

A Miracle Called Laughter

June 14, 2026

Genesis 18:1-15

¹ The Lord appeared to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre while he sat at the entrance of his tent in the day's heat. ² He looked up and suddenly saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from his tent entrance to greet them and bowed deeply.

³ He said, "Sirs, if you would be so kind, don't just pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought so you may wash your feet and refresh yourselves under the tree. ⁵ Let me offer you a little bread so you will feel stronger, and after that you may leave your servant and go on your way — since you have visited your servant." They responded, "Fine. Do just as you have said."

⁶ So Abraham hurried to Sarah at his tent and said, "Hurry! Knead three seahs of the finest flour and make some baked goods!" ⁷ Abraham ran to the cattle, took a healthy young calf, and gave it to a young servant, who prepared it quickly. ⁸ Then Abraham took butter, milk, and the calf that had been prepared, put the food in front of them, and stood under the tree near them as they ate.

⁹ They said to him, "Where's your wife Sarah?" And he said, "Right here in the tent."

¹⁰ Then one of the men said, "I will definitely return to you about this time next year. Then your wife Sarah will have a son!" Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were both very old. Sarah was no longer menstruating. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, thinking, I'm no longer able to have children and my husband's old.

¹³ The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Me give birth? At my age?' ¹⁴ Is anything too difficult for the Lord? When I return to you about this time next year, Sarah will have a son." ¹⁵ Sarah lied and said, "I didn't laugh," because she was frightened. But he said, "No, you laughed."

Genesis 21:1-7

¹ The Lord was attentive to Sarah just as he had said, and the Lord carried out just what he had promised her. ² She became pregnant and gave birth to a son for Abraham when he was old, at the very time God had told him. ³ Abraham named his son — the one Sarah bore him — Isaac.

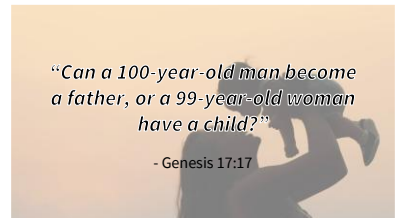
⁴ Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old just as God had commanded him. ⁵ Abraham was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born. ⁶ Sarah said, “God has given me laughter. Everyone who hears about it will laugh with me.” ⁷ She said, “Who could have told Abraham that Sarah would nurse sons? But now I’ve given birth to a son when he was old!”



As we pick up the story of Abraham and Sarah today, we are a ways into their story. So, to help make sense of this week’s passages, let’s review their story to date. If you’re a reader of my blog, most of this will be review for you. Last week we read from Genesis 12. This passage holds Abram’s call story. At 75, Abram heard God’s call: leave this land, your family, and your father’s household, and head “for the land that I will show you.” And there was a promise too: God will bless many nations through Abram’s descendants. In radical obedience, Abram left almost all behind and headed out, ending up in what would later be called the Promised Land. Because of this great step of faith, God credited Abram as “righteous.” This example of radical faith resulted in Abraham being known as the father of Israel.

There were two significant events between last week’s reading and this week’s reading. The first happened when Abram and Sarai decided to take matters into their own hands. It had been about 12 years since God promised to bless the nations through Abram’s descendants. A plan was devised to produce an heir. Abram slept with their Egyptian servant Hagar.

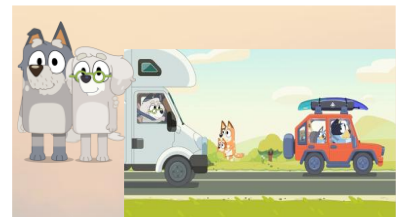
And a child is born. Next week we will turn to the outcome of the story of Hagar and Ishmael. The other significant event was God reiterating the promise. About a year after Ishmael was born, our faithful God came to Abram and, at age 99, re-established the covenant, saying, *“You will be the ancestor of many nations.”* Pronouncing the covenant, God renamed Abram, now calling him Abraham, which means, “ancestor of a multitude.” Sarai would also be renamed, becoming Sarah. God declared, *“Kings of people will come from her.”* At this point Abraham wondered to himself, *“Can a 100-year-old man become a father, or a 99-year-old woman have a child?”* Very good questions! God’s response: yes. Yes, you can and, yes, Sarah can.



