Dedication

To my mother, Lorna,
who has inspired me with her love for the Savior.

Other Books by Sharla Fritz

Divine Design: 40 Days of Spiritual Makeover
Bless These Lips: 40 Days of Spiritual Renewal
Divine Makeover: God Makes You Beautiful
Soul Spa: 40 Days of Spiritual Renewal
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INTRODUCTION

We’ve all experienced the frustration of waiting. Waiting in bumper-to-bumper traffic. Waiting through airport security. Waiting for service in a restaurant.

Waiting to hear, “You’ve got the job!” Waiting for wedding bells. Waiting for test results. Waiting to be reconciled with a loved one.

And we despise it. In our modern culture of instant everything—same-day shipping, streaming movies, online banking, microwaveable meals—we are accustomed to getting everything we want now. So when our lives are put in a holding pattern, we complain and grumble and do anything we can to get things moving again.

But what if the waiting rooms of life are actually God’s best classrooms? What if the Holy Spirit changes us through the uncomfortable delays of life? What if, in the waiting, the Lord draws us near and imparts lessons we could miss when our lives are flying at the speed of a Boeing 777?

Throughout history, God has called on His people to wait. In this book, we will examine the lives of a few of these God followers—eight biblical ladies-in-waiting, if you will. These were women who yearned for babies. Women who ached for healing. Women who waited for guidance. Women like you and me.

As we study these women and read their stories in Scripture, we will discover how to handle seasons of delay. If we can’t have what we want when we want it, what are we to do while we’re waiting? As Christians, we know God’s promise of a happy ending through Christ. But what are we supposed to do in between heartache and heaven? Tap our toes? Watch the clock? Pace the carpet of hope until it’s worn thin?

The examples of these ladies-in-waiting will instruct us that there is a better way to wait. A way to wait well.

Their lives will teach us about trust and surrender when life feels suspended. They will demonstrate how to handle the daily-ness of waiting and show us actions we can take even when it seems there is nothing we can do. We will find that a pause in our plotline doesn’t mean the end of our story, and we’ll learn that all waiting has a purpose.

Throughout the book, I share some of my own waiting stories. I’m sure you have your own accounts of delay and disappointment too. Although our
stories may differ, we will see that God is present in every tale. He gives us His Word to encourage us when it feels like He’s nowhere to be found. He promises His nearness when it seems our prayers are not heard. And by the power of God the Holy Spirit through our Baptism, we have faith to trust in His timing and provision.

Although we may detest waiting and struggle greatly with it, ultimately we find that it has the power to draw us to Jesus. One of the best places to meet God is in the in-between.

**Using This Study**

In *Waiting*, you will get to know biblical women who experienced delay. Some of their stories span many chapters of the Bible, some only a few verses. All of them offer fascinating peeks into ancient life. To help you understand each woman’s time period, the chapters include the following:

- **timelines** to help you see how each woman’s life fits in history
- **maps** to give you geographical perspective of her home
- **historical information** to help you envision the life she may have lived

You may choose to explore the concept of waiting well by reading the book straight through. Or you may take the time to go deeper by engaging in the Bible study questions in the back of the book beginning on page 147. These questions will help you reflect on the reading, dive into Scripture, and apply the lessons to your own life. There are even a few creative projects to help you internalize the concepts.

I encourage you to study *Waiting* with a group. Gather a few waiting women together. Learn from the biblical women of the past—that’s why God includes their stories in Scripture. Support one another as you wait in the present—especially when it may feel like God isn’t there. As you share with one another your own waiting stories of financial difficulties, relationship struggles, or health problems, you will be encouraged to see how God works in every life.

As you study with your group, remember these guidelines:

- Begin and end your time together with prayer.
- Rely on Scripture to guide your discussions.
- Keep what is shared confidential unless given permission to share outside the group.

May God bless you as you learn to wait well.
I have done a lot of do-it-yourself projects in my day.

As a teenager, I used my sewing machine to reproduce the cute outfits I saw in my favorite store but couldn’t afford. While in college, I taught myself to cook. (Well, that might be a bit of an overstatement.) As a newlywed, I tried to feather our nest with furniture I refinished myself—even snatching pieces with potential from the curbs on garbage day.

My husband and I took on a huge do-it-yourself project when we built our own home. We relied on the experts to pour the foundation, frame the house, and install plumbing and electricity, but my husband installed insulation, laid shingles, and constructed interior carpentry. I painted dozens of walls and varnished miles of woodwork.

