

SERMON NOTES

From *In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley*



Getting Ahead of God

KEY PASSAGE: Genesis 16:1-16 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Genesis 12:1-3, 10; 13-15; 21:1-5
Isaiah 64:4 | 1 John 1:9

► SUMMARY

Learning to listen to the Lord is an important lesson for all of us.

Otherwise, we can't obey Him because we won't know what He would have us do. Furthermore, we need to know God's timing because it's perfect, even though it may seem slow from our perspective. But if we jump ahead of God, we'll miss the blessings He has for us.

► SERMON POINTS

In Genesis 12:1-3, the Lord spoke to Abraham, saying, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

God's directions were very clear, but Abraham didn't follow them fully.

Like us, Abraham wasn't perfect, but made mistakes as he walked with God. He was told to leave his family, but he brought his nephew Lot with him, which later resulted in problems causing them to separate (Gen. 13:1-13). On another occasion, Abraham jumped ahead of God (Gen. 16:1-16). Although the Lord had promised that he would have a son and his descendants would be as vast as the stars, Abraham was getting older, and there was still no son.

After living ten years in the land of Canaan, Abraham's wife Sarah came up with a plan to speed up God's promise. She suggested that he have a son through her Egyptian maid, Hagar. The reason Hagar was in the household was because of a previous detour from God's will that Abraham had taken when he moved to Egypt to escape a famine. Now he jumped ahead of God and did what Sarah suggested. However, when Hagar conceived, conflict and trouble entered the household. Through their scheming, Ishmael was born, but he was not the son God had promised.

There's always danger when we are listening to the wrong voices.

Whether it's our own or the voice of someone else, we must always be careful to follow the Lord rather than human reasoning. Sometimes we don't understand how God could possibly accomplish what He's promised, so we decide to help Him out in some way or do it ourselves. However, if we don't wait for God, we'll live in disharmony with Him and suffer the consequences. Following His plan, no matter how long the wait, is always a better option because He has infinite wisdom and full knowledge of the past, present, and future. When we listen and obey Him, we'll experience His best for our lives even though it's not always easy.

Because of impatience and an unwillingness to wait for God, Sarah obtained a son through Hagar, but she also received many days of conflict, strife, heartache, and trials. Eventually she conceived her own son with Abraham when he was 100 years old (Gen. 21:1-5). The Lord delayed this son's arrival for so long because he wanted them to

realize that Abraham's promised lineage would only come through a miraculous act of God.

We probably don't deliberately decide to jump ahead of God; we simply make choices that please us at the moment or that seem to be the answer to what we're seeking. Since we live in a culture that doesn't value waiting, we tend to imitate what everyone else is doing. This is true in almost every area of our lives—purchases, jobs, marriage, education, and everything in between.

What causes us to get ahead of God?

- **We listen to other people instead of the Lord.**
- **We are deceived by appearances rather than making choices based on the will of God.**
- **We become impatient and impose a time limit on the Lord.**
- **We are afraid of failure or the possibility that we'll miss out on something if we don't act now.** In reality, we never miss anything by obeying the Lord. He alone knows the future and can guide us in the right direction. Furthermore, He sees our weaknesses and leads us in ways that protect us and keep us from stumbling. However, God doesn't outline His entire plan so we can see it from beginning to end, but He guides us one step at a time. Sometimes His path includes suffering, heartache, and loss, but it's also filled with His peace, joy, and contentment.
- **The problem could be unbelief.** Perhaps we don't believe that God has a plan for our individual lives. But if we discount God's will for us, then we must conclude that everything is just an accident, including the fact that we are alive. Then we can't rely on God for anything, but must depend wholly upon ourselves and our own wisdom and strength.

What is the penalty for not waiting for God?

- **We deny ourselves His best.** We may think we're doing all right even though we didn't wait for the Lord, but

we'll never know what He wanted to do in our lives, which would have been much better.

- **We delay God's purpose in our life.** Taking a wrong turn is a detour that delays the completion of God's will for us. If we confess our sin and turn back to the Lord, He forgives and receives us, but we may never again have the opportunities He offered us previously.
- **We experience disharmony.** Wrong choices may very likely create situations that bring discord to our lives, but if we are committed to the Lord, He enables us to grow in the midst of it.
- **We suffer great disappointments.** We may satisfy ourselves for a season but not in accordance with God's will, and ultimately that will bring disappointment. But when we wait for Him, He acts on our behalf (Isa. 64:4). Then we can count on Him to guide us one step at a time into His will.
- **Somewhere along the way we can expect defeat and possibly destruction.** If we live according to God's will and follow His direction, we may or may not achieve or accumulate all that others obtain, but we will have God's peace, joy, and contentment, which are much more valuable.

The Lord loves us unconditionally and has promised to direct our paths and provide for our needs if we will obey Him. Therefore, we must decide if we are going to follow the call of the world or the voice of our God.

► RESPONSE

- Have you ever jumped ahead of God? If so, what caused you to become impatient? What happened as a result?
- What have you learned about God's timing both from His Word and through your experiences of either obedience or impatience? How will these lessons guard you against getting ahead of Him in the future?

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