This summary brings us to today’s passage. As we prepare to delve into the miracle called laughter today, let us begin with a word of prayer...

O God, you who called Abram to leave his country and go with you, who in Christ called disciples to follow him, you call to us now. Help us to hear your voice, to leave behind old lives, and to walk with you in new life in your grace. Help us to hear what you are saying to us today, and to respond, by the grace of your Holy Spirit. And now, O God, I ask that you would bless the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts. You are our rock and our redeemer, our Christ and our king. Amen.

As we think about Abraham and Sarah, 100 and 99 respectively, and as we think about the opening scene in today’s passage, these characters came to mind. Most of you may not know who these folks are – unless you watch television with your grandchildren. Anyone know who these characters are in the pictures on the screen?



In the small car we have Bluey and his family. You may be able to see the worry in Bandit's eyes. That is Bluey's dad. He is afraid that the "grey nomads," those driving the RV behind them and in the inset picture, might get ahead of them. These seniors travel from place to place in slow-moving RVs, frequently stopping at every possible roadside attraction. Unfortunately, in the episode titled "Road Trip," an extra bathroom stop leaves Bluey's family stuck behind the grey nomads. This greatly frustrates Bandit, the father. Until he notices Bluey and his sister in the back seat, having great fun playing a made-up game, totally unconcerned with how fast they get down the road. For the kids, it was all about enjoying the journey. This was much more important than how soon they arrived at the destination. That's also why the grey nomads stopped at almost every possible opportunity. It was all about the journey.

I think Abraham and Sarah would classify as "grey nomads." They are certainly nomadic, following their flocks from pasture to pasture around the place they call home. They are certainly grey. And they are childless, in spite of God's promises. You see, it has been almost 25 years since the first promise was given as they left Terah and about 12 years since the covenant and renaming that came a year after Ishmael's birth. There is another similarity, too. As our passage opens, Abraham is sitting outside his tent, just watching the world go by. He is in no rush to get anywhere. This is why, in verse 2, we see that Abraham notices some men standing nearby. If he were rushing from place to place, not pausing to "smell the roses," as they say, he might not have even noticed the men. This is the final way that Abraham qualifies as a "grey nomad" – he is moving slow enough to notice and to offer kindness to these strangers. Quite frankly, isn't this why we miss some of the opportunities that God places before us or in our path? We're too frequently rushing from here to there, too often trying to get "just one more thing" done in our day. So, we miss opportunities.

Show of hands, nod of heads: Anyone been guilty of busyness this week? Maybe even today, even though the day is not yet very old? Yes, our schedules can be so full, our checklists so overwhelming, we often don't see the stranger that God has placed right there in our life.

It is not so with Abraham. He invites them to pause on their journey, to rest a while, to be refreshed. Soon he sits before these strangers a meal of milk, butter, bread, and meat. Abraham is demonstrating something that God calls us to practice. As he welcomes the stranger and generously provides nourishment and rest, Abraham is practicing radical hospitality. Now, the text begins with *"the Lord appeared to Abraham."* Did he know that God was with or was one of these three strangers? Probably not. But he did know that it was right and good to welcome them and to offer what he could for their betterment. Someone named Jesus will pick up on this theme in the New Testament, encouraging his followers to also welcome in the stranger, to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, rest to the weary.

Turning to verse 9, we get to the purpose of their visit. These three strangers ask Abraham, *"Where is your wife?"* Why, she is right there in the tent. It is then that one of the strangers says, *"I will definitely return to you about this time next year. Then your wife Sarah will have a son!"* Ok, let's review. They are old and grey and childless. Both are at or near 100 years old. Sarah has stopped having menstrual cycles. Impossible is not a word to use with God, but we are pretty close here. So, Sarah laughs to herself. And her laughter is heard.

*"I will definitely
return to you
about this time
next year. Then
your wife Sarah
will have a son!"*

- Genesis 18:10



Notice the speaker change in verse 13. In the text it says, *"The Lord said to Abraham..."* It is then that God asks Abraham, *"Is anything too difficult for the Lord?"*

The Lord then reiterates what has already been stated. At this time next year, I will return and Sarah will have a son. Yes, this is God speaking. But there had to be some pretty serious questioning, at least, going on in both Abraham's and in Sarah's heart and mind. Really, how could there not be questioning? We are so old. We are both well past child-creating and child-bearing years. Such things just do not happen. This is not normal.

