

For This Child I Prayed:
A Pastor's Counsel to Couples Trying to Conceive

"For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him." (1 Samuel 1:27)

The struggle of couples trying to conceive and have children is one of the most difficult seasons of life and marriage. When we might see others around us conceiving much easier, it is hard to not let unfulfillment, jealousy, and bitterness creep into our mind. We know that we are supposed to be content in whatsoever state we are in, but contentment is a great challenge for the barren couple. We wonder why the Lord has not blessed us with the answer to our prayers, and most of the time, we will never receive a perfect answer to that question. Scripture affirms the barren womb is never satisfied, and some women even preferred death to barrenness. This struggle, grief, and burden of soul is deep. We hope to be able to consider this topic from the word of God and receive balm from the scriptures of both God's sovereignty and his tender care towards his children struggling through this season of life and marriage. God is sovereign over every area of life and that includes the womb. God is sovereign to open and close the womb, according to his will. The Creator of heaven and earth is the Creator of all life, the God of conception, and the God of the womb. We hope to be fervent in prayer, submitting to God's will, and hopefully the Lord will bless with the joy of children, according to his good, acceptable, and perfect will.

God, The Giver of Life

When we are seeking the Lord's blessings in having children, we must first remember that God is the only Giver of life. Jesus Christ is "the life" (John 11:25, 14:6). It is only God that gives life, grants conception, and forms the child in the womb. *"The spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life."* (Job 33:4) Just as with the first human, Adam, the Lord breathes life into every child conceived in the womb (Gen. 2:7). It is also God that sustains our life, particularly that gives and sustains the child's life in the womb. It is *"in God"* that we – and our children in the womb – *"live and move and have our being."* (Acts 17:28) The child in the womb is a person known intimately by God, possessing identity and personality, even in the mother's womb. God is intimately involved in not just giving the initial life to the child in the womb, but all the aspects of the child's formation and growth in the womb.

In Psalm 139, we see God's intimate knowledge of the child in the womb. *"For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb."* (Ps. 139:13) God had covered and known David, and all of mankind, in his mother's womb. *"I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well."* (Ps. 139:14). This intimate knowledge in the womb should lead us to extol and praise the name of God because truly we are fearfully and wonderfully made. *"My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth."* (Ps. 139:15) God intimately knows our "substance", literally meaning "bones". In David's day, that was long before sonograms enabled us to see some of the physical development of the child in the womb. Even with biological advancement and knowledge, it is still a great mystery how life is given in the womb and even how the bones of a child grow in the womb of their mother. *"As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all."* (Eccl. 11:5) David was made "in secret" (concealed from public view) in the lowest parts of the earth in his mother's womb. Even at the lowest and most basic part of the earth (the child right after conception), God "curiously wrought" ("to weave or embroider") our substance together. God figuratively "sews together" the bodies, ligaments, muscles, tendons, and bones for every child in the womb.

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God “sees” every single child in the mother’s womb, even before anyone else (even the mother) knows their substance even exists. *“Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.”* (Psalm 139:16) God saw “my substance, yet being unperfect”. That phrase is translated from a Hebrew word (golem) that literally means “an embryo”. Notice at the most basic stage of human life, when David was still biologically an “embryo”, that collection of cells that God had given life was still David. That embryo was David. God knows every single one of those children in the womb. God knew David so intimately that even in that embryonic stage, he wrote all David’s members in his book, even prior to his physical body being fully fashioned. Notice these many verses that describe God “forming” or “fashioning” and creating the child in the womb of the mother:

- *“Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?”* (Job 31:15)
- *“Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”* (Jer. 1:5)
- *“Thus saith the Lord that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen.”* (Isaiah 44:2)
- *“Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me.”* (Isaiah 44:21)
- *“Thus saith the Lord, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the Lord that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself.”* (Isaiah 44:24)
- *“Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name.”* (Isaiah 49:1)
- *“And now, saith the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength.”* (Isaiah 49:5)
- *“As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.”* (Eccl. 11:5)

It is appropriate to seek sound medical advice to aid in the conception process. When advised by a doctor, it is even appropriate to have medical intervention to help aid in conceiving a child. Even with the benefits of modern medicine, we still need to be reminded though that life in the womb comes from God alone, not from a procedure, a medicine, or a test tube. God is the only source of life in this world. Therefore, while it is appropriate to utilize all medical options at our disposal, we also ultimately trust in God alone to give life according to his will, according to the appointed time of life.

God Opens & Closes the Womb

God is sovereign to give life, and God is also sovereign to open and close the womb, according to his will. God opened the womb of Leah for her to conceive (Gen. 29:31). God later answered the prayer of Rachel and opened her womb for her to conceive as well. *“And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb.”* (Gen. 30:22) There are many women who are called “barren” (literally “sterile”) who God opened their wombs, and they were blessed to bear children: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Manoah’s wife, Hannah, and Elisabeth. It is God who blesses the barren woman to keep house and to be the joyful

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mother of children. *"He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. Praise ye the Lord."* (Ps. 113:9) God resurrected the dead and barren womb of Sarah to life to be able to conceive a son. Just as God told Sarah, there is nothing too hard for the Lord, including opening the barren womb! God is in the business of giving life in the midst of death. *"God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land."* (Ps. 68:6) It is God who makes those alone in a solitary situation to have families and children to where they are not alone any more. *"[God] opened the rock, and the water gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river."* (Ps. 105:41) God "opened" a rock which is not naturally filled with water. When God moved on that rock, water did not just trickle, but water "gushed out" like a river. God can "open" an infertile womb, just like he can open the rock and have water and life flow out from it.

There are also examples of God shutting the womb, according to his will. *"Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith the LORD: shall I cause to bring forth, and shut the womb? saith thy God."* (Isaiah 66:9) Rachel was barren initially and had no children for many years because Jacob loved her more, and he hated Leah. Even Jacob affirmed that God withheld her from having children, mainly due to his own preferences (Gen. 29:31, 30:1-2). Thankfully, God was gracious to answer Rachel's prayer and ultimately bless her to have two sons. When Abraham went to Gerar, he lied to King Abimelech that Sarah was his sister. Then, when Abimelech unwittingly took Sarah, the Lord then *"fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech"* because of Sarah, Abraham's wife (Gen. 20:18). This judgment was lifted when Abraham prayed for Abimelech, and they were once again able to bear children (Gen. 20:17). God opened and closed the wombs of those in Abimelech's house according to his will. When Michal questioned David for dancing before the Lord, David rebukes her, and she *"had no child unto the day of her death"* (2 Sam. 6:14-23). It appears the Lord closed up the womb of Michal in this instance. We see that God can open, but he can also close the womb, according to his will.

Be Fruitful & Multiply

The Creator of heaven and earth is the Creator of all life, the God of conception, and the God of the womb. The original command to man and woman in creation was to *"be fruitful and multiply and replenish (fill) the earth"* (Gen. 1:28). This command to be fruitful and multiply was reiterated to Noah after the flood (Gen. 9:1,7), and then also to Jacob (Gen. 35:11). It is God's will for men and women to have children and to fill the earth. Having many children and the "multiplication" of your seed is a blessing from the Lord. God promised Abraham to *"multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is upon the seashore"*. In the multiplication of Abraham's seed would all the families of the earth be blessed (Gen. 22:17-18). God answered this prayer and multiplied the Israelites very exceedingly. They did not choose to simply grow or have children themselves, but God blessed for them to be multiplied. *"The Lord your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude."* (Deut. 1:10)

God blessed his people in Egypt to be very fruitful and multiply, so much so that Pharaoh became very concerned. *"And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them."* (Exod. 1:7) God blessed his people to be so fruitful in bondage that they were overtaking the Egyptians in number. God declared that being fruitful to bear children was evidence of God's blessing upon his people. *"Thou shalt be blessed above all people: there shall not be male or female barren among you, or among your cattle."* (Deut. 7:14) *"4) Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. 11) And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit*

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of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers to give thee.”
(Deut. 28:4,11)

On the other end of the spectrum, in Bible times, being barren and unfruitful was seen as a judgment from the Lord. God told Israel that if they disobeyed his commandments, then *“cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep.”* (Deut. 28:18) It was a great shame in Jewish society for a husband and wife to not have a child. Not only was the name and seed of the husband to not continue if they didn't have a child, but the Jewish mothers were always hopeful that they would be the mother, or at least the seed, of the promised Messiah. God took the perpetuity of a husband's seed so seriously that if a man died without a child, his near kinsman was required to marry his widowed wife to raise up his seed and have a child with his wife (Deut. 25:5-10, Gen. 38:7-11). That is why so many Jewish women viewed it as a reproach to be barren. It could be a sign of judgment from the Lord and your name and seed would not continue without children. Children, especially many or the multiplication of children, are viewed in a very negative sense in our culture today. However, the scriptures consistently declare that having children is a divine blessing from God, and we should pursue God's command to be fruitful and multiply, according to his will.

A Heritage of the Lord

Children are a blessing from the Lord. Unfortunately, in the world and culture today, children are seen as a burden, expense, and a drag that should be avoided. The Lord views children the exact opposite of this world. The Lord bestows his blessing upon his people by not just having children, but by granting unto them many children. *“Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.”* (Ps. 127:3) Children are a “heritage” from the Lord unto his people. God grants “his reward” unto his people through the fruit of their womb. Having many children is not an additional burden, but additional blessings from the Lord. Happy and blessed is the man who has his quiver full of the children of his youth. *“4) As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. 5) Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them.”* (Ps. 127:4-5) It is a great blessing to see a family serving God together and being fruitful in the church. The wife is a fruitful vine. The children are strong, fruitful olive plants round about thy table. *“3) Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. 6) Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel.”* (Ps. 128:3,6) It is a blessing to not only have children, but a blessing from the Lord to see and have grandchildren. Obviously, you can't see any grandchildren without having your own children. Your heritage from the Lord continues even beyond your lifetime through your children, grandchildren, and so on.

God comes and gives children unto his people. The Old Testament patriarchs gave God the glory for giving them a child. The Lord personally “visited” Sarah and she conceived at the “set time” that God had promised (Gen. 21:1-2). Sarah attributed her conception to God that the Lord has given me laughter through my son, Isaac (Gen. 21:6). Leah thanked God for giving her children. As she bears Issachar, her fifth son, she credits God for this child, *“God hath given me my hire”* (Gen 30:18). For Leah's sixth child, Asher, she says *“God hath endued me with a good dowry”* (Gen 30:20). Rachel named her son, Joseph, saying that *“God hath taken away my reproach”,* and *“the Lord shall add to me another son.”* (Gen. 30:23-24). Jacob attributed the “grace” of God in giving him his children – *“the children which God hath graciously given thy servant”* (Gen. 33:5). God certainly bestows grace and unmerited favor unto his people by blessing them with children. These Old Testament saints certainly had a great understanding that it was the Lord who granted them with their children.

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Children are such a blessing from the Lord, and thus it is a great burden when a wife is unable to have children. If someone is unable to have children, there is a sense in which the barren wife will never be fully satisfied. *"There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough: The grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough."* (Prov. 30:15b-16) We see particularly with Rachel that she preferred death to being barren and childless (Gen. 30:1). Hannah was in bitterness of soul because she was barren and unable to have a child. God has put a desire to love and care for children into women, and if that desire is unfulfilled, there is a sense in which the barren wife will never be fully satisfied. We are called to be content in any circumstance, and God can bless us with contentment to serve God without biological children, if that is God's will for our lives. We will deal with that more in depth in a later section. However, scripture here affirms that the barren womb will never be fully satisfied. Therefore, we see that we have to trust God and his will in the blessing of giving children. We will consider multiple accounts from scripture of God blessing with children, even when the women were previously barren, to encourage us and learn how God works sovereignly in opening the womb and conceiving children.

Abraham & Sarah

When we are first introduced to Abraham, we are specifically told that his wife Sarah (Sarai at that time) was barren and had no child (Gen. 11:30). Then, Abram was called from Ur of the Chaldees, being promised by God that he would *"make of thee a great nation and make thy name great...and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."* (Gen. 12:2-3) Abram was 75 years old when he departed out of Haran, which was a brief pit stop on the way to Canaan. Therefore, Abram had been called out of Ur of Chaldees some time before age 75; we don't know exactly when. Abram had been promised to have a large seed and become a great nation, and for that to happen his barren wife, Sarah, was to have a child. This was already a slim natural possibility, with him being 75 and his wife being 65 and barren, but God's promise trumps natural biology.

In Genesis 15, we see Abram beginning to doubt the promise of God. We don't know the exact time frame of this account, but we can safely assume it had been more than adequate time since the original promise for them to have a child, possibly a couple of years. Abram questions the Lord's timing for not giving him a child yet. *"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."* (Gen. 15:2-3) Abram is questioning the promise of God because they haven't had a child yet, and if I'm going to have a seed, then I suppose I'll have to just raise up seed through my chief servant, Eliezer. Notice, Abram blames God – *"to me thou hast given no seed"*. Abram is getting bitter and blaming the Lord because God has not given them a child on his own timetable.

God not only reaffirms his promise, but he expands his promise for Abram's seed to be as vast as the stars of heaven. *"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."* (Gen. 15:4-5) For the moment, that reaffirmation of God's promise was good enough for Abram, and he believed the promise of God in faith. *"And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness."* (Gen. 15:6) God even confirms the promise further by passing between the smoking

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furnace and burning lamp to validate his covenant with Abram for his promised seed to inherit the land of Canaan (Gen. 15:9-21).

In the next chapter, about 10 years after their arrival in Canaan, Sarah being 75 years old now herself, she begins to doubt the promise of God. *"And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai."* (Gen. 16:2) Sarah blamed the Lord for not having children – *"the Lord hath restrained me from bearing"*. There is a sense in which that is true because the Lord was waiting for the appointed time, but Sarah was blaming God solely for this. God's not doing what he said he was, so now we have to come up with our own plan to have a seed (just like Abram had earlier suggested with his servant, Eliezer). That's such our nature, to get impatient and not wait on the promise of God in faith. When God doesn't act on our timetable, we blame God, get impatient, and try to speed up God's will by taking the matter into our own hands. Well, that never goes well when we take matters of God's timing into our own hands instead of patiently waiting in faith on God's perfect will and perfect timing.