But there was one thing we couldn’t seem to complete on our own: children. What should have been the easiest thing for a loving husband and wife to attain continued to stay just out of reach for us. As all of our friends welcomed their bundles of joy, our arms remained empty. And we wondered, Why is God making us wait?

I’m sure that Sarah, wife of the Old Testament patriarch Abraham, also asked herself that question. After all, God had promised Abraham a son. Why was He making them wait? Eventually, Sarah grew tired of the delay and tried a do-it-yourself plan that resulted in disaster. Instead of waiting for God’s timing in her life, she took matters into her own hands—and ended up wishing she hadn’t.
Setting the Scene

Sarah was born ca. 2156 BC, and when we first meet her, she is living in the Sumerian city of Ur. Her name at the beginning of the story is Sarai, which means “my princess.” Since Ur was a thriving metropolitan area and her father appeared to be fairly wealthy, I can imagine Sarai was treated like royalty.

We know Sarai was very beautiful because even when she was a senior citizen, her husband, Abram, worried that important kings would want her for their harems (Genesis 12:11–13; 20:1–2). He was so afraid a willful ruler would kill him to attain her that he told the kings Sarai was his sister.

We don’t know much about Abram and Sarai’s early life. Perhaps they were educated, flourishing citizens of the great city of Ur. Perhaps they attended grand parties and important festivals.

We do know Abram and Sarai’s father, Terah, worshiped other gods (Joshua 24:2). Maybe he, like other citizens of Ur, bowed down to Nanna, the popular moon god. But Abram was called by Yahweh—the one true God:

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.”

Genesis 12:1

I wonder, how did Abram come to know Yahweh in a land of idols? How did he hear the voice of the Lord in a place filled with cries to moon gods? We aren’t told the details of the call of Abram. Neither are we told how Abram shared God’s words with Sarai. I, for one, would have liked to have eavesdropped on that conversation. Did Abram come in the back door and greet Sarai as she was making bread?

THE ANCIENT CITY OF UR

There is some debate about the exact location of Ur, but many scholars place it on the River Euphrates near the Persian Gulf. Because of the silting of the Euphrates, the site is now 150 miles inland, but during Abraham’s time it was an important port city. In fact, it may have been the greatest city-state in the world at that time. It was a prosperous industrial, agricultural, and commercial center with a population of 200,000–300,000. The city was dominated by a great brick ziggurat that honored the moon god Nanna. Middle-class families lived in houses with ten to twenty rooms. They enjoyed the availability of plenty of food and good education.2
Were Sarai’s hands suddenly still when Abram relayed God’s instructions to leave Ur? Did she stop kneading the dough, put her hands on her hips and question, “And where did God say we should move?”

Did her jaw drop when Abram replied, “He hasn’t shared that little detail with me yet”? God told Abram to leave his country (Genesis 12:1) and flee all influences that led to false gods. Scripture tells us:

Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram’s wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there.  

*Genesis 11:31*

Abram and all of his household set out on the long journey. But after

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**A PUZZLE**

Genesis 11:31 tells us Terah, Abram, Sarai, and company set off for the land of Canaan, but in Genesis 12:1, God does not give a specific destination. Acts 7:2–3 confirms that God first called Abram in Ur: “The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, ‘Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.’” How do we reconcile the two passages?

One commentary suggests that when Genesis 11:31 tells us they set off for the land of Canaan, this was “expressive of the Divine destination, rather than of the conscious intention of the travelers.” The Bible summarizes what is going to happen.
approximately six hundred miles of arduous travel, they stopped in Haran. We are not sure why they cut the journey short, but commentators suggest that it may have been because of Terah’s health.

But Haran was not their final destination. Haran was in between what Abram and Sarai had left behind and where God wanted them to go. It was a waiting place. However, God did not give up on them. He continues to call His people when they are not totally obedient. So when Terah died at the age of 205, Abram and Sarai packed their bags again and completed the journey God had instructed them to take, traveling three hundred more miles to Canaan. By this time, Sarai was a senior citizen (she was 65, and Abram was 75). If I had been Sarai, I would have complained about another move so late in life. I would have grumbled about living in tents and about sand in my soup. But we have no indication that Sarai did that. In fact, in the New Testament, the apostle Peter commended Sarah as an obedient wife (1 Peter 3:5–6).

Waiting for a Child

All this time, Sarai was not only waiting for a place to settle down; she was also waiting for a child. The very first description of her is “Now Sarai was barren; she had no child” (Genesis 11:30). How would you like to be introduced as “Sarai, mother of none”? Parents of young children are often known as “Ethan’s mom” or “Emma’s dad,” but Sarai was defined by her lack of children. That had to hurt.

