*“Twelve Extraordinary Women – How God shaped women of the Bible and what He wants to do with you” --Reviewing our October 25th, 2016 study*

**“SARAH- Hoping Against Hope”** --Chapter 2

Through the OT narrative account of Sarah’s life (starting at the end of Gen. 11 through to the beginning of Gen.23) Pastor MacArthur points out throughout the eight sections in this chapter that “by no means was she always the perfect model of godly grace and meekness.” “Sarah’s faults are obvious enough. She was certainly fallen. Her faith, at times, grew weak. And her own heart sometimes led her astray….” (pg29) I think we can all relate to Sarah in some ways, can’t we?

“she **considered**” her circumstances— “Sarai was barren; she had no child” Gen. 11:30

“Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing Children” Gen.16:2a

“she **contemplated**” and reasoned that since she owned Hagar, and if Abraham fathered a child by Hagar, it would in effect be her child” pg.39-Gen.16:3

“she **concluded”** *what* needed to be done and *when* it needed to be done if God’s promise to Abraham was ever going to be fulfilled” Gen. 16:1-3

“she **concocted** a scheme that was immoral, unrighteous, and utterly foolish” “a man-made solution to her dilemma” Pg.28-Gen. 16:1-4

“she **coaxed”** her husband to join her in her sin – “please go into my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her.” Gen.16:2b

“she **chose** to be **“captain”** (chief and commander) of her own fate – ***“She unwittingly stepped into the*** ***role of God.”***

*RESULT after taking matters into her own hands:*

“she **complained** and **chafed** (was angered) at her husband and at Hagar” which led to unbearable strife and conflict in her home. Gen.16:4-6; Gen.21:9-10

“she **comprehended** the results of her fleshly attitudes and actions and reaped the **consequences** (the bitter fruit) of what she had sown.” Gen. 16:4-6

“Sarah was a fleshly creature like us.” How often do we take matters into our own hands, relying on our own power and strength, making things happen in our timing and not His? How often do we step into the “role of God” trusting and putting our confidence in our own reasoning and other’s conclusions about a matter? - (“Really? I never knew that! I know God’s Word says that but...I think we need to…or else…”) How often do we take a pragmatic approach to the situations we face and the conversations we engage in day by day? - (“this is the only thing that makes sense to me…so I need to…”) How often do we allow ourselves to be controlled by our own feelings and by our own experiences? - (“Wow, I can’t believe it…I feel there’s got to be another way…”, “it feels like it’s the right thing to do.”)

Ladies, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind (including yourself) and makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the LORD…Blessed is the man who trusts (whose confidence is) in the LORD And whose trust is the LORD…’” Jer.17:5-10

Those who truly have genuine saving faith exhibited in their love for God and who have an ongoing hatred of their own sin and repentance of it, know that “living faith” always leads us to a point of decision. We will either:

1) fuel and feed our flesh ***(“MY will be done”)*** motivated by loving, serving and *pleasing ourselves* which always reaps the bitter fruit of: discontentment, doubt, discouragement, disillusionment, despair, defeat, depression, and devastating consequences…leaving a woman with a deadly testimony for Christ because she lives in a self-centered world.

**or**

2) we will yield to the Spirit of God through the “living word” of God ***(“YOUR will be done”)*** motivated by loving, serving and *pleasing our Great God*, which always reaps the sweet fruit of: dependency upon Jesus Christ our Lord and His Word. This leads to: dedication to defend God’s name and reputation instead of my own or others reputation, devotion to live for His honour and glory and not for my own honour and glory, daily diligence and discipline in the Word of God (learning to: relinquish my need to control, replace my sinful thought patterns, renewing my mind with things that are true…and eternal, rejoicing in the Lord ALWAYS, and reverencing (fearing) God more than fearing man)…leaving a woman with a powerful testimony for Christ because she lives in a God-centered world.

Ladies, we must daily draw on the grace of God and Spirit of God to help us take drastic measures to cut sin out of our lives because we love Him more than anything else!

***Despite Sarah’s weaknesses, Pastor MacArthur helps us to focus on “the central feature of her legacy - “The steadfastness of her faith.”***

*How did Sarah ultimately become extraordinary?*

Pastor MacArthur says, “What made ‘this woman’ extraordinary was a memorable, life changing encounter with the God of the universe.”

As we see in Hebrews chapter 11, Abraham and Sarah are among a select group of OT saints who truly did have a “life changing encounter with God.” How do we know this? Even though they didn’t know *when* God’s promises would become a reality for them, as we see in the OT narrative account, in the NT their lives do powerfully testify that their confidence, faith and hope was **in God** to fulfill every one of His promises.

