

# THE 'WAITING – ROOM' SERIES

Tan Sin Liang

## 1. ABRAHAM'S 'WAITING-ROOM' EXPERIENCE

**Theme: Trusting God Even When The Odds  
Are Against You.**

## **The 'Waiting-Room' Series**

All of us go through 'waiting-room' experiences. Perhaps it is looking for a job. Or looking for a life partner. Or our health. Or our family. Or our business or finances. Or our children. The list is endless.

Waiting is one of the hardest things in life. Especially when you don't see any positive signs. It's like travelling through a dark tunnel and you don't see any light at the end of the tunnel. So what do you do? How do you cope?

It is during these 'waiting-room' periods, doubts begin to creep in and grow. You begin to ask: What's wrong with me? Does God really care about me? You find the 'ligaments of your faith' stretched to the limit. Has this been your experience?

Great men of faith in the Bible also went through their 'waiting-room' experiences. Abraham waited for 25 years. David waited for about 20 years before he became King. Joseph waited 13 years. Saul waited 7 days & failed. We do not know how long Job waited before God restored him double-fold after he lost everything.

Having struggled for many years with his personal 'waiting-room' experiences and having studied and mediated on God's Word, Tan Sin Liang will share with you his insights on –

- Abraham's 'waiting-room' experience;
- Joseph's 'waiting-room' experience;
- Saul's 'waiting-room' experience. and
- David's 'waiting-room' experience;

The objective of this series of 4 studies is: To learn from God's Word how to cope with our 'waiting-room' experience. Learn from these great men of faith how they coped, or failed to cope, with their 'waiting-room' experiences.

This study may change your life (or your perspective of life).

# ABRAHAM'S 'WAITING – ROOM' EXPERIENCE

Theme : Trusting God Even When The Odds Are Against You

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## Call Of Abraham

- “Terah took Abram his son, and Lot...his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son’s Abram’s wife; and they went together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there” (*Gen 11.31*)
  - “Sarah was barren; she had no child.” (*Gen 11:30*)
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- “Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth from your country and from your relatives and from your father’s house to the land I will show you.”” (*Gen 12:1*)
  - “And I will make you a great nation” (*V.2*)
  - “And I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you I will curse.” (*V.3*)
  - “So Abram went forth as the Lord has spoken to him; and Lot with him. Now Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran” (*V.4*)
  - “Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions....and the persons (sevants) which they acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan. Thus they came to the land of Canaan.” (*V.5*)
  - “...Now the Canaanite was then in the land.” (*V.6*)
  - “The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” (*V.7*)
  - “Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there for the famine was severe in the land” (*V.10*)
- (*Gen 12: 1-10*)

## God’s First Promise: “The Promised Land”

- God called Abraham from Haran (Iraq). So Abraham was an ‘Iraqi’?
  - his father had taken him, his wife & his nephew Lot to Haran & settled down there (his father died in Haran).
- God told Abraham to leave Haran and go to a place where God said He will make Abraham “a great nation”
- Abraham probably had no clue what God was talking about.
- What would you do if you were Abraham? If it was me, the conversation would be something like this:

- “What? You want me to leave my hometown, my family and all my friends? We have just settled down in this town.
- By the way, where is this place you want me to go?
- Has it got a name? What? No name? What kind of place is that?
- God said, “I will show you”.
- How am I going to tell my friends & family? “I am going to a place with no name?”

- But that’s not the conversation between Abraham & God
- In fact, there was no conversation at all!
- As Abraham was packing his life-long possessions and rounding up his animals, curious neighbours began to gather outside his house.
- Perhaps this was what happened.

#### Neighbours bidding Abraham farewell

- One of the neighbours: “Hey Abraham. Why are you packing all your things? Where are you going?”
- Abraham: “I don’t know”
- Neighbour: “What do you mean you don’t know?”
- Abraham: “Well, God told me to go somewhere”.
- Neighbour: “Where is that “somewhere”? Has it got a name?”
- Abraham: “I don’t know. God just said, “Go to the land I will show you””.
- Neighbour: “Abraham, are you out of your mind? How can you uproot yourself like this and go to a place you don’t know? I hope God knows where he is taking you”.

- So Abraham and his wife and others headed to a ‘land with no name’ on a 1-way ticket with no questions asked.

■ Hebrew 11:8: “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go to a place that he was to receive an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going”.

- So by faith Abraham obeyed God to go to a place he did not know.

