WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU FEEL FORGOTTEN BY GOD
Genesis 7:24 – 8:22

Let's pray – Almighty God, thank you for giving us your word so that we might know you better and surrender more fully to your will and your way and so find peace in your presence. Please open the eyes of our hearts so that we might see and hear and understand better who you are today, and who we are in relationship to you. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

INTRODUCTION – Forgotten

Many years ago, I moved from Hong Kong to upstate New York, for college. I quickly began attending a church plant located a couple of miles from campus. I didn't have a car and was very blessed that there were people in the congregation willing to swing by campus and pick me up on Sunday mornings for church, and Sunday night for prayer meeting and Tuesday evening for CD Hour – Christian Development Hour.

One day I waited at the designated pick-up location with a friend I had invited to join me. But my ride didn't come. As the minutes ticked by, my friend and I began to wonder aloud if we had been forgotten.

This was back in the day before cell phones were around, so we had no way to call and find out. Five minutes came and went. Ten minutes came and went. Fifteen minutes came and went. Surely our ride must be on the way. But how long should we stand their waiting to see if they would show up? Should we figure out another way to get there?

There can be a certain amount of anxiety that creeps in when you begin to wonder if you have been forgotten. Why hasn't my ride come? Are they okay? Did something happen to them? If they are okay and they just forgot, what does that say about my worth to them? Maybe nothing, maybe they just forgot. But how do you know?

At some point I looked at my friend and said, "Well, it doesn't seem like we are going to get a ride today. The weather is nice. How about we walk there? It's just a couple of miles, and I think I know the way." She agreed to the plan and we walked the couple of miles to church that day. We looked back on that experience for years, laughing about the day ***the Pastor*** of that church plant forgot to come and get us.

Have you ever been forgotten? What was that experience like?

A few weeks ago, as I was preparing to head out on vacation, I was scheduled to have breakfast with a group of friends. The night before I had been up late working on things for church. And in the morning when I got up, I launched into my long to do list that included chauffeuring my kids to their activities, dropping off a stool sample at the vet for one of the dogs, getting my tires rotated on the car, finishing up some things for

church. I was moving steadily through my list until about 11am, when it suddenly dawned on me, with all I was trying to accomplish before I left on vacation, I had forgotten to go to breakfast at my friend's house that morning. Ugh. I felt awful.

It was no reflection on my care for them or the value of this group of friends to me. It simply reflected the fact that I had too many things on my finite human mind as I imagine my pastor in college did the day she forgot to come pick me and my friend up for church.

But now with cell phones I could text my friend group as soon as I realized what I'd done and say, "I'm so sorry. My mind was in other places this morning and I simply forgot to come over this morning." They knew I was getting ready to leave town and they were just relieved to know I was okay and nothing bad had happened.

Have you ever forgotten to do something with someone, or for them? What was that like for you?

Memory lapses are quite common for human beings. But what about for God? Have you ever wondered if God has forgotten about you?

It is not uncommon for people to feel forgotten by God during periods of prolonged pain or suffering such as when a loved one who has been their anchor dies and they are going through extended grief, or when someone experiences financial ruin, or when someone must endure a chronic illness.

It is not uncommon for people to feel forgotten by God when there has been betrayal or mistreatment or abuse in a relationship. When someone feels isolated in their pain, or that their experience is hidden, it is easy to feel invisible to God as well.

It is not uncommon for people to feel forgotten by God if they go through sustained periods of waiting for major life longings to be fulfilled. Waiting many years to find a suitable marriage partner or conceive children can leave people wondering if God even cares.

It is not uncommon for people to feel forgotten by God when they believe their prayers have gone unanswered. Praying persistently for healing, restoration, or relief without seeing any change or intervention might leave one feeling disappointed and wondering if God is looking the other way.

When we feel spiritually empty, hollow, or numb, if we are unable to sense the peace or comfort of God's presence in private or corporate worship, we might wonder if God has forgotten us.