**God’s Word can be trusted! GOD IS TRUSTWORTHY! GOD IS FAITHFUL!** Sarah attested to this, “By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered **HIM FAITHFUL** who had promised.” Hebrews 11:11

“For in this way in former times the holy women also, **who hoped in God**, used to adorn themselves being submissive to their own husbands; just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.” (1 Peter 3:5-6)

The NT testifies and renders the final pronouncement on Sarah’s character. She was a woman who dwelled on her high calling as a wife and mother. Pastor MacArthur says, “The apostle Peter (1 Peter 3:2-6) pointed to her as the very model of how every wife should submit to her husband’s headship… and her enduring faithfulness to her husband and deep affection for him was one of the most exemplary aspects of her character. As she persevered against unbelievable obstacles she was utterly and completely devoted to her husband…and God honoured her for it.”

***Sarah was a holy woman who hoped in God and adorned herself by recognizing her husband’s spiritual headship/leadership and willingly chose to submit and obey HIM…as to the Lord!***

**Someone once said, “YOUR DEVOTION TO YOUR HUSBAND IS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL WAYS YOU CAN DISPLAY YOUR DEVOTION TO CHRIST!”**

Ladies, we have a faithful God, the same God as Sarah’s who is faithful to keep all His promises for His own honour and glory. 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, “For all the PROMISES of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.” Pastor MacArthur in his NKJV study notes on this verse says, “All God’s OT and NT promises of peace, joy, love, goodness, forgiveness, salvation, sanctification, fellowship, hope, glorification, and heaven are made possible and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. (Lk. 24:44)”

*Hebrews 11:1 NASB “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it (faith) the men of old (“all saints, both men and women”) gained approval (by God Himself).*

It is only by faith in Jesus Christ that we are made righteous! (Romans 5:19-21) and that once made righteous; justified “before God” as seen in Rom.4:2-3 we will walk in faithful obedience to God “before men” (James 2:14-26, Gen.22) by the power of His Spirit (Gal.5:16-25). The New Testament beautifully reveals that Abraham and Sarah’s hearts were right with God. They believed in the Gospel that God had preached to Abraham in Gen.12:2-3 and affirmed in Galatians 3:6-16. Their obedience to God’s Word was simply the fruit and outward evidence of the faith that God had given them! (Eph. 2:8-9) Abraham and Sarah walked by faith and not by sight!

**RESPONSE** towards God and others: ***“BECOMING A WOMAN OF LIVING FAITH”***

**F** Genesis 18:14 “IS ANYTHING TOO DIFFICULT FOR THE LORD?” {“Is anything hidden from the Lord?”} “Oh Lord, your powerful hand and Your penetrating eye is so wonderful and beyond all belief. Help me to embrace Your hope-filled promises every day with absolute joy and amazement in my heart. And may this joy cause others to see that my hope is in the Lord who gave His life for me!”

**A**  *Hebrews 11:11 “By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered HIM FAITHFUL who had promised.”* “Lord, knowing that you are FAITHFUL causes me to anchor my hope and my confidence in Your absolute ability to accomplish every one of Your promises. “You will NEVER leave me…therefore I can boldly say, “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (Heb.13:3-4) Oh this blessed assurance gives me the ability to press on by the power of Your Spirit!” Thank You Jesus!

**I** Worthy of emulation: “Thank you Lord for revealing in the pages of scripture Sarah’s example of “enduring faithfulness to her husband *as* one of the most exemplary aspects of her character” (pg29) and that “her steadfast hope *in You* persevered against unbelievable obstacles.” (pg200)

**T** “Lord, help me to demonstrate my faith and hope and trust in You like “Sarah” of old. I need your help as I am growing and continuing to learn how to adorn myself with the beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit and how to respectfully love and submit to my dear husband, as to the Lord” (1 Peter 3:4-6)

**H**  “Despite Sarah’s occasional bursts of temper and struggles with discouragement”(pg47)…“Sarah’s life on the whole is actually characterized by humility, meekness, hospitality, faithfulness, deep affection for her husband, sincere love towards God and HOPE that never died.”(pg29) “Thank You Lord that Sarah lived out before us in the pages of scripture the reality that if I keep my hope fixed on You, then I know I can persevere in whatever circumstances You place my in.”

Romans 15:4 says, “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that *through perseverance and the encouragement of the scriptures* we might have **HOPE**.”

“Now may the *God who gives perseverance and encouragement* grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

With joy and thanksgiving,

Christyn