## My personal experience

- In 1986 God spoke to me in a series of dreams (actually more of 'nightmares' e.g. missing my lectures, exams) to leave Malaysia to pursue a postgraduate Masters degree in law. That was never on my agenda.
- After convinced that it was God's will, I decided to sell my law practice in Kuantan. But who wants to buy my small law firm?
- Miraculously, God found me a lawyer who was keen to buy my practice immediately.
- I applied to several universities in US & UK to do my LLM (Masters in Law) studies. It would take several months because the academic year had not started.
- So what should I do?
- Common sense told me to sell my practice after I was accepted by the university. That was my most logical thing to do.
- On the other hand, the lawyer who was keen to buy my practice was eager to start soon. He may not want to wait too long. I may lose the only buyer I had.
- After much prayer, I decided to go in faith. Against all logic, I sold my law practice before I was accepted by any of the universities.
- There was no turning back. If I was rejected by all universities I applied to, I would also end up with no law practice! I've burnt my bridges. I would be the laughing stock in my hometown.
- So every day I waited for the postman to deliver me the good news. Never so keen to see a postman before.
- During those excruciating painful months of waiting, I did not know where I was going (or indeed whether I'm going anywhere)
- But in my heart, I knew God was with me.
- However, I struggled greatly with this great conflict within me. The hardest was to leave my mother. Also my church and my friends. And my law practice.
- This was one of the biggest decisions in my life I had to make which concerned my whole family's future.
- Subsequent events confirmed that God indeed called me to leave Malaysia.

## Abraham did not know where he was going. But he knew who was going with him.

- The same is true in life. Sometimes we do not know where our life is heading to. It is more important to know that God is going with you.
- Finally, when Abraham reached Canaan. God said to Abraham:
  - "I will make you a great nation".
- To build a great nation, you must have the land.

- That's why God's 1<sup>st</sup> promise was to give to Abraham Canaan
  - the Promised Land

### The "Promised Land" that did not look very "promising"

- When Abraham finally arrived in Canaan, what did he find?
- 2 things might have disappointed him (I would)
- First, Canaan was already inhabited by Canaanites. It was not a vacant territory. To claim this territory, Abraham would have to evict the Canaanites. How was he going to do that?
- Secondly, Canaan was ravaged by a severe famine. In fact the famine was so severe, Abraham had to flee to Egypt and lived there like a refugee temporarily (not sure how long)
- So God gave Abraham a 'Promised Land' that did not look very 'promising'
- If you were Abraham, what would you say to God? I would say: "God, got better land or not?"

### God's 2<sup>nd</sup> Promise; "The Promised Nation"

- To make Abraham into 'a great nation', God provided him the land (territory)
- But to build a nation, you also need people
- However, there was a problem. Abraham was already 75 years old and his wife, Sarah, aged 65, was barren with no child ("past her age" Hebrews 11:11)
- How do you build a nation with an old childless couple past child bearing age?
- Looks like God had chosen the 'wrong' couple to start a 'great nation'

### God promised Abraham that he will have as many children as stars in the sky

- After the famine was over, Abraham came back to Canaan.
- One night, God took him Abraham for a walk under the star-lit sky
- This is roughly how the conversation went (my own paraphrase of Gen 15:5-6)

- God: “Abraham, look up into sky and count the number of stars in the sky, if you can”
- Abraham replied: “Oh God, are you crazy? (not in the Bible). How can I count the number of stars in the sky?”
- God answered: “So shall your descendants be”
- You could see Abraham’s jaw dropped to his knees!
- Abraham could have replied to God: “Oh God, in case you have not noticed, I’m 75 years old, my wife Sarah is 65 years old and she is barren! Do we look like a couple about to have a child?”

- That’s not how the conversation went. Again, no conversation (no Q&A).
- Gen 15:6 states: “And he (Abraham) believed the Lord, and He (God) credit it to him as righteousness”
- Abraham just believed everything God told him. For his absolute faith in God, God recognised Abraham as righteous. That’s how God look at us. Faith (or trust) is a form of ‘righteousness’.

### **Abraham & Sarah’s Waiting-Room Experience**

- When Abraham broke the news to his wife, Sarah, they must have been the happiest couple in Canaan. They might have thrown a big party to welcome the birth of the baby. Wouldn’t you?
- Like all couples expecting their first-born child, they must have thought that within a year they would have their baby.
- But did God say when? That was the problem
- So 1<sup>st</sup> year came and went. No baby. That’s ok, maybe next year
- 2<sup>nd</sup> year came and went. No baby. That’s ok, maybe next year
- 3<sup>rd</sup> year came and went. Same result
- 4<sup>th</sup> year & 5<sup>th</sup> year came and went. Still no baby.
- If you were Abraham & Sarah what would you do?
- By now, they would have visited all the gynaecologists in Canaan.
- By this time, you can hear Sarah asking Abraham almost every night:

- “Are you sure God never mention ‘when’?”
- “Perhaps God should have told me instead (after all I am the one going to give birth to the baby)”
- “If God had spoken to me, I would have asked God ‘when’? Not like you men.”

