

Crazy & Laughable

On Sunday, we continued our journey through the book of Genesis, coming to a story about Sarah and a huge surprise God had waiting for her in her old age.

1. Warm-up question: Tell us about an elderly person you have adored and one of their idiosyncrasies.
2. Sometimes we find ourselves in a place where we feel unsettled and restless. We have a sense God is trying to say something to us, but we're not sure what that is or if we're just imagining it. When did you last feeling like that? Tell us about it.
3. Today's Bible story is about Abraham and Sarah. This part of the story is told from Sarah's perspective. Years earlier, God had told Abraham that Sarah would birth a child of promise whose offspring would become a great nation that would bless all the earth. God said, "Look toward the heaven and count the stars, if you are able to number them. So shall your descendants be." Genesis 15:5. Through the years, Sarah clung to that dream.
 - a. How do you think Sarah felt when she first heard the prophecy that she would bear a child of promise? How would you feel in that situation?
 - b. Imagine Sarah a decade after the promise was first given, but still no child. Age was creeping up her. At that point, how do you think she felt? How would you have felt?
4. The years continued to pass and nothing happened. No promise fulfilled. No child. Eventually Sarah passed her childbearing years; now it was too late. Then something strange happened. Read Genesis 18:1-15.
 - a. In this story, God and two angels appear to Abraham and Sarah disguised as human travelers passing by. This is what theologians call a "theophany," i.e., when God appears disguised as a human. Have you ever experienced something that may have been a theophany? What happened?
 - b. As the three strangers ate dinner, Sarah eavesdropped from inside the tent. When she heard one of the strangers say that she would soon birth a son, what mixture of emotions do you think she felt?
 - c. Reinhold Niebuhr once said, "Humor is a prelude to faith, and laughter is the beginning of prayer." What do you think he meant? Do you agree or disagree?
 - d. In verse 12, the Lord said, "Why did Sarah laugh? Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" In what tone of voice do you envision God saying that?
5. In the months that followed the theophany, Sarah's laughter turned to hope, hope turned to faith, and faith to prayer. Eventually, she became pregnant and birthed the

child of promise. She named him Isaac, which in Hebrew means “laughter.” By her son’s name, she was memorializing a lesson for the ages, namely: It’s never too late for God to do something wonderful in your life. No matter what age you are, young or old, there will be seasons when you find yourself saying, “It’s too late.” In those times, if you think you overhear God through the tent wall saying something crazy, go ahead, laugh. But don’t be too quick to dismiss it. Pray about it, and if God keeps tugging you in that direction, take a chance! Be bold! Take a risk!

- a. Jeff told about a crazy idea he’s hearing from God about a book he could write that might help many people grow their understanding of faith, rather than losing it as they bump up against the realities of life. He feels like he needs to take some steps of faith to explore that possibility. How about you? At this point in your life, are you hearing anything “crazy” from God? If so, what? And what are you going to do with it?
- b. In the movie *We Bought A Zoo*, Benjamin Mee says, “Sometimes all you need is 20 seconds of insane courage. Just literally 20 seconds of embarrassing bravery. And I promise you, something great will come of it.” When in your life have you had “20 seconds of insane courage?”
- c. Years ago, Gary Haugen and some of his friends conceived the idea of forming a faith-based non-profit that would combat sex trafficking. In 1997, Gary resigned his job as a Justice Department lawyer and took the plunge. Now International Justice Mission has 22 offices across the globe, helping thousands. Gary describes the fear he felt right before he resigned his Justice Department job:

“What was I really afraid of? As I thought about it, I feared humiliation. If my little justice ministry idea didn’t work, no one was going to die. If IJM turned out to be a bad idea and collapsed, my kids weren’t going to starve. We’d probably just have to live with my parents for a while until I could find another job. . . . [The real reason I was afraid was, if my idea failed,] I would be terribly embarrassed. Having told everybody about my great idea, they would know that it was a bad idea or that I was a bad leader. Either way, it would be humiliating.

So there it was – my boundary of fear. I sensed God inviting me to an extraordinary adventure of service, but deep inside I was afraid of looking like a fool and a loser. [But then I thought,] when I’m [older], do I really want to look back and say, ‘Yeah, I sensed that God was calling me to lead a movement to bring rescue to people who desperately need an advocate in the world, but I was afraid of getting embarrassed and so I never even tried?’”

How much of Gary do you see in yourself? How much does fear of failure, risk aversion, or a desire for security hold you back?

6. Picture a person who plays it safe and goes to the grave without adventure. Picture another person who sees life as an adventure and dares to attempt some laughably crazy things. Which person are you? Which person do you want to be? What is a concrete step of faith (large or small) you’re now taking (or going to take) in response to God’s voice in your life?