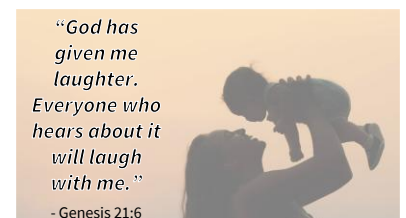


In the next chapters we have the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the weird “she’s my sister” episode with Abimelech. Turning to chapter 21, it has been a year. In verse 1 we read that God was attentive to Sarah and did what God promised. Sarah becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son. Abraham names his son Isaac, which means “he laughs.” Both parents had laughed at the possibility of being parents at 100. It was certainly a laugh that expressed disbelief. But what if the laugh was also partly “huh, what if...?” What if the laugh was a “hmmm... I do believe that anything is possible with God” kind of laugh? That would help make sense of why Abraham would call this miracle “laughter.”

Sarah offers these words in verse 6: *“God has given me laughter.*

Everyone who hears about it will laugh with me.” This is not a laugh of embarrassment. This is not a laugh of derision. This a laugh that

celebrates the impossible becoming real. This is a laugh that is filled with joy. This is a laugh that comes again and again as Sarah holds this baby boy in her arms. Naming this child “Laughter” is a daily reminder of the gift, the miracle, the persistent joy. In this sense, I think that we could name all miracles “laughter.”



Miracles, after all, are not meant to be understood or explained. They are meant to be received with joy and laughter. The grace of these miracles reveals the wonder of God working in ways that stagger our imagination. These miracles often touch us with joy, as it did for Sarah and Abraham and everyone else who celebrated Isaac's birth with them. Yes, they were all filled with joy, right there next to the disbelief. It was all mixed together – in their hearts, in their laughter, in this child. But the disbelief did not diminish the gift. This too was part of the joy and hope. To have moments when we say aloud or to ourselves, "I cannot believe that God did ____" is good for our faith. It is reassuring to our faith.

Reflecting on these miracles, on the joy that they produce, theologian Frederick Buechner wrote these words in a sermon:

"We can never take credit for our moments of joy because we know that they are not man-made and that we are never really responsible for them. They come when they come. They are always sudden and quick and unrepeatable." They are God-moments, here often unexpectedly and then the moment passes. But the gift, the joy, the miracle – they and their impact lasts for all of our life.

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- Frederick Buechner

While I believe this is true of the miracles that happen in this world and in our lives, I also believe that while we are not responsible for the miracle itself, we do have a role to play. Consider Abraham's role. Had he not made time and had he not practiced radical hospitality, then the three strangers would not have lingered and would not have foretold Isaac's birth. We can assume, no foretelling, no miracle. Abraham created space for the miracle to be foretold and, therefore, for it to come to fruition.

In our busy, rushed world and lives, do we even see or pay attention to those people sent by God or to the Holy Spirit if this is God's chosen miracle announcement vehicle? Who are those visitors that come to us, those strangers that arrive unexpectedly, ready to share a word from God with us? When has the Spirit whispered to or nudged us, alerting us to the unfolding work of God in our lives or in our world? And in these moments, how do we live with a heart ready to see and hear and receive from God?



My friends, if we move through life like Bandit, looking over our shoulders, worrying about somehow not getting there soon enough or about not having enough time to do all that we have planned or put on our checklist, we will often miss the joy, the gift, the miracle. Yes, there may be times when God bonks us over the head with a miracle. But when we live rushed and overly scheduled, anxious and consuming lives, we will miss the moments, the “small” miracles, the touches of God, the experiences filled with joy, hope, love, and laughter. This week and every week, today, tomorrow, and every day, may we make the intentional choice to listen for God, to notice the stranger, to pause in the moment, to extend radical hospitality, to live the abundant life that God has planned for us all. May it be so for you and for me. Alleluia and amen.

Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow.* How might you cut back on the busyness and to-do checklists? In what ways could this lead to a growth in your faith?
- 2) *Pray.* Did you miss a God opportunity this past week? Pray for guidance on how to come back around to that opportunity!
- 3) *Study.* Read Genesis 20. Who is the righteous one in the story? What does this say about God and how God sometimes works through imperfect people like us?