- So the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> year came and went. And still no baby.
- By now Abraham was 85 years old and Sarah, 75 years old (way past child bearing age).
- Sarah must be thinking: “Abraham, we’re running out of time! And we’re supposed to have as many children as ‘stars in the sky’ and ‘dust of the earth’ (Gen 13:16)?”
- If you were Abraham or Sarah, what would you do?

#### Problem with waiting in a ‘waiting-room’ experience

- Quite often we go through a ‘waiting-room’ situation, it is like travelling through a dark tunnel with no light at the end of the tunnel. It’s open-ended.
- The problem is not that we don’t trust God. It is trusting God for His timing, that’s the problem.
- Perhaps you feel you’ve waited long enough
  - for a job opening, for a life partner, for a child, for your very difficult son or daughter (I’ve struggled for over 15 years) etc.

### **A Surrogacy Plan That Went Awry**

- By the 10<sup>th</sup> year, Sarah felt she had waited long enough.
- Since God had not been doing much, Sarah decided to help God to speed things up.
- She came up with a ‘surrogacy plan’.
  - in case you don’t know, surrogacy is not a modern day practice.
  - it is an ancient practice dating back to Abraham’s days.
- Under Sarah’s ‘surrogacy’ plan, she gave permission to Abraham to sleep with her servant, Hagar, to bear his child (since her womb was barren).
- Abraham agreed.
- Hagar conceived and bore him a son, Ismail.
- But there’s a problem. Ismail was not God’s covenanted child.

- God make this very clear to Abraham in Gen 17:19 & 21: “But I will establish my covenant with Isaac”
- So Sarah stepped in and messed up God’s plan. Humanity is still paying the ‘price’ today (the Israeli-Palestinian conflict).

### Lesson Learned

#### (i) Don’t move ahead of God

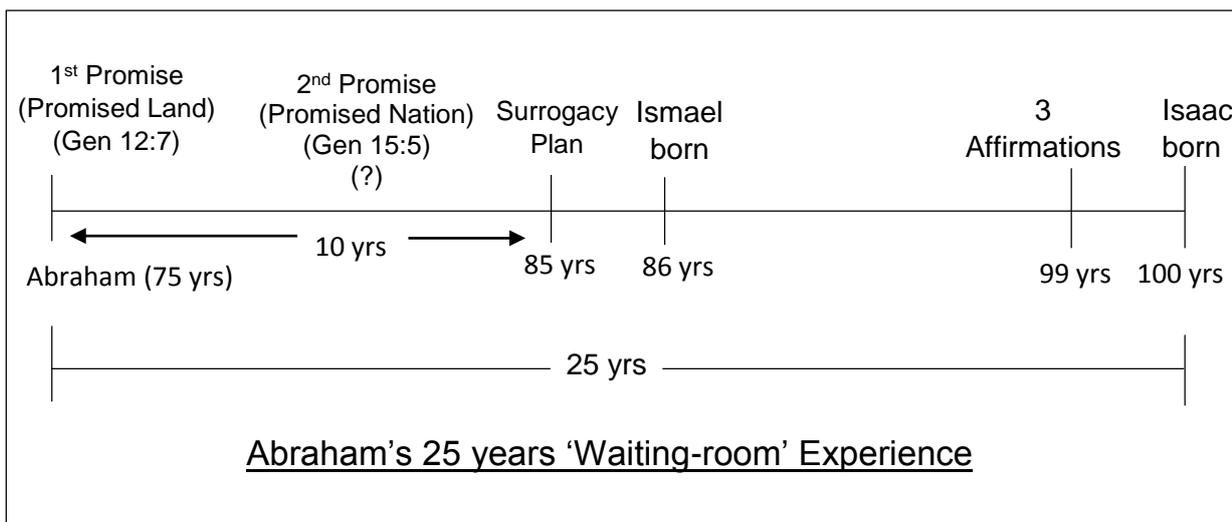
- In our impatience we have the tendency to move ahead of God, only to regret later the mistake we’ve made in haste.

### **Abraham & Sarah’s faltered ‘waiting-room’ experience**

- So Abraham & Sarah faltered after waiting 10 years in their ‘waiting-room’ experience
- Before we judge them, let us remind ourselves that 10 years is not a short period. Most of us cannot even wait for 10 weeks!
- For the record, altogether Abraham & Sarah waited a total of 25 years before Isaac was born.