And it was probably very confusing because when God told Abram he should pick up and move, He also promised, “I will make of you a great nation” (Genesis 12:2). Now, a great nation doesn’t appear out of thin air. So years earlier when Abram shared this promise with Sarai, she probably envisioned being the mother of a great brood of offspring.

But she waited and waited. She waited through a move away from the
homeland she knew. Waited through a journey to Haran. Waited through the trip to Canaan. Even waited through a tour of Egypt. And everywhere they went, God blessed them with material wealth. Abram became “very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold” (Genesis 13:2), but Sarai still didn’t have the one thing her heart ached for—a child.

After living in Canaan for some years, God visited Abram in a vision and gave him a more specific promise: “Your very own son shall be your heir” (Genesis 15:4). God called Abram out to look at the night sky and promised that his descendants would be as countless as the stars in the heavens.

 Abram and Sarai had probably given up on the possibility of having children. Perhaps they had often lamented the fact that there were no little ones to play peekaboo with the tent flaps. No babies to hold. No toddlers to hug. But now, God resurrected hope in their hearts.

A Do-It-Yourself Project

However, this is where things started to go wrong. After Sarai and Abram had been living in Canaan for ten years, Sarai decided she had waited long enough. At this point, she was seventy-five years old, and surely her body had given her all the signs that babies were no longer a possibility. She remembered God’s promise that Abram would have a son, but perhaps she despaired that God made no direct mention of her. She told her husband, “The Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her” (Genesis 16:2). It was like she was saying, “Abram, it looks like we have to go with Plan B. If God isn’t going to give me children, it seems a surrogate is my only path to motherhood. So go sleep with my maid.”

Right. Accomplish God’s plan by violating the sacred gift of marriage.

POLYGAMY IN THE BIBLE

God’s plan for marriage has always been one man, one woman: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). But during ancient times, polygamy was widely practiced. Lamech was the first man to marry two wives (Genesis 4:19). He was not a man of good character. He killed a man for striking him (Genesis 4:23). Abram was the first godly man reported to have multiple wives.
Sarai was definitely not waiting well.

Sarai must have been extremely desperate by this time to suggest sharing her husband with another woman. But maybe she had already asked all of her neighbors for their homemade remedies. Perhaps she had visited the local herbalist and picked up every fertility potion available.

Sarai tried waiting for God. She had waited for years since the Lord had first vowed Abram would have countless descendants. Maybe she thought, *Why hasn't God blessed us with a child when He so clearly promised one? It's probably all my fault. I don't know what I've done to deserve God's anger. But there's no reason Abram should suffer for my mistakes. We can't wait forever. If God isn't going to bless me with a child of my own, my little do-it-yourself project with Hagar should work instead.*

Surprisingly (or maybe not so surprisingly), Abram agreed to Sarai's plan. And it worked. Hagar became pregnant. But it wasn't long before Sarai regretted her decision. Once Hagar knew she was pregnant, she openly despised Sarai. She knew she could do something her mistress couldn't.

*Thirteen* more years go by. Sarai has now had more than a decade of living with the consequences of her choice. Can you imagine Sarai sitting in the shade of the entrance to her tent and watching as Abram walked with Ishmael? Did she feel a stab of pain in her heart when Abram put his arm around his son—by another woman? Did she glance over to the cooking fire and see Hagar also observing the scene with a smile on her face? Sarai's name was “My Princess.” She may have been accustomed to getting everything she wanted. But the one thing she most desired, she couldn't have. And now, at the age of eighty-nine . . .

Sarai had probably resigned herself to the fact that God had promised Abram a son.

But not her.

Then the Lord came to Abram again. Thirteen years after Ishmael was born, God once again told Abram that he would be the father of many, even changing his name from *Abram* (“exalted father”) to *Abraham* (“father of many”). And this time, the Lord specifically mentioned Sarai. He changed her name—from *Sarai* to *Sarah*. Both mean “princess,” perhaps emphasizing that she would become the mother of rulers and kings. The Lord assured Abraham a son would be born within a year, and Sarah would share in the blessing:
“As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”

*Genesis 17:15–16*

At this, Abraham fell facedown and laughed. Was he responding with temporary disbelief? Was the laughter a response of incredulous joy at the thought of having a child at the age of one hundred? Or was he responding to the irony that now that he and Sarah had lived through the consequences of her flawed DIY project, God was revealing the fact that Sarah had been part of the plan all along?

Shortly after God’s visit with Abraham, Sarah met the Lord herself. She had waited a long time to be included in the promise. At last, Sarah encountered this mysterious God who, for decades, had dangled the promise of a child in front of her but never allowed her to catch it.

The visit took place at their home. While Abraham sat at the entrance of his tent, he looked up and saw three men. Recognizing one of them as the Lord, he immediately urged them to stay awhile. He instructed Sarah to bake some bread while he selected a calf for the meal and directed a servant to prepare the meat. While the Lord ate, Abraham stood near them and Sarah eavesdropped on the conversation, hiding at the entrance of the tent. When God repeated His promise that Sarah would have a son within a year, Sarah laughed to herself and thought, *Are you kidding? Now that I’m old and worn out? Now I’m going to be a mother?*

The promise had become more specific. Now God revealed His timeline: a son would be born within a year. Wouldn’t you like it if God told you exactly when He was going to answer your prayer? But I think Sarah had waited so long and had hoped so long, that now she simply couldn’t let herself believe the good news. She had heard it before and nothing had happened. Perhaps she didn’t want to get her hopes up again only to be disappointed once more.

God heard Sarah laugh, and she tried to deny her silent snickers—after all, she had “laughed to herself” (*Genesis 18:12*). She had expressed her doubts only in her thoughts. It must have been a bit disconcerting when the Lord said, “No, but you did laugh” (*Genesis 18:15*). How could He know what was in her head and in her heart?
Is Anything Too Hard for the Lord?

It was then that God asked the question at the heart of the matter: “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” (Genesis 18:14).

Behind that question are a dozen others: Don’t you believe I am powerful enough to give you a child? Don’t you trust Me to provide what you need? Don’t you see it all depends on Me and not on you?

Ah, there is the crux. It certainly looks like Sarah believed everything hinged on her efforts. We see this in her very first words recorded in Scripture:

And Sarai said to Abram, “Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.”

Genesis 16:2

In the Hebrew narrative, the first words a person speaks reveal his or her character and personality. Sarah’s first recorded words happen here in Genesis 16 and in them we see Sarah’s impatience. When God didn’t meet her expectations, Sarah decided not to wait for God’s timing. She blamed God for her misfortune—“the LORD has prevented me from bearing children”—and didn’t trust Him to come through on the promise to Abram.

Now believe me, I can relate. I have already told you how I like do-it-yourself projects. Maybe you do too. There is a certain satisfaction in creating something with your own two hands. A particular pride that comes when you’ve accomplished something with your own efforts.

And that’s the problem. See that little word in the last sentence—pride? From the beginning of time, we humans have tried to convince ourselves we don’t need God. We can manage by ourselves, thank you very much. Satan told Adam and Eve they didn’t have to depend on God for knowledge—they could become wise like Him. The ancient world tried to prove their independence and ingenuity by building a tower to the heavens (Genesis 11).

But God designed us to need Him. He has constructed the universe in a way that reveals His limitless power and rule and our limited understanding and ability. In the account of Abraham and Sarah, God continually reminded them that He is the Almighty. He is the one in control.

The very first encounter between the citizen of Ur and the Lord demonstrated this. God told Abram, “Leave all that is familiar and follow Me. Trust Me for the next step and the next step and the next, and don’t be
concerned about your final destination. Depend on Me and not on your maps or guides.” Yahweh wanted Abram—and Sarai—to abandon control of their own existence and let Him choose the path of their lives.

The Lord reminded Abram of His might once again when He reiterated His promise in Genesis 17:

> When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless, that I may make My covenant between Me and you, and may multiply you greatly.”
> **Genesis 17:1–2**

Here God revealed Himself with a new name—God Almighty. The Hebrew is *El-Shaddai*, which “perhaps means ‘God, the Mountain One,’ either highlighting the invincible power of God or referring to the mountains as God’s symbolic home.” God, the One-with-All-the-Might, would fulfill the promise.

Again, God reminded Abram and Sarai that He was the one with the power. He was the one in control.

But somehow that lesson never sank in with Sarah. She executed a do-it-yourself plan that backfired. She laughed when God reassured her she would have a child in a year’s time.

### What God Is Waiting For

I can so relate to Sarah taking the initiative. I’m all about planning and accomplishing important tasks. But I can also connect with her desperate yearning for children and the frustration of waiting for that bundle of joy.

That prolonged period of waiting came when I was a newlywed. My husband and I were married as students. Actually, we took turns being students. John worked at a local church while I finished my bachelor’s degree; then I worked as a seamstress and piano teacher while he finished seminary. And all the while we were waiting for the time when we would be finished with school and get on with the business of our careers and starting a family.

Finally, the last year of seminary came. We could hardly wait for the