When Sarah gets impatient and tries to create God's will on her own, Abram just hearkened to what his wife had decided. Just in the last chapter, Abram believed the promise of God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. Now, he is again doubting the promise of God. What Abram should have told Sarah was, "No, I'm not going in to Hagar. We have to trust the promise of God to give us a seed in his time and according to his will. God said he was going to give us a child – not through an Egyptian servant – and he will bless us with a son in his good and perfect timing." Instead, Abram gave in to the demands of his wife, and only bad things have come from Hagar and Ishmael and his descendants ever since, all because Sarah and Abram's faith wavered in the promise of God. Only bad things happen when we get impatient and try to circumvent God's will instead of waiting patiently on God's perfect timing in faith.

In Genesis 17, Abram is now 99 years old. God reaffirms his promise that Abram would have a great seed by instituting circumcision and changing Abram's name to Abraham, the father of many nations. God even changes Sarai's name to Sarah because she would be the mother of many nations. *"15) And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. 16) And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her."* (Gen. 17:15-16) What is Abraham's response to this reaffirmation of God's promise for Sarah (now 90 years old and still barren) to have a child? *"17) Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? 18) And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!"* (Gen. 17:17-18) Sarah is more well known for laughing in her heart, doubting the promise of God, in the next chapter. However, Abraham fell on his face and laughed that his wife would have a son at age 90. He even offers God yet another alternative route – O that Ishmael might live before thee forever.

In spite of Abraham's doubt, laughter, and scoffing at God's promise, God makes a promise that Sarah would bear a son at the "set time" in the next year. *"19) And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. 21) But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year."* (Gen. 17:19,21) Abraham has been waiting for 24 years and then God finally tells him, the child will be born in the next year. That is a time for excitement! Actually, notice it was God who gave the name to this child, and his name "Isaac" (which means "laughter") was given in response to Abraham falling on his face laughing in unbelief, doubting the promise of God.

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Then, in Genesis 18, God appears to Abraham and Sarah on the plains of Mamre. This appears to have been a very short period after Gen. 17 when God told Abraham they would have a son in the next year. If Isaac was born in a literal 12-month period, then it would have been at most 2-3 months after God's promise to Abraham. You would think that Abraham would have immediately told his wife of God's promise from the previous chapter. She has had to wait all this time, but now she should be super excited because the time for me getting pregnant has finally arrived. Therefore, either Abraham didn't tell his wife they would have a son in the next year, or she didn't believe him. *"10) And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him. 11) Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. 12) Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"* (Gen. 18:10-12) It's most likely that Sarah didn't believe Abraham because she knew physically her womb was dead (she had passed menopause and had no physical capability to have a child, v.11). When God promised that Sarah would have a son according to the time of life, Sarah laughed in her heart.

Even though Sarah doubted and laughed in her heart, God still reaffirms his promise to Sarah. *"13) And the Lord said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? 14) Is any thing too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son."* (Gen. 18:13-14) God yet again reaffirms the promise, despite Sarah's unbelief, that she will of a surety have a son this year. God gives the rhetorical question that is so valid in this discussion of having children – *"Is any thing too hard for the Lord?"* It was a biological fact that Sarah physically had no ability to have a baby. Even the biological deadness of Sarah's womb was not a hinderance to the God that resurrects the dead. Nothing is too hard for our sovereign, omnipotent God!

There are many couples that have been told by a doctor that there is no biological way they can have a child. While there is no guarantee that God will give them a child, we also need to remind ourselves *"is any thing too hard for the Lord?"* Just because a couple has received an adverse medical diagnosis does not mean they can never have children. It was a biological and physical impossibility for Sarah to have a child, but that was no big deal to Almighty God, the Giver of life! Thankfully, many of those same couples have a testimony to God's life-giving power of having children even after the medical experts deemed it was a biological impossibility. Therefore, don't be overly discouraged if you receive an adverse medical opinion. God is the only one sovereign over the womb, and the Lord often has a sense of humor to baffle medical doctors for his own glory.

It was a very busy year that Sarah conceived – circumcision (ch.17), a visit by God on plains of Mamre (ch.18), the destruction of Sodom (ch.19), and the deceptive visit with Abimelech (ch.20). As a side note, Sarah was brought into Abimelech because Abraham lied that she was his sister. Abraham is again acting in unbelief by lying, fearing he would be killed, contrary to God's promise. Because of what Abimelech unwittingly did, the Lord fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech. In the irony of ironies, Sarah who has been barren for 90 years and is going to have a child in just a few months, but then God closed up the wombs of Abimelech's house for this issue with Sarah. *"17) So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children. 18) For the Lord had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife."* (Gen. 20:17-18) God opened back up the wombs of Abimelech's house when Abraham prayed unto God for them.

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Finally, after 25+ years of waiting, sometimes trusting, but regularly doubting, the promise of God unto Abraham and Sarah finally came to fruition. The Lord personally "visited" Sarah, and she conceived according to the "set time" appointed by the Lord. *"1) And the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken. 2) For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him."* (Gen. 21:1-2) God's timing is never late or never early. God is always on time; he has made everything beautiful in "his time" (Eccl. 3:11). God gave Abraham and Sarah a son: "at the set time" (Gen. 17:21, 21:2), "at the time appointed" (Gen. 18:14), and "according to the time of life" (Gen. 18:10,14). I know that after this child finally arrived, from her experience that Sarah would counsel you today to wait patiently on God's "beautiful, set, appointed time".

Having this promised child was well worth the wait. Even though Abraham and Sarah went through some very difficult periods in waiting for their son to be born, the joy and laughter they had from their son was worth the challenging period of waiting. *"5) And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him. 6) And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me. 7) And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have born him a son in his old age."* (Gen. 21:1-7) Who would have thought this could actually happen? Who would have said Abraham would have a son in his old age and that Sarah would nurse a child in her old age? Pretty much only God would say that. Is any thing too hard for the Lord? Praise God the answer is "No!" Nothing is too hard for our great God!

It is common during prolonged periods of waiting for a child to doubt God's care for you and your family, just like Abraham and Sarah did. Not only did they get impatient, blame God, and doubt God's timing, but they usually tried to come up with "alternative scenarios" that God could use to band-aid his unfulfilled promise. We get into great trouble when we try to come up with our own ways to suggest that God will accomplish his will. We really get into great trouble when we act on those alternative means that are not God's will (such as Abraham with Hagar that resulted in Ishmael). Abraham and Sarah were unique in that God had promised them a child. There is no promise of a child to any of us. If God ultimately does not bless you with a child, then he will give you contentment in your station of life. However, we must trust God in faith as we wait. God will send you a child in his own perfect timing, in his own perfect will – "at the set time, at the time appointed, according to the time of life". God might not have given you a child yet because maybe your "time of life" isn't right yet. Maybe you need to learn some more lessons and experiences during this season of waiting on God's will. Maybe you are not in the appropriate job or location or circumstance yet that would be best for you having a child. We don't know all those factors as intricately as God does. Therefore, we just have to trust God in faith as we wait for the "appointed time" for our children as well.