### **God’s 3 Affirmations**

- Did God leave Abraham completely in the dark for 25 years? No.
- When Abraham was 99 years old (1 year before Isaac was born), God began to speak to him and gave him 3 Affirmations.
- 1 year before Isaac was born, Abraham knew the sex of the child, his name and which year he would be born.
- Finally, when Abraham was 99 years old, he was “seeing the light at the end of the tunnel”.



### 1<sup>st</sup> Affirmation (Gen 17: 1-11)

- When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; serve me faithfully and live a blameless life. (V.1)
- I will make a covenant with you; by which I will guarantee (V.2) to make you into a mighty nation. (V.3)
- .....Then God said to him, “This is my covenant with you. I will make you the father of not just one nation but a multitude of nations (V.4)
- What is more, I am changing your name. It will no longer be Abram; now you will be known as ‘Abraham’ (means ‘father of many’) for you will be the father of many nations (V.5)
- I will give you millions of descendants who will represent many nations (V.6)
- Yes, I will give all the land of Canaan to you and your offspring forever. And I will be their God. (V.8)

### God's Affirmation Of Abraham's Fatherhood

- God affirmed that Abraham will be the father of many nations
- God also re-affirmed that Abraham will be a father with millions of descendants (through generations)
- So the 1<sup>st</sup> affirmation was God's affirmation of Abraham's fatherhood
- 1<sup>st</sup> Affirmation was still in general terms

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Affirmation (Gen 17:15-21)

- Then God added, “Regarding Sarai, your wife-her name will no longer be Sarai; from now on you will call her Sarah (V.15)
- And I will bless her and give you a son from her. Yes, I will bless her richly, and she will become the mother of many nations.....(V.16)
- Then Abram bowed down to the ground but he laughed to himself in disbelief. “How could I become a father at the age of 100?” he wondered. Besides Sarah is 90; how could she have a baby?” (V.17)
- And Abraham said to God, ‘Yes, may Ismael enjoy your special blessing! (V.18)
- But God replied, “Sarah, your wife will bear you a son, you will name him ‘Isaac’ and I will confirm my everlasting covenant with him and his descendants. (V.19)
- But my covenant will be with Isaac, who will be born to you and Sarah about this time next year (V.21)

### 4 things we learn from 2<sup>nd</sup> Affirmation

- God told Abraham it would be a son. (sex identified)
- God told Abraham that Sarah will give birth to this son (mother identified)
- God already had a name ready for the son – “Isaac” (name identified)
- God told Abraham he will have the son next year about this same time (time identified)
- So how more specific can it be?

### God’s affirmation of Sarah’s motherhood

- Whilst the 1<sup>st</sup> Affirmation confirmed the fatherhood of Abraham
  - the 2<sup>nd</sup> Affirmation confirmed Sarah’s motherhood
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Affirmation was very specific (pin-point)

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Affirmation (Gen 18:10-14)**

- Then one of them (angels) said, “About this time next year I will return and your wife Sarah will have a son. (V.10)
- Now Sarah was listening to the conversation from the tent nearby. (V.10)
- And since Abraham and Sarah were both very old, and Sarah was long past the age of having children, she laughed silently to herself (V.11 -12).
- Then the Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh? Why did she say, “Can an old woman like me have a baby? (V.13)
- Is there anything too hard for the Lord? About a year from now, just as I told you, I will return, and Sarah will have a son. (V.14)

### **Re-affirmation of 2<sup>nd</sup> Affirmation**

- Whilst the 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Affirmations were delivered by God himself, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Affirmation was delivered by 3 angels (in the form of 3 persons).
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Affirmation was to re-confirm the 2<sup>nd</sup> Affirmation
  - (i) Timing of Isaac’s birth (next year this time)
  - (ii) Sarah will be the mother of this son.
- In 3<sup>rd</sup> Affirmation God used the 3 angels to affirm his earlier Affirmation so that Abraham was left with no doubt whatsoever God’s promise.

#### **Lesson**

- Sometimes God use a third party to affirm what is God’s will for us.

### **God’s Silence And His Affirmation**

- So after a long period of silence (20 years or more), God suddenly gave Abraham 3 affirmations, back to back (each one clearer than the earlier one).
- It was like God took a vacation (a long vacation) without leaving his ‘calling-card’ behind.
- And just as you’re about to give up (having waited 24 years) you receive this ‘long-distance call’ from God to assure you that everything is going according to plan.
- By the time Abraham received the 3<sup>rd</sup> Affirmation, he was left in no doubt exactly what was going to take place. It had become crystal clear.