As we have journeyed through Genesis together, we have gotten to the part of the story that deals with the life of Noah. I wonder if there were times in Noah's life when he might have felt forgotten by God.

I wonder if he felt forgotten in all the years he had to wait to become a father. Do you remember the genealogy we looked at in Genesis 5 a few months ago? That written record shows his forefathers had children at much younger ages than he did. Adam was 130, Seth 105, Enosh 90, Kenan 70, Jahalalel 65, Jared 162, Enoch 65, Methusalah 187 and Lamech, Noah's dad was 182 years old when he was born.

For those who enjoy numbers, the age range was 65 to 187 for becoming a father. And the mean age of this group was 117 years old.

Does anyone know how old Noah was when he became a father? 500 years old.

I wonder how Noah felt about having to wait that long? Did it bother him to watch his peer group enjoying what he presumably longed for too? Maybe Noah was fine with it at 100, or even 182 years old, which is the age his father was when he was born. But what about when he turned 183 and still was not a dad? What about when he became the oldest man in his family tree to not father a child by the age of 188? What about when he turned 200, or 250, or 300, or 499 years old and still had no child of his own?

I wonder – In all those years, did he ever question the goodness of God or even the existence of God. Did he ever wonder if God was punishing him for some unknown sin? Don't some of us go to those kinds of places when we must wait a long time for something we desperately want?

If Noah desired to have children, and it's a safe assumption that way back then he did, then Noah suffered for very long time, doing without something he deeply wanted. In all those first 500 years of his life, did this unfulfilled yearning ever make Noah ever wonder if God had forgotten him? We don't know. The account of his life we find in Genesis doesn't tell us what went on in his heart and mind regarding these matters.

It just says that, after Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham and Japeth. (Gen 5:32) And after that we're told that Noah found favor with God.

After this, God spoke to Noah, revealing his plan to destroy the entire world and everything in it because of all the violence and corruption and evil in the world.

But God promised to preserve the life of Noah and his wife and his 3 sons and their wives in a giant ark that Noah was to build.

Is God's plan becoming clear to you now as you consider the greatly delayed timing in Noah's ability to father children? **He hadn't been forgotten after all.**

By making Noah wait so long to be a father, God was able to ensure that the lives of all 3 of Noah's sons were preserved in the ark with him. What a relief it must have been for Noah to realize that none of his descendants would perish in the flood.

Often when we feel forgotten by God it's because we don't yet fully see or understand the plans that God is working out in our lives. His plans are for our good. They are plans to prosper us and not harm us. Plans to give us hope and a future. Those plans often take time to work out in real life, because they involve real people.

The Bible assures us that no matter what situation we are facing, and regardless of how we feel, God will not forget us.

In Isaiah 49:15-16 God says:

15 "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast
and have no compassion on the child she has borne?

[Pause – those of us whose moms have had dementia know that sometimes human mothers do indeed forget the babies they have born. Even if you know it is because of an illness, it can be painful to have your own mother look you in the face with no recognition and ask, "Who are you?" "What is your name?" Which is why this verse reassures us that even if a human mother could forget her own child, God does not forget us.]

15 "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast
and have no compassion on the child she has borne?
Though she may forget,
I will not forget you!
16 See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;
your walls are ever before me.

In Luke 12:6-7, Jesus says:

6 Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. **7** Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

So, if you need reassurance about the challenges you are facing today, hold on to the truth of God's word. He knows your situation and he has not forgotten you, nor will he ever forget you, no matter how difficult your life or your problems feel. You are valuable to him and he cares for you deeply. Will you choose to trust that He is working out his good purposes behind the scenes in your life even if his purposes are not yet clear to you?

Sometime the lessons we learn about God, others and ourselves as we go through tough times help us later with subsequent trials.

I imagine that the lessons Noah learned about patience when he understood God's plan after waiting 500 years to become a father made it easier for him to trust God's timing and God's plan as he and his family were tossed about in the ark.

[Image of Noahs Ark on the stormy ocean.]