Isaac & Rebekah

Abraham and Sarah had to wait 25+ years for their son, Isaac, to be born after God's original promise and 100 and 90 total years, respectively. That's a long time. In the next generation, Isaac had to wait a long time in his own right for both marriage and children. Isaac was 40 years old when he was married to Rebekah (Gen. 25:20). They were not blessed to have their twin sons, Jacob and Esau, until Isaac was 60 years old (Gen. 25:26). Therefore, Isaac had to wait 20 years himself to have children. Abraham would have undoubtedly told Isaac his whole life that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed, and that Isaac would also be the father of a great nation. God's promise was not just that Abraham would have a son, but also that Isaac would have children; that their whole family would be a great nation. We don't have as detailed an account of Isaac's testing of faith during his waiting period as we do Abraham, but I'm

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sure he doubted God's promise from time to time as well. His father told him he would have children to grow Abraham's seed according to the promise of God. Then, not only did he have to wait 40 years to get married, but then it was another 20 years before God blessed Isaac and Rebekah with a seed to be born.

After waiting 20 years with still no child, Isaac prayed unto God for his barren wife, Rebekah, and God hearkened unto the prayer of Isaac and Rebekah conceived. *"And Isaac intreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren: and the Lord was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived."* (Gen. 25:21) The KJV alternate wording for "intreated" here is "pleaded with". This word means "to pray, to entreat, to supplicate or plead". Isaac begged and pleaded with God in prayer "for his wife" since she was barren. In this instance, God saw fit to open her womb, and the Lord was "intreated of Isaac" and Rebekah was then blessed to conceive. I was especially burdened with this verse one particular month during our season of waiting for a child, and I specifically prayed and intreated the Lord for my wife. That month I was especially burdened to pray Gen. 25:21 to the Lord and intreat the Lord, and that was the month the Lord was gracious to bless us to conceive our first son, Zachary! I can tell you from my personal experience, we need to be more fervent in our prayers and "intreat" the Lord for our dear wives, and the Lord might see fit to answer those prayers in a mighty way!

The most important thing we can do as we seek to have children is to pray and intreat our God. Every couple's circumstance is different, Isaac and Rebekah included. God had promised them to have a child to grow Abraham's seed in this world, but they had to wait a long, long time from our perspective for that conception to come to fruition. In this instance, God saw fit to open Rebekah's womb based on the fervent prayer of her husband. That shows us that the *"effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much"* (James 5:16). No doubt many Christian couples that are trying to have children are praying unto God. This is certainly not to diminish the fervency of their previous or current prayers. However, we never know when that "one prayer" might be the one that God heeds to give us children. No doubt Isaac and Rebekah had been praying consistently many times to God for a child for 20 years already. However, even after praying for that long, God hearkened to one intreating prayer of Isaac for them to have a child. All those prayers for children ended up being answered. They just had to wait longer than they would have preferred for the fulfilment and answer to every one of those prayers. *"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."* (Gal. 6:9) Don't give up in your fervent prayers. Don't get weary in well doing because you will reap "in due season" if you faint not. God will answer your prayers "in due season" in his own perfect timing. God has made every thing beautiful in his time (Eccl. 3:11).

Rachel & Leah

Jacob was actually 70 years old when he stole Esau's birthright and fled to Haran. (Jacob was 147 when he died (Gen. 47:28) and Joseph was 56 at that time; Jacob was 91 when Joseph was born; Joseph is born right before they leave Laban and Jacob was there for 21 years. Therefore, he arrived at age 70). Therefore, Jacob was an old man when he had his children too; he was 77 when he had his first child with Leah. Since he died at age 147, he was essentially middle age (equivalent to 40-45 in our day), but he still had to wait a long time to have children. He had the same promise that Abraham and Isaac did, that they would be the father of a great seed. Yet at age 70 he was still without any children and had to flee from his homeland to preserve his life.

Jacob arrives in Haran and immediately falls in love with Rachel. Laban tricks him and gives him Leah to marry instead. Jacob shows preference to his true love Rachel and is pretty disrespectful and neglectful to

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Leah. It seems the Lord judges Rachel based on Jacob's preferential love, making Rachel barren, while blessing Leah to conceive. "30) *And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years. 31) And when the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren.*" (Gen. 29:30-31) Unfortunately, here it seems that Rachel is being punished for something beyond her control. Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah; he even "hated" Leah. Therefore, God opened the womb of Leah and closed the womb of Rachel, making her barren. Rachel was barren because of Jacob's preference and love of her. This certainly seems unfair that Rachel would be punished for Jacob's preferential love of her, but that appears to be the case.

Rachel really struggled with her condition of barrenness, especially when she saw her sister giving birth so freely. She was so distraught that she even preferred death to being barren and childless. "1) *And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die. 2) And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?*" (Gen. 30:1-2) Rachel is certainly an expression of Prov. 30:15-16 we noted earlier that the barren womb will never be satisfied. She desired a child so much that she even preferred death to her barren womb. She also displays the natural response of jealousy towards her sister who has been blessed with children. Bitterness and jealousy are dangerous thoughts that we must keep at bay as we wait for the Lord's timing in our lives.

To try to get satisfaction through her maid, Rachel gave Jacob her maid, Bilhah, to marry "that I may also have children by her." (Gen. 30:3) Leah saw that she had left bearing (Gen. 30:9) but did not want to be outdone by her sister. Therefore, Leah gave Jacob her maid, Zilpah, to wife to bear children too. Leah knew that she had left bearing, but then after Leah and Rachel negotiate one night with Jacob for Reuben's mandrakes, Leah actually bears another son after "God hearkened unto Leah" (Gen. 30:17). It appears that even after she had become barren, she prayed unto God to give her another child. Not only does God bless her to conceive again, one more time (Issachar) but two more times (Zebulun and a daughter, Dinah). Therefore, Leah was blessed by God to have 3 more children after she had left off bearing. Why? Because God hearkened unto Leah's prayers. Leah prayed to God to open her womb back up, and he graciously granted her request.

If Jacob served another full 7 years (a week of years) before marrying Rachel, then Rachel had to endure at least 7 years of barrenness, watching three other women around her give birth readily. After years of longing for a child, Rachel is blessed to finally have a son. "And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb." (Gen. 30:22) God remembered Rachel. God remembered her anguish for years over not having a child. She hadn't necessarily done anything wrong but was punished because Jacob loved her more and preferred her over Leah. She was barren because of Jacob's love of her. I'm sure that was very difficult to deal with. God remembered her suffering during that time, and eventually, God hearkened unto Rachel's prayer and opened her womb. "23) *And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach: 24) And she called his name Joseph; and said, The Lord shall add to me another son.*" (Gen. 30:23-24) She viewed not having children – especially while Leah was having many children – as "a reproach". Now in her mind, God had taken away her reproach. Rachel is later blessed to give birth to one more child, Benjamin. It is somewhat ironic that Rachel actually passes away in giving birth to Benjamin (Gen. 35:16-20). Rachel had previously said that she would rather die if she did not have children, and then she ended up dying in giving birth to her second son.