- Finally Abraham was beginning to ‘see the light at the end of the tunnel’
- Have you ever felt that way? I have.

### Continuation of my story

- Having sold-off my law practice, I waited every day, week after week, month after month, for the postman to bring me the positive reply from the universities I applied to.
- It was one of the most painful periods of my life as my future was hanging by a thread
- One day, the postman finally arrived with an envelope from one of the universities (never so glad to see the postman before).
- It was a positive reply! I was accepted from the university I was hoping to study in!
- In the end, I was accepted by both the London universities I applied to.
- Whew! What a relief.
- Finally, it became very clear to me that God wanted me to leave M’sia to study in London.

- Quite often as we struggle to cope with our ‘waiting-room’ experience, God gives us ‘affirmations’ or ‘signs’ to show us whether we’re on the right track.
- The problem is that when we’re trying to cope with our struggles in our ‘waiting-room’ situation, we failed to see God’s ‘signs’ or ‘leading’.
- Where do we find God’s affirmation? It may be from God’s Word, through prayers, circumstances or through counselling by godly Christians.
- I’ve learned from my experience that no matter how ‘dark’ our situation may be, God always gives some ‘light’ to encourage us along the way, if we look close enough.

### **Lesson(s) Learned From Abraham’s ‘Waiting-Room’ Experience**

(i) TRUST in God even if the odds are against you.

- Throughout the 25 years ‘waiting-room’ experience, Abraham did not say much. But his silence spoke eloquently about his trust in God.
- How did Abraham cope with his 25 years ‘waiting-room’ experience? One word: ‘TRUST’
- He continued to trust God even though the odds are against him.

- If you're going through a 'waiting-room' situation and the odds seem to be against you, don't give up. Continue to trust in God.

## **Closing**

### **Seek the Healer rather than healing**

Some of us may be facing some serious health problems. Perhaps you have been struggling with it for some time and you're waiting for a positive outcome. And you know the odds may be against you.

Let me share with you a powerful and heart-rending testimony from a pastor (he was my ex-pastor whom we have supported for many years) who went through 21 months of 'waiting-room' experience. Let's call him "John".

John had been struggling from severe depression for many months. He had 'panic attacks', he heard voices, he had suicidal thoughts and had thought of killing himself many times. What prevented him? He said, "*I dared not do it because I was afraid that if I jumped down from a high-rise building and did not die, it would be worse!*"

He went to see a psychiatrist. John was given drugs for chemical imbalance. It did not really help. His several 'Job comforters' helpfully gave him all sorts of advice to be healed (e.g. go for deliverance, diet supplement, stop taking medicine go by faith etc.) But none were useful to John.

He began to question God: "*Why God? Why me? I have faithfully served you as a missionary for 32 years. Why others get promotion I get depression? Why are you doing this to me? I wondered if I was really saved. I even doubted the existence of God and the authority of the Bible*".

However, despite his confused and miserable state, John continued to trust in God. He said, "*I did not give up on God. I kept trusting in His unfailing love and faithfulness. However, as all people who suffers from depression will testify, your life is like a 'yo yo' which goes up and down. In one of his lowest moments, John challenged God, "*Either you kill me or heal me or I kill myself. I was thinking of jumping off one of the HDB flats behind my office on my way home*".*

But before John went home that day (and to end his life), he happened to read Romans 8: 31-39 in his office. He was struck by God's love expressed in this passage.

*“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?....For I am convinced that neither death or life, neither angels or demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”.*

(Romans 8:31-39)

John described the full impact of these verses on him at that moment, “*God instantly opened my spiritual eyes. Suddenly, I felt the dark cloud of depression of 21 months lifted out of my soul. My fear, doubt and anxiety vanished. God’s peace and calm which I had longed for many months were quickly restored.*”

He continued, “*I came to my senses and told God that I **no longer cared about whether He was going to heal me or not. I resolved to focus on my walk with Christ instead on the healing of my depression.** God did not heal me instantly but He did day by day. Each day I was getting better than the day before”.*

Looking back, he reminisced, “**One reason it took so long for God to heal me was because I kept asking him for divine healing. If I had surrendered my depression to His sovereignty, I would not have been so miserable**”.

In other words, John was healed of his depression when he **sought the Healer rather than the healing.** Put it another way, when John **put his TRUST in God, God began to heal him.** The tragedy is that some people (Christians included) only **trust God when God heals them.** John discovered **trust in God comes first.** Not the other way round.