God had destroyed the whole world in a flood. It had rained nonstop for 40 days and 40 nights. “Every living thing on the face of the earth had been wiped out...Only Noah was left and those with him in the ark.” (Gen 7:23) Those must have been scary and difficult times for Noah and his family and all the animals.

But God had not forgotten Noah, even if at times they might have wondered.

Genesis 7:24 – 8:22.

7 **24** The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days.

8 But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded.

2 Now the springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens had been closed, and the rain had stopped falling from the sky. **3** The water receded steadily from the earth. At the end of the hundred and fifty days the water had gone down, **4** and on the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. **5** The waters continued to recede until the tenth month, and on the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains became visible.

6 After forty days Noah opened a window he had made in the ark **7** and sent out a raven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth. **8** Then he sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground. **9** But the dove could find nowhere to perch because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it back to himself in the ark. **10** He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark. **11** When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth. **12** He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him.

13 By the first day of the first month of Noah’s six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. **14** By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry.

15 Then God said to Noah, **16** “Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. **17** Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it.”

18 So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. 19 All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on land—came out of the ark, one kind after another.

20 Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. 21 The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though[a] every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

22 "As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest,
cold and heat,
summer and winter,
day and night
will never cease."

The turning point of the flood narrative is described in this one sentence:

8 But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark,

What a sec. What does it mean that God remembered Noah?

Does that mean God actually did have a memory lapse? Does it mean God had gotten too busy with his other tasks of running the universe and for a period of time Noah had slipped his mind and then it suddenly dawned on God what he had done, and he was like, "Oops, sorry Noah, I forgot you were down there on earth stuck in that ark. But something just jogged in my memory and now I realize what I've done. I'm so sorry I left you floating in that ark for so long. My bad."

Is that what God does with us? Does he forget us temporarily and then realize his mistake, like what I did when I forgot to go to breakfast at my friend's house?

No, we've already established that God does not forget us.

So what does it mean when the Bible speaks about God remembering someone, if it does not mean at some point he had temporarily forgotten them?

When the Bible says God remembers someone…

It means God is turning his attention towards something that will require his powerful intervention on their behalf. He is getting ready to act with mercy and grace on someone's behalf.

It means God is preparing to take action that will show his favor rests upon a particular person or group of people.

It means God is getting ready to deliver on a promise he has made to rescue them from trouble.

When God was preparing to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, with burning sulfur that rained down from heaven (Gen 19:24), in judgement for the evil that was going on there, we read that "he remembered Abraham," and as a result, "he brought [Abraham's nephew] Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived." (Gen 19:29)

When Rachel was barren and desperately wanted children and her sister Leah kept popping out babies and there was competition and jealousy between them, we read that "God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son." That son was Joseph – the dreamer who grew up to save the Israelite and Egyptian people from perishing in a severe and extended famine. (Genesis 30:22)

When the Israelites were enslaved and mistreated in Egypt after Joseph died, we read that "God heard their groanings and he remembered his covenant with Abraham with Isaac and with Jacob." (Genesis 2:24) He then set in motion his plan to lead them out of slavery in Egypt with the help of Moses.

When Hannah was barren and her husband's second wife had children and then maliciously kept provoking her to irritate and bring pain to her heart, Hannah cried out to God. And we read that "God remembered her, so in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son, whom she named Samuel. Samuel grew up to become the last Judge of Israel and one of the greatest prophets we read about in the pages of Scripture.

When Mary became pregnant with Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit, she glorified God, rejoicing in her Savior, who she said was now helping Israel, and "remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, as he had promised their fathers." (Luke 1:54-55).

When the repentant thief on the cross next to him begged Jesus, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom," Jesus replied, "Today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:42)

In all these examples, the point is the same. When the Bible says "God remembered someone" what follows is some sort of powerful action or work of God on behalf of his people, to provide deliverance or fulfill a promise. When we read that God remembered someone it is a cue for us to know that he is about to step in to save or bless them in a powerful way.

