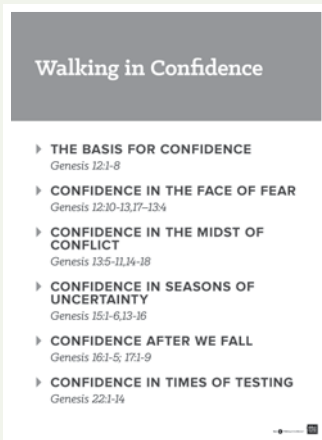


## Get into the Study



5 MINUTES

**LEADER PACK:** Display **Item 6: Walking in Confidence** poster to review the major theme of this study, along with the focus of each session.



**DISCUSS:** Question #1 on page 112 of the PSG: **“When have you seen the best-laid plans fall apart?”**



## SESSION 4

# Confidence in Seasons of Uncertainty

### THE POINT

Trust God when you don't have all the answers.

### LIFE CONNECTION

“The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry.” Our plans can change in a moment. Things happen in our world that just don't make sense. As much as we'd like all the answers, the Christian life calls for faith in God. Until we see and understand how God is at work, we must trust His unseen hand. We need to trust that nothing takes God by surprise, and we can trust Him in all things.

### THE PASSAGES

Genesis 15:1-6,13-16

### THE SETTING

Abram received promises from God, but then he found himself in a military conflict. The kings of the cities around the Dead Sea were defeated in battle. Lot and his possessions were taken captive. Abram then took his 318 trained men and his allies and chased down the invaders. God gave Abram the victory; they defeated the invaders and recovered the stolen possessions. Abram's heart was right before God, and the word of the Lord would come again to Abram.

## GENESIS 15:1-5

**1** After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.

**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.

**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.

**1** ▶ *Verse 1.* Abram made a difficult decision to lead his men into battle. God brought him a great victory, but often after the height of victory comes a valley. Consider how Elijah had a great victory over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel but ran away afterward due to the threats of Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 18–19).

Abram sought to be faithful to God, but he was struggling in his faith. Faith is confidence that God is at work. Abram was empowered by God to win a military conflict, but he still did not fully understand that God keeps His promises. However, God had a message for him again. **The word of the LORD came unto Abram.** This terminology is common in the Old Testament, yet it only occurs a few times in the first five books, and reveals something about Abram. In Genesis 20:7, God told Abimelech that Abraham was a prophet. A prophet received the word of God and spoke it courageously before others.

God told Abram that He was his **shield**. God would be his protector, his defender, and there is no more excellent protector than the Lord. Then God told Abram his **reward** would be **exceeding great**. Abram's reward for his faithfulness would be more than he could imagine. The way before Abram was not clear, but God clearly told him to keep trusting. Receiving a vision did not refer to an entrance into a trance-like state; it involved an enhanced

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 113 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of trusting God during seasons of uncertainty by reading or summarizing the text or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

**RECAP:** The year 2020 created the perfect storm of uncertainty. When things in life seem to be blurry or unstable, how do we respond? Oh, if only our faith were strong enough to overcome the uncertainty of it all! We know Abram as a man of faith, but that faith did not prevent him from experiencing his own season of uncertainty. Let's learn some lessons from the life of Abram.

**GUIDE:** Call attention to “The Point” on page 113 of the PSG: “Trust God when you don't have all the answers.”

**PRAY:** Transition into the study by asking God to help the group understand the importance of trusting Him during seasons of uncertainty. Thank Him for being the sovereign God who reigns from His throne and in our lives.

## Study the Bible

### Genesis 15:1-5



10 MINUTES

**LEADER PACK:** Display **Item 7: The Journey of Abraham** poster to give context for the events in these Scripture verses. Point to places and events on the map as they are discussed.



**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Genesis 15:1-5 on page 114 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Use Commentary **1** on pages 121-123 to help explain Abram's relationship with Eliezer.

apprehension of the Lord and His Word. Abram had faith, he had God's promises, but he also had questions.

**Verse 2.** Abram opened his heart before the Lord. Abram had faith, but he did not ignore his feelings. He freely expressed his emotions to God. The promise of God that he would have far more descendants than he could count and for his descendants to occupy the land depended on the birth of a child. Of course, Abram was childless.

