forgotten before God.**

Three faithful questions believers may ask

Asking God is not automatically unbelief.

How long?

When will You act?

What about Your word?

“How long?” — bring the delay to God.

“When will You act?” — confess dependence on God’s timing.

“What about the word You gave me?” — hold God’s promise in prayer.

The danger is not the question. The danger is replacing prayer with our own shortcut.

Genesis 16 warning

Abram and Sarai stopped asking and started answering.

Genesis 15

Abram asks God.

He brings the contradiction
between promise and
circumstance back to the Lord.

Genesis 16

Abram and Sarai act.

They try to produce the promise
by a human arrangement God
did not command.

Main lesson for the study

A simple sentence to carry home.

There is nothing wrong with asking God, “How long?”

The danger begins when we stop asking God and start answering the question ourselves.

Faith waits with God. Impatience tries to help God without asking Him.

Bible study discussion questions

Use these to draw the group into the passage.

- What made Sarai's situation painful in Genesis 16:1?
- Which "How long?" verse best expresses the feeling of delayed promise?
- Why is asking God different from unbelief?
- Where are we tempted to manufacture what God has promised?
- What would it look like to bring the delay back to God this week?

Prayer focus: "Lord, help us to wait without losing faith, and to ask You before we act."