So we understand that the fate of Noah and his ark pivot on this one sentence:

8 But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark,

This is our cue that God is about take powerful action on behalf of Noah and his shipmates to intervene and rescue them in order to keep the promise of deliverance he had made before Noah even began to build the ark.

What was the action God took in his remembering of Noah?

God caused a wind to blow, which began to dry up the water that covered the earth.

A few years ago we had a valve fail on the water pipe leading into the toilet attached to our master bedroom. The water ran out of the broken valve and onto our floor for several hours before we discovered it. Thankfully it was not dirty water of the sewer backing up and overflowing. It was clean water flooding our bedroom. But even though the water was clean, it made for a very soggy carpet. We did the best we could to sop up the excess water with towels and vacuum up the remains with the shop vac. But in the end, the best remedy was to get big fans and blow them at the wet carpet.

God initiated a similar solution for the flood that covered the earth. He caused a wind to blow, which began to dry up the water that covered the earth. This signifies the beginning of earth's renewal.[Got Questions]

The result was that 150 days (or, 5 months) after the first drop of rain fell, the water had receded enough for the ark to come to rest on the mountains of Ararat. And about 2 ½ months later, the tops of the mountains became visible.

Wait a sec. You mean Noah was in the ark more than just 40 day and 40 nights? Yup.

From the day the Lord shut them into the ark, until the day the Lord called them out of the ark, Noah and his family along with all those animals were shut in the ark a little over a year.

Often we must wait as God works out his plans in our lives and the world. The Bible tells us that God is patient with us, delaying judgement, not wanting any of us to perish. (2 Peter 3:9)

Are we willing to be patient with Him, as He works out his plans for our lives and our world? Will we trust His timing when we are stuck in a difficult situation for longer that we would like?

Noah waited patiently for God's work of re-creation to be done. But he wasn't passive in his waiting. He looked for signs that God's timing was complete. And we can in our situations too, because God often gives us indicators to encourage us along the way.

After God sent the wind to dry the water, and after the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat, and after the tops of the mountains became visible, Noah waited 40 more days. Then he opened a window he had made in the ark and sent out a raven and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth.

8 Then he sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground. 9 But the dove could find nowhere to perch because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it back to himself in the ark. 10 He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark.

[Show image of Noah holding the dove with the olive branch.]

11 When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth. 12 He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him.

13 By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. 14 By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry.

15 Then God said to Noah, 16 "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. 17 Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it."

18 So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. 19 All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on land—came out of the ark, one kind after another.

Noah looked for signs that showed the progress of God's work and we can too. God is often willing to give us kindness along the way to strengthen our resolve and help encourage us and to just remind us that he is there.

But Noah didn't come out of the ark until God called him forth. He knew that staying where God had put him was the safest and best place for him to be, even if it was tough. God had called him into the ark and shut him in. God would have to bring him out when God's purposes had been fulfilled. The ark was a place of great safety, and yet it was also undoubtedly a place of immense challenge. Was it Noah's feelings that kept him safe, or was it the ark?

Often when we go through challenges that last a long time, we have times when our feelings might lead us astray. Thoughts come that might make us question if God knows what is happening and if he even cares. Those are the times we need to hold onto the truth of God's word and remind ourselves of what God has already done for us.

I don’t know what you are going through, but are you willing to trust God, as Noah did, even when the waiting is long and dark and deep?

Two things stand out clearly in this story. God remembered Noah, and in turn Noah remembered God.

The first thing Noah did when he and his family and all the animals came off the boat was worship.

Worship is always an appropriate response ...both while we are waiting (as Job did) and once the storm has passed and we have been saved from our troubles as Noah did. Gratitude can keep us from despair.

CONCLUSION -

Many of us face challenging situations. God doesn’t always tell us before hand what his plans for us are. We understand them more fully as we go forward with our lives.

In the storms of your life, will you hold on to the truth that God has not forgotten you. Will you cry out to God in hope that God will remember you and will act on your behalf? will you wait patiently and worship?

BENEDICTION:

Numbers 6

24 "‘The Lord bless you and keep you;
25 the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
26 the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.’