So Abram spoke to the Lord, addressing Him as **Lord God** ("Lord Yahweh"). Servants would often refer to their masters by the word *lord*, so Abram was clearly addressing Yahweh as his master.

Abram said to the Lord, "**What wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?**" God was teaching Abram to walk by faith and not by sight, and it was not an easy lesson to learn. Abram was asking a question; he was making a point and complaining at the same time.

He was childless, and he pointed out "**the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus.**" The word providing the concept of heir in this verse is an obscure word only used here in the Old Testament, but the meaning of the word is clear from the context since there is parallelism in verses two and three. **Childless and the steward ... is Eliezer** is parallel to **no seed and one born in my house is mine heir** (v. 3). Parallelism is common in Hebrew and similar Semitic languages. Parallelism occurs when the writer uses words that are similar in an intentional repetition of meaning or to contrast thoughts. In the Hebrew, there is also a wordplay on "the steward" and "Damascus" since the words sound very similar.

This was the first mention of Abram's faithful servant, Eliezer. Jewish and Christian tradition holds that this is the same servant who made a trip in Genesis 24 to find a wife for Isaac. If that is true, it is clear he was also a man who had a strong faith in the Lord.

**Verse 3.** Abram said to God, "**Behold, to me thou hast given no seed.**" Recall what Adam said to God when asked if he had eaten from the forbidden tree. Adam shifted the blame and said it was the woman God gave to him who gave him the fruit to eat (Gen. 3:11-12). Similarly, Abram complained that God made these marvelous promises to him, but God had not given any offspring to

him, so how could these promises be kept? Abram said to God that **“one born in my house is mine heir.”** It is not known how Eliezer could be born in Abram’s house as a servant and still said to be of Damascus at the same time. However, archeology has shed some light on how a slave could become an heir to Abram. Inscriptions exist from various locations in the Ancient Near East that reveal that an outsider or slave could be adopted into the family and become an heir. The adoption of a slave would provide a son to meet the needs of the father or mother in their old age and could ensure their proper burial. In return, the adopted heir would receive an inheritance. It seems the adopted child did not lose his inheritance rights, even if the father subsequently had children. If Eliezer was still alive at the time of the passing of Abram, he very likely was rewarded for his faithfulness.

**Verse 4.** Eliezer was a faithful servant, but God had other plans. The Lord told Abram that **“he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.”** God was calling Abram to continue to trust Him. Faith calls us to believe despite what our circumstances are telling us.

**Verse 5.** God took Abram outside of the tent and told him to **“Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars”** if he was even able to count them. Then God told him, **“So shall thy seed be.”** God graciously promised it would not be possible to count the number of Abram’s descendants. God did not rebuke Abram for his questions; He consoled him with fresh promises. ◀

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## GENESIS 15:6

**6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.**

**KEY WORD: Righteousness** (15:6)—To be righteous is to measure up to God’s standard. Righteousness is credited to a person who trusts in Jesus for forgiveness and salvation.

**Verse 6.** Abram heard God’s promises and **believed in the LORD.** He still did not fully understand how God would keep these promises, and he did not need to know. He needed to trust. He needed to rest in God’s faithfulness, confident that God would do what He said He would do.

**RECAP:** Since the time God first called Abram and promised him land, offspring, and blessing, the patriarch had encountered a lot. Abram had endured a trip to Egypt to escape a famine, and then being kicked out of Egypt by Pharaoh. He had successfully managed relational tensions with his nephew, Lot, and he had defeated invading kings. After all this, things may have seemed a little unclear to Abram. All these events and circumstances didn’t seem to be leading to the promises God gave Abram.

**DISCUSS: Question #2**  
on page 115 of the PSG:  
**“How do we determine the difference between worry and legitimate concern?”**

**RECAP:** Picture Abram squinting his eyes and trying to do the impossible when God told him, “Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them.” Of course, even counting the stars would miss the point. God wanted Abram to realize that, in spite of how circumstances seemed at the moment, he would have so many descendants—a great nation—they couldn’t all be counted. Abram couldn’t count them, but God could—and even more so, He would know each one by name.

