



WORKTALK WEEKLY

13 SEPTEMBER 2010

Welcome to WORKTALKweekly

In Between Times 14: Laughter

Learning the meaning of laughter...

American poet E.E. Cummings is reported to have said 'The most wasted of days is one without laughter'. It is certainly true that laughter is a universal human activity. If you are with humans for any reasonable amount of time, it is almost impossible not to hear the sound of laughter.

The reasons for laughter are not uniform at all. We laugh as expressions of a wide and mysterious variety of emotions. Nervous laughter comes out of fear, we laugh to mock, we laugh with relief, we laugh with disdain as well as out of amusement and sheer joy. Laughter can be used as a weapon to destroy an enemy or fight off gloom. It can lift the spirit, and lighten an atmosphere.

You might like to monitor laughter in your week to see whether you laugh enough and perhaps even in the healthiest ways. That might be enough for you from this piece, but I would like to focus your eyes, or perhaps your ears, on some ancient laughter which surrounded an infamous 'in between time'.

In the Biblical record, there are remarkably few reports of laughter. One is described when the professional mourners laugh at Jesus of Nazareth, prior to his reviving Jairus' daughter from death. In their case, it is mocking. The one that I am suggesting you listen to comes from the spiritual royal family of Abraham and Sarah. Both of them laughed when they were told that they will have a son in their old age.

This laughter marked the beginning of a short 'in between time', but it was set in a much larger one. For twenty-five years they had lived with a promise of being the starting point of a nation. Abram's name was 'father' and it was changed to Abraham - 'father of many'. Sarai's name was changed to Sarah, meaning 'princess'. They were living with an irony that their names reminded them of every day. They were supposed to be producing offspring, but couldn't.

The twenty-five year 'in between time' may capture our attention on another occasion, but this smaller one of twelve months is full of learning, as we taste the laughter sandwich.

At the other end, there is further laughter, when their son is actually born. As instructed, they name him 'he laughs' and Sarah laughs again.

Within the space of twelve months, they have moved from a complex and ambivalent laugh of disbelief (probably mixed with incredulity, anxiety and frustration) to a laugh of unbridled delight (maybe with a hint of embarrassment).

Yet again the 'in between time' ends with a birth - but yet again the birth is more than just of the child. What is born in Abraham and Sarah is a new depth of trust, a new awareness of the power of God. They are themselves different people, a new Sarah and a new Abraham is born. What they have been holding in their souls for a long time had finally materialised.

Isaac's arrival defied all logic. Abraham was a hundred and Sarah was ninety - past

childbearing age. I doubt if the nine month pregnancy was filled with confidence - they would have been nervous that the child would not survive to full term. It was an 'in between time' of surreal confusion, where their views, values and beliefs were being challenged as each week passed.

So what of your 'in between time'? Have you been carrying a dream, a promise, a potential for a long time? Does it seem as if the moment has passed? Is all logic telling you 'it's over'? Have you been living with contradictions and irony surrounding yourself? Have you begun to laugh a laugh of disbelief? All these reactions are supremely human and understandable. They are genuine, honest expressions of vulnerability in the face of the impossible.

Until God shows up.

Then the last laughs can be of delight. Abraham and Sarah did not know this. Neither can you - until the birth actually takes place. But at least you can look at your spiritual ancestors, for you too are part of their offspring - part of the answer - part of the laughter. It's another type of self-image that may help you cope with the 'in between time' of now.

n between now and the next WORKTALKweekly, do feel free to email us your thoughts to wtw@worktalk.gs or leave a comment on our [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) profile.

Work well
Geoff Shattock

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BIBLE SECTION

Genesis 17:7

17 Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?"

Genesis 18: 10-12

10 Then the LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. 11 Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

Genesis 21:1-7

1 Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. 2 Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. 3 Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. 4 When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. 5 Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." 7 And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

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