The "conception wars" between Leah, Rachel, and their two handmaids is a very interesting portion of scripture. Their children end up being the prominent 12 tribes of Israel that are a central theme and story

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line throughout all of scripture. Many of those 12 children were the result of God hearkening to the prayers of Leah and Rachel. Leah was even blessed to conceive 3 more children after she had left off bearing. Rachel finally receives 2 children in answer to her prayers. We see from Rachel (and next from Hannah) the great affliction of soul and unfulfillment of the barren wife and the barren womb. Thankfully, the Lord takes great care to answer the fervent prayers of those afflicted wives, even if their season of waiting feels worse than death.

Hannah

The Holy Spirit gives us a beautiful picture in Hannah of the Lord answering the prayer of a depressed, barren woman and opening her womb to bear a great man of God. In scripture, every time a man has multiple wives, things never go well. Such is the case with Elkanah and his two wives Hannah and Peninnah. *“And [Elkanah] had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah: and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.”* (1 Sam. 1:2) Peninnah had quite a few sons and daughters, but Hannah was barren. Hannah was not able to have children at this time because we are specifically told that *“the Lord had shut up [Hannah's] womb”* (1 Sam. 1:5,6). The language here indicates that at this time the Lord had shut up Hannah's womb. When Elkanah went up to the temple to offer sacrifices, he gave Peninnah and her sons and daughters a portion, but he gave to Hannah a “worthy portion” because he loved Hannah (1 Sam. 1:3-5). This obviously caused jealousy among Peninnah toward Hannah (similar to the feud of Leah and Rachel). Peninnah *“her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb.”* (1 Sam. 1:6) Peninnah was an adversary to Hannah; she mocked and ridiculed Hannah every year when they went up the temple to where Hannah only wept and did not eat (1 Sam. 1:7).

Elkanah was not as sensitive as he should have been to his wife's suffering and asks Hannah why she was weeping and not eating. *“Why is thy heart grieved? Am I not better to thee than ten sons?”* (1:8). The word “grieved” here means “to quiver, or tremble”. Hannah was crying so much and not eating that apparently she was just shaking and trembling in grief (and Elkanah is not very sensitive to his wife's trembling and crying). Her heart was grieved from being barren, but also being harassed by the other wife. Elkanah was a good man, but apparently, he thought pretty highly of himself. He thought he was just as good as ten sons to Hannah. He should have known the answer to this question. Since Hannah was weeping and crying about not having a son, obviously, Elkanah was not better than ten sons to Hannah.

Hannah rose up after they had eaten; she was “in bitterness of soul”, and there she prayed to the Lord and wept sore (1:9-10) *“And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.”* (1 Sam. 1:11) Out of Hannah's bitterness of soul and weeping, she begs for the Lord to look upon her affliction and answer her prayer to give her a man-child. She literally poured out her heart and soul to the Lord. She makes a commitment that she would give the child to the Lord and make the Nazarite vow, for no razor to come upon his head. Hannah was praying and crying unto the Lord; she spoke to the Lord in her heart with her lips moving, but she didn't audibly say anything. Eli saw this and thought she was drunk (1:12-14). Hannah was pouring out her heart before the Lord, praying in her heart with her lips moving.

Hannah answers Eli that *“I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit. I have not drunk wine, but I have poured out my soul before the Lord.”* (1:15) Hannah wants to make sure Eli did not count her as a daughter of Belial

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but had come sincerely before the Lord (1:16). Eli saw the sincerity of her petition, and he tells her to go in peace and offers his hope that God will grant her petition that she was requested (1:17). Hannah now went her way, returning home from Shiloh, and she began to eat again, and her countenance was no more sad (1:18). God had not yet answered her prayer, but pouring out her soul to the Lord allowed her to go home happy, and not be so sad and sorrowful over her unfulfilled desires. We always feel better when we talk to someone, but there is no better source to tell all the cares of this life to than Christ, our Lord who ever liveth to make intercession for us. They finished their trip to Shiloh, came and worshipped, when they returned home, Elkanah went in to Hannah, and *“the Lord remembered her”* (1:19). The Lord had previously shut up Hannah's womb, now he remembered her and opened up her womb to have a child. The Lord did not overlook her pouring out her soul to the Lord, but the Lord remembered and heard her cries and saw fit to graciously grant her petitions.

Hannah bore a son and called his name Samuel because *“I have asked him of the Lord”* (1:20). Samuel means “heard by God” (and Hannah means “grace”). Hannah prayed unto God. The Lord remembered her, heard her, and granted her petition. Then, Hannah remembered the Lord as she received the answer, naming her son Samuel as a memorial of the Lord's hearing and answering of her prayer. When God hears and answers our prayers, we don't need to just go about our merry way and not acknowledge the blessing of the Lord. Hannah did not take this blessing and answered prayer for granted, but she praised God from whom that blessing had flowed. God takes heed to the burdens and prayers of our soul, and is a faithful keeper of the burdens of our heart.

As per their annual custom, Elkanah and all his house went up again to Shiloh to worship (1:21), but Hannah did not go up but was going to wait until Samuel was weaned and then take him up the temple to stay there and serve the Lord forever (1:22-23). Samuel was probably 2-3 years old after he was weaned and taken up the house of the Lord to dwell permanently with Eli. When Hannah had weaned Samuel, she brought him up, and she brought the child to Eli and brought an offering of 3 bullocks, 1 ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine (1:24-25). Hannah goes up to Eli and says, I don't know if you remember me, but I was the woman that stood here praying, and now God has answered my prayer and I am granting him to you to serve the Lord in his temple, as long as he liveth (1:26-28). Hannah reminds Eli that she was that same woman who prayed in bitterness of soul, but now she is here in fulfilling her commitment in the answer to that prayer.

In the midst of Hannah's prayer of praise, we find one of the most common phrases when children are born, and it's just as appropriate today as it was when it was originally delivered by Hannah. *“For this child I prayed: and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him”* (1:27). Children are a gift, heritage, and blessing from the Lord. When we pray unto the Lord for children and he hearkens unto our prayer (remember she named him Samuel, heard by God), we need to honor and acknowledge the Lord. God answers the prayers of his people today as well with the great blessing of children. Parents also need to have Hannah's perspective, that we “lend our children unto the Lord”. Parents are given custodial care of their children, but ultimately, they are not the parents' alone; the children are the Lord's. Also, it took a great measure of faith in God for Hannah to commit this child that she loved so much and had prayed for unto Eli, with her knowing the wicked lives of his sons. Overall, this was not the best environment for a young child to grow up in around Hophni and Phinehas, but she remained faithful to her commitment to the Lord, and committed him over to Eli, trusting in the care and provision of Jehovah God.

After Hannah leaves Samuel, she offers a prayer of praise unto God. We see two prayers of Hannah: 1) Prayer of pouring out her soul to the Lord (1:11-17); 2) Prayer of praise unto God (2:1-11). When God answers our prayer, we need to praise and extol his name for him graciously granting our petition. Our

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prayer of praise is just as important as our prayer of petition. The first prayer was prayed in her heart with only her mouth moving out of grief of soul. The second prayer is a prayer of joy that she wants to shout from the rooftops to praise God's blessings. It's also noteworthy that Hannah didn't offer this prayer of praise when Samuel was born, but when she had left Samuel with Eli (and his two wicked sons) in Shiloh. What great faith and perspective, to still be able to pray this prayer of praise, even after she had left her son alone with Eli and his ungodly sons in the temple. Hannah praised God that the barren had been blessed to bear many children. *"They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble."* (2:5) Now, the barren (Hannah) had born seven, figuratively. At that time she only had one child, but eventually was blessed with 5 more children. In contrast, those who had many children (Peninnah) had waxed feeble.

Later, when they came to Shiloh annually to worship, Eli blessed Elkanah and Hannah, praying the Lord would grant them seed for the sacrifice they made in lending Samuel to the Lord (2:20). Hannah had faithfully given up her only seed unto the Lord, and now Eli prays for God to honor that sacrifice and grant unto them more children and seed. Then, in answer to Eli's prayer, the Lord visited Hannah, and she had 3 sons and 2 daughters, while Samuel continued to grow and mature before the Lord (2:21). The Lord had previously shut up Hannah's womb, but now the Lord "visited" Hannah again and honored her sacrifice in giving her son, her only son (at that time) to serve the Lord. We see yet again that God answers the grieving and bitter prayers of the soul of his children praying for a child. Then, God answers the prayer of Eli for Hannah to have even more children. Let us be faithful to pray unto God that he may be gracious to open the womb of the barren wife.

Manoah's Wife (Birth of Samson)

The children of Israel had been in bondage to the Philistines for 40 years, and God saw fit to raise up a judge to defend Israel from a barren woman. There was a wife of Manoah (we are not given her name) who was *"barren and bare not"* children (Judges 13:2). She is told by an angel that she would conceive. *"Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son"* (Judges 13:3) who would be required to be a Nazarite from birth. The wife tells her husband, Manoah, who prays to God for the angel to appear to him again. The angel appears to him and his wife a second time and confirms that they will have a son and he will be a Nazarite (Judges 13:6-23). *"And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him."* (Judges 13:24) In this instance, we are not told specifically in scripture that Manoah and his wife were praying for a child. I'm sure they were praying for a child since she was barren, and it was a great embarrassment to a Jewish lady to not be able to have children. God chose a barren woman to bear the judge to deliver Israel from Philistine oppression in Samson when he blessed her with a child.

Shunammite Woman

There was a great woman of Shunem who showed great hospitality to Elisha and even built a room on her home for Elisha when he was traveling through (2 Kings 4:8-13). Elisha wants to return this kindness to her and finds out from his servant that she has no child and her husband is old. Then, Elisha tells this barren Shunammite woman that *"according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid."* (v.16) This woman had apparently given up on having children, and therefore tells Elisha, don't joke around like that, don't lie to me about having a child. Elisha was not joking around because this woman had a son. *"And the woman conceived, and bare a son"*

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at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life.” (v.17) Notice, she had a son “according to the time of life”. That shows God’s sovereignty and perfect will in conception and giving of children. Every child’s conception is never too early, never too late, but perfectly on time, according to the time of life.

Then, later on this child continued to grow, but then gets a severe headache and dies in his mother’s arms (v.18-21). The woman seeks out Elisha, displaying great faith that “It shall be well” (v.23). Then, when she arrives, Gehazi asks her, *“Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well.”* (v.26) She was blessed with great faith by God to be able to answer “it is well”, even after her son had died in her arms. Then, she passive aggressively rebukes Elisha saying, *“Did I desire a son of my lord? Did I not say, do not deceive me?”* (v.28) She had previously resigned herself in her mind to never have a child, but then she was blessed with a child. Now, the pain of that child dying in her arms was worse than never having a child. Elisha promptly returns with her and raises her son from the dead (v.29-37). This woman had given up hope of ever having a child, and then the Lord graciously blessed her to have a child in her old age. That language is very beneficial for us; she conceived and had a son “according to the time of life” and “at that season” that Elisha had told her. God has made every thing and every season beautiful in his time, especially the season of birth and life.

Zacharias & Elizabeth

John the Baptist was a central figure in the beginning of the New Testament and his life (and thus his birth) was even prophesied of multiple times in Isaiah and Malachi. Who were the parents of this prophesied central figure as the forerunner of Christ? A barren woman, and an old couple past the natural ability to conceive. God chose to use barren women to bear some of the most central figures in all the Bible – Isaac, Jacob, many of Jacob’s sons, Samuel, Samson, and John the Baptist. If so many fervent prayers went into the conception of these children, it makes sense that the Lord’s hand would be specially upon them and use them in a mighty way in his kingdom. That is our prayer as well; that in the answer of our prayers for children, that the Lord would use them in a powerful way in the kingdom of God.

Zacharias and his wife, Elisabeth, were old and well past the natural ability to conceive children. Despite them both being old, well stricken in years and his wife being barren, Zacharias was still praying for a child. Similar to Abraham, Zacharias against hope, believed and prayed in hope. Then, the Lord saw fit to answer his prayer. *“But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.”* (Luke 1:13) The Lord acknowledged the prayers of Zacharias; his prayer was heard and answered. Not just his current prayer, but all those many years of apparently unfulfilled prayers were all heard and answered in the Lord’s perfect timing.

In a natural, physical sense, there was no way they could have children. Elisabeth’s womb was just as dead as Sarah’s had been in conceiving Isaac. In spite of those natural inabilities, Zacharias was still praying for a child anyway. They had no doubt been praying this prayer for many years, but they had to wait a long, long time for God to answer their prayer. God did not forget those prayers that Zacharias had been praying for many years. He knew the Old Testament story of Abraham and Sarah, and he knew even physical age was no limitation to God in bearing children. Similar to Abraham, even when God told him of the answer to his prayer, Zacharias still doubted and asked for a sign for confirmation (v.18). He prayed for a child but like we are many times, he did not fully believe the Lord would actually answer this prayer. As a judgment for his unbelief, Zacharias was not able to speak for nine months until after the birth of John.

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Elisabeth no doubt had much grief over the years from her barrenness. The barren womb is never satisfied. We are not told really anything about her previous struggles, but I am confident she prayed the same type prayers of grief and affliction as Rachel and Hannah. Then, when the Lord gave her a child, she felt a lifting of "reproach" from her life. *"Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men."* (Luke 1:25) Elisabeth felt like it was a "reproach" (same as Rachel, Gen. 30:23) to not have a child. The Lord was gracious to remove that burden, and she was blessed to conceive a child that was born again in her womb, and the forerunner of the Messiah. Despite her many years of waiting, grief, and reproach, the Lord used this barren woman to conceive one of the most central figures in all the New Testament. I believe if you asked Elisabeth, she would tell you that John the Baptist was worth the wait.

Prayers for Children

We see all throughout scripture the powerful impact of prayer in opening the womb and having children. God listens to and answers the prayers of his people. We see God opening the wombs of the women in Abimelech's house by the prayer of Abraham (Gen. 20:17-18). Isaac intreated the Lord for his barren wife, Rebekah, and the Lord hearkened and she was blessed to conceive (Gen. 25:21). God hearkened unto the prayers for children of Leah (Gen. 30:17) and Rachel (Gen. 30:22-24). God answered the prayer of Hannah for a child during her grief and bitterness of soul (1 Sam. 1:6-19). Then, God answered the prayer of Eli to give Hannah more seed and children (1 Sam. 2:20-21). God answered the prayer of Zacharias to have a child with Elizabeth, his wife, even in their old age (Luke 1:13). God will hear and answer your prayers as well, according to his will.