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):**

Break into smaller groups and ask each group to use their smartphones to put together some trivia about the stars and constellations that they can ask the other groups. (Some facts they may want to ask about: the current estimate of how many stars exist; what major stars can be seen from earth; what percentage of stars can not be seen from earth, closest star, furthest star, etc.) Instruct groups to challenge other groups with their trivia. Consider offering a prize to the group that puts together the most creative list of questions. Then invite the entire group to consider how Abram, who knew far less about the stars than we do, would've processed the promise God was making to Him.

**DISCUSS: Question #3** on page 116 of the PSG: **“What obstacles get in the way of trusting in God?”**

*Alternate: What are some things Abraham had to lean on while waiting on God's plan to develop?*

**TRANSITION:** We are to trust God even when the way is not clear. In the next verses, we see that trust in God results in righteousness.

Asking how was no longer his concern. God can do above and beyond what we can imagine. Biblical faith is not just hoping something is true. It is believing something is true with great confidence and a willingness to obey. The evidence of Abram's faith was his obedience.

It's interesting to note that the word “amen” in the English language is a loanword from the Hebrew word for *believed*. A loanword is a word that is borrowed from another language and used naturally in the new language. For example, the word *rodeo* is a loanword from Spanish. Abram believed the Lord. It is like he said, “Amen! So be it!”

The way we respond to God is the most critical issue of life. Abram's obedience was not perfect, but God **counted Abram's faith to him for righteousness**. In other words, Abram was righteous because God declared that to be the case. Isaiah 53:4 uses the same Hebrew word in reference to the coming Messiah. In this instance, it is translated as “did esteem,” as in “He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” However, God did more than regard Abram as righteous; He imputed righteousness to him, which means God declared him to be in a right standing with Himself, free from the guilt of sin.

In 2 Samuel 19:19-20, Shimei would plead with David saying, “Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me,” although Shimei knew he had sinned. In essence, Shimei was asking that he not be declared guilty. David granted his request and pardoned Shimei. David did not impute sin to Shimei or declare him guilty. In Psalm 32:2, David wrote, “Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” God declared Abram righteous entirely on account of his faith. That's how anyone is righteous in God's sight.

Genesis 15:6 only contains five words in the Hebrew, but it is one of the most significant verses in the Old Testament. Paul cites the verse in Galatians 3:6. False teachers had infiltrated the Galatian churches, claiming that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Paul taught that salvation was by grace through faith, and not by works. Paul said that God gave the Galatians His Spirit when they believed what they heard, just as Abraham had believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness (Gal. 3:5-6). Paul also said those who have faith are “children of Abraham” (v. 7). Furthermore, Paul said all the

nations would be blessed through Abraham (vv. 8-9). So God's promises to Abraham, the man of faith, proved true.

In Romans 3:20, Paul concluded that no one can be declared righteous by their works. The law does not make one righteous; the law makes one conscious of sin. Paul said a righteousness from God has been revealed, and is only available through Christ's atonement. It is through the Son of God, through Jesus, that the righteousness of God is available to anyone. Romans 3:22 states it clearly: "Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe."

Paul pointed out what Abraham's life revealed about salvation in Romans 4:3, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." In Romans 3:24, Paul wrote that all who sin are "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Forgiveness and salvation are only possible through faith in Christ. Those who have been justified by faith will have peace with God, and they belong to the family of God. All the sins of the believer are forgiven. In First John 5:11, we read that the believer in Christ now has eternal life: "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." Eternal life is, by definition, everlasting, so there is no way a true believer can lose it.

James also cited Genesis 15:6 in his letter (Jas. 2:23), but some would argue he was in disagreement with Paul. In James 2:17, he states, "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." James went on to say that faith without works is useless, that Abraham was justified by works in offering Isaac on the altar, and that "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness" (v. 23). He concluded by saying, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (v. 24).

However, James and Paul were addressing two different questions. Paul was addressing the question of whether faith plus keeping the law is necessary for salvation. James was addressing the question of what type of faith saves a person. Faith that is only intellectual and does not lead someone to love Christ and serve others is a faith that cannot save. It is like the faith of demons (v. 19). Paul would certainly agree that saving faith leads to good works. Paul argued that keeping the Jewish law was not necessary for salvation, and James would agree. James told his readers to rid themselves of all moral filth (i. e., repent) and "receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls" (1:21). Paul likewise said in Romans 10:17, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Paul and James agreed that

## Study the Bible

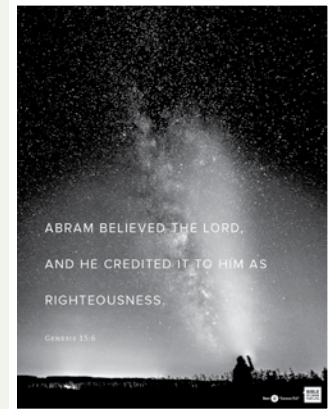
### Genesis 15:6



10 MINUTES

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Genesis 15:6 on page 116 of the PSG.

**LEADER PACK:** Display **Item 9: Genesis 15:6** poster to help illustrate today's verse. Invite a group member to read the verse aloud to the group.



**RECAP:** After God told Abram to count the stars, "he believed in the LORD." God did not give Abram any details concerning how He would deliver on the promises, but Abram trusted the word God spoke to him. He believed.

**LEADER PACK:** In advance, make copies of **Item 10: Word Study of Genesis 15:6** handout and distribute them to your group members. Use this handout to help group members understand the theological significance of this verse.



**RECAP:** Securing salvation on God's promise that we are made right by our faith in Christ alone propels us through other unknowns. Faith provides us with a foundation that is certain and stable. Faith helps give us an eternal perspective to see the world through the eyes of God, so when everything around us seems to be crumbling, we can stand confidently. No matter the outcome, when we trust Christ alone for salvation, we are made right with God and are secure in Him.

God saves the sinner when the sinner hears the gospel, repents of sin, and trusts in Christ. If someone claims to believe in Jesus, but there is no change in his or her life, how has that type of faith brought them to salvation? In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul wrote that anyone in Christ is a “new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” The good news is we are saved by grace through faith, and faith comes by hearing the Word of God, particularly the message about Christ. And that faith bears fruit.

To summarize, Paul spoke about how salvation is activated; it is by faith. James spoke about how faith is demonstrated; it is by the works of one who loves God. James said a faith that does not result in works is useless (Jas. 2:14-17). Paul likewise said that one is saved by faith for the purpose of good works (Eph. 2:8-10).

When Paul used the word “justified” (Rom. 3:24), he was referring to justification before God. We are declared righteous by the work of Jesus on the cross when we put our faith in Christ. Everyone who receives Jesus as their Savior and Lord is declared righteous, justified, by God. When James used the word “justified” (Jas. 2:21), he was referring to justification before men. A person is righteous before others when that person lives in a way that honors God. Because Abram believed God, he was credited with righteousness. As a sinner, Abraham's spiritual bankbook was empty. He was bankrupt just like every sinner in this world! But he trusted God, and God credited righteousness to Abraham's account. Abraham did not work for this righteousness; he received it as a gift from God. He was declared righteous by faith. He was justified before God by faith, and he was justified before men as he obeyed God.

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## GENESIS 15:13-16

**13** And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;

**14** And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.

**15 And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age.**

**16 But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.**

**2 ▶ Verse 13-14.** In Genesis 15:7-12, God made a binding covenant with Abram and assured him of the fulfillment of His promises. Abram cut in half a heifer, a goat, and a ram, then along with these laid out a dove and a pigeon. However, birds of prey came down on the carcasses, and he had to drive them away. Abram then went to sleep, but there was great terror in his thoughts. A covenant was more substantial than just a contract, and the dead animals were a reminder that those who broke the covenant deserved the same fate as those animals (Jer. 34:18-19).

God spoke to Abram and told him his descendants would be enslaved and oppressed in another land for four hundred years. Yet God promised He would **judge** those they served. Abram's offspring would come out of the land of bondage, and they would **come out with great substance**. That is what God said would happen and it did (see Ex. 3:21-22; 11:2-3; 12:35-36). God made a solemn covenant with Abram, and Abram could be confident God would keep it.

**Verse 15.** What about Abram? What would happen to him? The thought of four hundred years of slavery and oppression undoubtedly saddened Abram, but God had a gracious promise for him. Abram would not have to endure abuse in Egypt. The Lord promised him a long life. He would be **buried in a good old age** and would go to his **fathers in peace**, which could just be a figure of speech, meaning that he would live a peaceful, abundant life and then die (Gen. 25:8).