Does your lack of a child cause affliction in your soul? What is our remedy for affliction? Prayer. *"Is any among you afflicted? let him pray."* (James 5:13) We relieve our affliction by praying unto God. Hannah sets a great example for us to follow as she prayed from her heart out of her burden and sorrow of soul. We cast all our burdens and cares onto the Lord to sustain us (Ps. 55:22). God hears the effectual, fervent prayers of his saints. *"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man [and woman] availeth much."* (James 5:16) God heeds the prayers of his saints. God told Hezekiah to put his house in order and he was about to die. Then, Hezekiah prayed fervently unto the Lord. The Lord hearkened to his prayer and saw fit to add 15 more years to his life, instead of him passing away quickly (Isaiah 38:1-10). We see here that God can see fit to change his course of action in our lives based on the effectual fervent prayers of his people.

As we wait each month, hoping that God will bless us with a conception and a child "this month", it is very emotionally difficult to find out that month's answer to prayer was "No". However, it's important to remember that biologically, every single month there is a uniquely different DNA egg each month and uniquely different sperm each month that would create a uniquely different child at conception. Therefore, it is beneficial to be reminded each month that simply it was not God's will to bless us to have and raise "that child" that could have been born from that egg. You do not need to be overly disappointed each month if you do not conceive. Instead, be reminded that the genetically unique child that God intends for you to have was simply not that month's egg. Do not wait solely in disappointment and sadness. Instead, defer and submit to God's will that it was not his will to bless you to have "that child". You are simply waiting on the exact right genetically unique child that God intends for you to have, and we hope that God will grant that blessing in his own good, acceptable, and perfect will.

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The greatest action we can undertake in desiring children is to pray to the sovereign God of the womb, and the Giver of life. God also takes special heed to prayers as they are accompanied with fasting. You should consider fasting in association with your prayers, to have your voice heard on high (Isaiah 58:4). When we voluntarily forego natural food for a period of time in conjunction with prayer, we are more and more conformed and submissive to God's will, whatever that ends up being. If it happens to be God's will that you don't have children, either now or at all, fasting and prayer will make you much more submissive and conformed to God's will in your life. In fasting and prayer, our own will, desires, and preferences are broken down and then built back up in greater conformity to the Lord's will. This might sound trite or an oversimplification, but truly the greatest and most vital need in your desire to have children is our fervent prayer life, and possibly fasting. Also, do not neglect asking your family, friends, loved ones, and spiritual confidants to fervently pray for you as well. You should desire as many people as possible petitioning the God of the womb to grant life and conception.

I believe God answers every prayer in one of three ways: yes, no, or not now. When the answer is yes, we should immediately offer a prayer of praise, thanking God for his gracious blessing of answered prayer. However, many times we struggle to discern the difference between "no" and "not now". Most of the time we simply do not know if something will ever occur or not. We don't know if it's the Lord's will or not. Time eventually manifests God's will, but maybe the set, appointed time has not come yet. That is why we must submit and be more conformed each day to the will of God. God's will is always good, acceptable, and perfect (Rom. 12:2). Never doubt that. When the answer is "not now", I believe you will still feel a burden for children and a hope that God will eventually – in his own beautiful will and timing – grant you with a child. However, if over time it manifests that God's answer is a closed door, a definite "no", then I believe God will give you a contentment to understand that "no" answer, and grace to pursue serving God in other arenas than natural conception – either adoption, fostering, or other avenues that the Lord may place on your heart. Therefore, we trust our loving heavenly Father will guide our hearts with clarity about his answer. If we have not received a clarity that the answer is "no", then we hope and trust that God will eventually bless, in his own beautiful time, purpose, and will.

Seeking Medical Treatment

For those who are struggling to conceive children, it is appropriate to seek medical advice, and even medical intervention and treatment, to aid in the conception process. God has given us the blessing of modern medicine, and thankfully it is one more tool at our disposal that God can use to help us with the conception of children. In another areas, God has blessed us with medicine and surgeries that help with many areas of health, and I believe we should utilize those blessing of modern medicine that the Lord has given us at our disposal. Even if medical treatments are consulted and ultimately used, it is still God who grants life in conception. Therefore, even if we use medical treatments to help, it is God who receives the glory for conception as the Giver of life, not our doctors, medicines, or test tubes. I think God has blessed us with great advancements in modern medicine that we should utilize to the best of our ability, as long as we feel we are following the Lord's direction in his will.

I will give my own firsthand account of the blessing of modern medicine and fertility treatments that blessed us in the conception of our first son, Zachary. After over a year of trying to conceive, my wife and I decided to discuss our situation with our doctor who referred us to a fertility specialist. After an ultrasound, we found out that my wife had a uterine septum (a division in her uterus that will typically cause miscarriages), both of her Fallopian tubes were naturally blocked, had a condition that hindered her eggs from ovulating

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properly (PCOS), and some small benign polyps in her uterus. The cumulative effect of this diagnosis was pretty overwhelming and gut wrenching for us at first. As soon as we got home after receiving this diagnosis, we came into the room we planned to be our baby room, we fell on our knees and wept and prayed unto God. The most significant of these challenges was that both of her Fallopian tubes were blocked. It's probably been a while since your last biology class, but essentially, the Fallopian tubes are where the egg is fertilized, and there is essentially no way to conceive with two blocked Fallopian tubes. Due to this medical condition, in Bible times, my wife would have been "barren". We scheduled a surgery with our fertility specialist to attempt to address these issues. We were originally told they could not fit us in and schedule a surgery for 2 months, but the Lord blessed and we had our surgery scheduled in 10 days. The Lord blessed the surgery to fix the septum, open one of the two Fallopian tubes, and removed the polyps. I told our family that of the 5 issues we had, the Lord blessed 4 of them to be fixed – septum corrected, polyps removed, 1 of 2 tubes opened, and PCOS would be treated with medicine.

Due to our condition of only having one open Fallopian tube, we chose to try 3 rounds of intrauterine insemination (IUI), which still allows for fertilization in the uterus but just helps aid the process. My wife also took medicine that helped the PCOS and boosted her ability to ovulate. The first two months of IUI treatments were unsuccessful. On the third try of IUI, we were blessed to conceive. It was such a blessing to have everything come full circle and to get on our knees in the same baby room floor we wept in seven months before and weep tears of joy as we offered prayers of praise for God's answered prayer. It was this month that after our treatment, I was burdened and committed to praying Gen. 25:21 and intreating the Lord for my wife and child in the two weeks we waited to find out if we did conceive. I did my best to intreat and pray Gen. 25:21 to the Lord during these two weeks. It turned out that month was the one the Lord blessed us to conceive and then nine months later our dear first son, Zachary, was born. I know it was not solely due to my prayers. We had so many loved ones and faithful saints praying for us during this season and that month. However, this was a powerful lesson to me that the month I felt burdened to pray the Gen. 25:21 verse and intreat the Lord was the month that God blessed us to conceive. Even though we used medical assistance, it was God that gave life to our son in the womb. We are thankful for our doctors, surgery, and medicine and how they were used in the process, but we know that God alone receives the glory for the giving of life, not our doctors or any one else. We have done our best to thank God for the blessing of modern medicine and knowledge, but we give God all the glory for the blessing of our first son in our lives.

We had the surgery in May 2022 and only seven months later we conceived in December 2022 with our third IUI treatment. The Lord blessed the surgery and medical intervention to give us the blessing of a biological child. What is so humbling and sobering in our situation is that – outside of a Sarah or Elisabeth miracle – unbeknownst to us (and we would have never known without the blessing of an ultrasound), we had no biological ability to have a child with two blocked Fallopian tubes. You simply have to have open Fallopian tubes to conceive a child, and my wife's tubes were both blocked. Due to the blessing of modern medicine, we were able to identify the issues, have the surgery to fix the septum, open one of the two Fallopian tubes, and then use treatments and medicine that increased our percentages of conception. God is sovereign over the womb, and he can open and close the womb as he sees fit. However, in a natural sense, we did not have ability to have biological children. If my wife and I were trying to have children forty years ago or more, then we would have been barren for our whole lives, never knowing the true medical issues. My wife would have been praying those same prayers as Rachel and Hannah with no ability to conceive due to both her Fallopian tubes being blocked. God alone receives the glory for our conception, but it was through God using the tools of modern fertility treatments, medicine and surgery that we were blessed to have a biological child.

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Therefore, I encourage you to not look down on the use of modern medicine, treatments, and surgery as an aid in conception. God blessed us to be able to have a biological child through these tools, when forty years ago we would have been barren and childless. You do need to perform independent research and consult reputable professionals bathed in prayer to ensure you know exactly the logistics of each treatment and can make an informed decision. Ultimately, each couple needs to be prayerful to where they have clarity and peace about whether to pursue any type of medical treatment.

If God Does Not Give You Children

As we noted before, I believe God answers every prayer as either yes, no, or not now. While scripture affirms that the barren womb is never satisfied, if it is ultimately not God's will for you to have biological children, then I believe the Lord will give you clarity and contentment in that state of life. As long as you have a strong burden and desire to have children, I think we should continue to faithfully pray and seek any medical intervention possible to help in the process. However, there may come a time where God gives you clarity that he will not bless you with children. If that is the Lord's will for your life, I believe the Lord will give you contentment in that state of life he has called you to. We have to learn to be "content" in whatsoever state we are in and that God has called us to (Phil. 4:11). If we are not content in our current state, we need to pray that either God will give us clarity about a closed door or renew our hope that God may see fit to bless us with a child in the future.

If God gives you and your spouse clarity that you will not be able to conceive biological children, there are many other ways that you can serve God by helping other children. You need to pray for God to give you clarity about any further options, and burden you for the path he would have you to follow. Some great options if you are not blessed with biological children, God may burden you regarding adoption, foster care, or just ministering to other children in our family and the church. There are many children who would be tremendously blessed with you considering adoption, being raised by a godly family in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. There are also many children who are in great need in foster care that can be blessed if you committed to help in fostering. Then, if you did not make the commitment to adoption or fostering, there are always still family or church members who you can influence and be a blessing to. You can help with nieces and nephews, or even young children in the church, babysitting these children for their parents, or many other circumstances where you can be a godly influence on children. While these relationships may not totally fulfil the lack of a biological child, there are still tremendous opportunities for you to adopt, foster, help raise, or minister to children to be a blessing to them and be a godly influence in their spiritual growth and development.

Eunuch's for the Kingdom's Sake

While it can be sad for ourselves or loved ones to not have children and if we do not feel burdened to adopt or foster children, that can allow you a tremendous amount of time, ability, and even finances to serve the Lord and his people in his kingdom in ways that others cannot. Paul was an unmarried minister, and from his perspective, it was better for him (and even others) to be unmarried to be totally devoted to the Lord and the kingdom. *"He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife."* (1 Cor. 7:32-33) Paul was able to devote himself fully to the kingdom of God without any limitations of having to care for his wife or children. When a man is married, his responsibilities change, and he is required to

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care for his family. However, Paul's singleness allowed him to travel from city to city and establish churches, to spend years in prison, and many other things that he would not have been able to do for the kingdom if he was married.

The same principle can be true of a godly couple that does not have children. It is a reality that they can devote themselves to the Lord, his people, and his kingdom in a way that those with children are more limited. However, not every one is called to serve the Lord in this way, either to serve the Lord in singleness or to serve the Lord with your spouse without children. It takes a blessing of contentment in that station from the Lord to be able to serve in that capacity without being bitter. However, if you have been called to that manner of life, there are great things you can do for the Lord and his people in the kingdom, that others with children might be more limited to perform.

In his ministry, Jesus spoke of being eunuchs for the kingdom's sake. In Biblical times, a eunuch was a man who was prevented from conceiving children by an involuntary medical procedure, castration. *"11) But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. 12) For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."* (Matt. 19:11-12) First notice that not everyone is called to this type of devotion. Only those to whom it is given can receive this saying of contentment in being a eunuch for the kingdom's sake. A eunuch did not sign up to be sterile. It was the decision of others that prevented them from having children. It would be very easy for these eunuchs to be bitter and blame God that the Lord suffered them to be castrated and never to have children. However, if they had the right perspective, they could use their singleness – or in our discussion, a married couple without children – as an opportunity to be a eunuch for the kingdom's sake like the apostle Paul.

For those without children, it can be easy to fall into the trap of self-pity, maybe even being bitter against the Lord. In Isaiah 56:1-12, we have a discussion of eunuchs and the blessings of serving the Lord in that devoted role, if that is what you've been called unto. The eunuchs that have no biological ability to have children might be tempted to say, *"I am a dry tree."* (v.3) They might think there is no fruitfulness in their life because they can't have children. However, God articulates the tremendous blessings for those who devote themselves to the kingdom of God as eunuchs, either by their own voluntary choice or by a biological restriction. *"4) For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; 5) Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. 6) Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; 7) Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people."* (v.4-7) God promises them "a name better than of sons and daughters" – blessings in the kingdom that might be even better than having natural children. They will have "joy" in the Lord's holy mountain, not bitterness and sadness. If God calls you to serve him without children in his kingdom, these verses show the great blessings that God will bestow upon your faithful service as a "eunuch couple" devoted to the kingdom of God.

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Conclusion

I believe we have seen from the word of God that the Lord is sovereign to open and close the womb, according to his will. Many examples are given of women who had been barren, and the Lord opened their womb and blessed them with a child. God is the sole Giver of life and blesses with conception. The most important thing you can do in trying to conceive is to be effectual and fervent in prayer, and request others to be praying for you as well. There are also many examples of the prayers of these faithful wives and husbands that God answered their prayer and blessed them with children. In prayer, the Lord will give you contentment in our current season of life, slowly conforming you more and more to his will. Then if it's not the Lord's will for you to have children, I believe the Lord will give you contentment to serve God and other children in his kingdom in a way others might be hindered. Ultimately, remember that God's will is always good, acceptable, and perfect, and the Lord makes everything beautiful in his own perfect time.

David Wise
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