**Verse 16.** The word for **generation** is used more than one way in Hebrew. It may refer to people who live in a particular time. Moses referred to his fellow Israelites as a "perverse and crooked generation" (Deut. 32:5). From the context of the passage, it is evident Abram's descendants would not return for four generations, which amounted to about four hundred years at the time.

God would continue to show mercy to the Amorites for another four hundred years. He would allow them time to repent, but finally their iniquity would reach a point when God would judge them. God would later be gracious to

#### **ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):**

Play the video clip found at [BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra](http://BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra) to illustrate how this passage impacted the Apostle Paul and later Martin Luther through Paul's writings in Romans..

**DISCUSS: Question #4** on page 118 of the PSG: **"What are some things that help us build trust in God?"**

*Alternate: Whom do you know who often expresses confidence in the promises of God?*

**DO:** Direct group members to complete "Engage" on page 120 of the PSG to help group members apply the principles of this verse to their lives.

**TRANSITION:** In the next verses, we see that we must trust God to work in His time.

## **Study the Bible**

### **Genesis 15:13-16**



**15 MINUTES**

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Genesis 15:13-16 on page 118 of the PSG.



**RECAP:** Abram believed God regarding offspring, but he asked for confirmation regarding the land: "Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" (Gen. 15:8).

**GUIDE:** Use Commentary **2** on pages 127-128 to help explain how God's promise foretold future events among Abram's descendants.

**DISCUSS:** Question #5 on page 120 of the PSG: "When have you experienced the reliability of God's timing?"

*Alternate: What makes it so hard to wait for God's timing?*

**GUIDE:** Refer back to "The Point" for this session: "Trust God when you don't have all the answers."

Judah, but He would eventually send the Babylonians to conquer them in judgment.

God's covenant with Abram highlights His amazing grace. It was common when two parties entered into a covenant for both to walk between the severed animals; however, we read in Genesis 15:17 that only a "smoking furnace, and a burning lamp ... passed between those pieces." The smoking furnace and burning lamp represented God; this solemn agreement was unilateral. Just as God credited Abram with righteousness by grace through faith, so He would fulfill these promises by grace and not by any works on the part of Abram. ◀

### ENGAGE

Evaluate yourself by considering how seasons of uncertainty impact your life. For each statement, circle an answer that best reflects your experiences. Then talk with a partner about how you answered.

"The older I get, the more difficult the struggles of life are."

**Definitely**      **Somewhat**      **It depends**      **Not really**

"My faith and trust in God have matured with my age and experiences."

**Definitely**      **Somewhat**      **It depends**      **Not really**

"During seasons of uncertainty, my prayer life is more active and I try to rely on God more than my own strength and capabilities."

**Definitely**      **Somewhat**      **It depends**      **Not really**

"During seasons of uncertainty, I typically reach out to others for prayer and spiritual guidance."

**Definitely**      **Somewhat**      **It depends**      **Not really**

## LIVE IT OUT

We should trust God when we don't have all the answers. Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Look at your hands.** Uncertainty has the ability to make us act irrationally and take matters into our hands. Take some time and evaluate where you might need to let go and place something back into the hands of God.
- ▶ **Look at the stars.** Uncertainty can make us forgetful. Before the day is over go outside if possible and look up in the sky. Be reminded of the many promises of God that you may have forgotten over time.
- ▶ **Look at your faith.** Uncertainty in our faith affects the way we respond to uncertainty in life. Take some time and assess the foundation of your faith. Then share your faith with someone else.

## Live It Out



5 MINUTES

**READ:** Direct group members to page 121 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the applications to carry out this week.

## Wrap It Up

**SUMMARIZE:** Read or restate this idea from page 120 of the PSG:

*Things may not occur in the time frame we think they should, but God's timing is always perfect. He is always "right on time." We can be confident in seasons of uncertainty because we do not have to face them alone.*

**PRAY:** Thank God for guiding us through uncertain times. Ask Him to help group members seek His wisdom when things don't seem clear.



**EXTRA!**

Free additional ideas for your group are available at

[BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra](http://BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra)