

Laughter Meditation –

We're going to use our moment of silence today as the beginning of our sermon. Today I am going to teach you how to do...a laughter meditation. Yes, it's a thing.

First stand as you are able. Feet spread a bit. Stretch your arms high above your head. Rock your body side-to-side from your torso, then bend over and touch your hands to your feet. Next, massage your jaw and yawn at least two times to loosen your mouth and relax the muscles in your jaw.

3-5 minutes: Find a comfortable position to sit or stand. Start by slightly smiling and then begin laughing without too much effort. Move to deep belly laughs. (Hint: try different types of laughs to encourage your true laugh to come through. Even if it begins as a forced feeling, most people find the forced laughter catalyzes authentic laughter in no time.)

Sit or lie on the floor in stillness and silence for a few seconds. Be mindful of what comes up for you—how your body feels, emotions that present themselves, and thoughts that arise.

Proverbs says it well, Laughter is the best medicine. And what we just did with our laughter meditation has scientific proof of several benefits. Laughter allows us to slow down and be present with our lives. Laughter brings some lightness into our serious “adult ways. It brings connection with others in a fun and meaningful way. Laughter reduces stress and anxiety. And finally, laughter provides emotional release. Think about how you've felt in moments where you laughed so hard you cried.

Today's prayer, Sarah's laughter, was not an attempt to achieve any of these benefits. In fact, it was an accidental prayer of laughter. When she got busted on this prayer of laughter, she did the most logical thing any of us would do. She lied. It was like that kid from Polar Express saying over and over again. I didn't do it. (3x).

Did Sarah really think she would get away with fibbing to an all-knowing deity? Yes Sarah laughed, but who can blame her. Look at what Sarah and Abraham have been through.

We have to go all the way back to Genesis chapter 12 where God first makes this bold promise to Abram. Verse 1-3. Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” In you all families of the earth will be blessed. How else could that happen except through them having children to carry on that promise?

Time passes. The stork does not visit. Possibilities arise and then fade. Abraham becomes close to his nephew Lot. But then Lot goes his own selfish way and Abraham’s nursery? Empty. Abraham becomes close to another young man, Eliezer of Damascus. Again, this lad drifts away and still Abraham and Sarah have no heirs.

They become so desperate that Sarah offers Abraham a surrogate, her servant, Hagar. Hagar has a son with Abraham. But Ishmael is not the fulfilment of God’s promise. God promised that Abraham and Sarah would have a child...together, just them.

When Abraham and Sarah try to make that promise happen through ordinary human means, each attempt is met with failure. Each heir. The nephew, Lot; the Damascus kid, Eliezer; and even the half-son Ishmael all fail to win divine approval.

In our passage today from Chapter 18, here is the current state of things. Sarah is at the ripe, post-menopausal age of 90. Abraham is at the ripe, less virile age of 99. The last thing on their minds is attending “birthing” classes and setting up a nursery. When the Lord says. “I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.” Sarah does the only reasonable thing anyone in this situation would do. She laughs.

And why wouldn’t she? Who ever heard of someone becoming a first-time mother at the age of 90? Sarah wasn’t struck by humor; she was struck by shock. Long ago, Sarah gave up any hope of having a child on her own. When God tells her that in the next year she will have a son, she laughs. An over-the-hill couple like Abraham and Sarah? They could never accomplish this.

And they are right. They could never accomplish this on their own. But as Abraham's heir and God's Son, Jesus would say generations later. With God All Things Are Possible!

Whenever I've heard messages on this passage, Sarah has always been painted in a bad light. A woman lacking trust in God. But let's look at something else that happened in this story. Sarah listened. Sarah heard these improbable words spoken by God. What would you do if God said something this unbelievable to you? I have to say that I was a bit guilty of this with my call to ministry. But I did listen.

Let me tell you about what happened when I first realized that God wanted me to be a pastor. It was early June in 2018. The pastor at Santa Cruz and I had just finished a memorial service for the brother-in-law of a friend. It was especially difficult, because whether he died knowing Christ was in question with the family. As the pastor and I talked afterwards, he turned to me and said, "Have you ever thought about going into the ministry. You'd be really good at it." My answer was immediate. "Yes, I did." And when I was in college, what I wanted to do was be a missionary. His next question made me think a bit. "What stopped you?" This answer came with a sigh. "I got married." But Suzanne, Jon, and Meg...I'm glad I did.

He asked if he could mention our conversation to our district superintendent. I said sure. A few weeks later, our DS, Mark Conrad, was there for a different meeting that I was involved in. After the meeting we started talking. By then I knew about being a licensed local pastor. This would be perfect. I could keep my cushy Intuit job and be a part time pastor on the weekends. After I finished telling our DS about this, he turned to me and said. "Have you ever thought about being an elder?" Since I didn't know what he meant by this I asked, "What's an elder?" He said, "You would be the full-time pastor of a church". Now I didn't laugh at this but shock was definitely something I was feeling. I felt like that moment in Princess Diaries where Anne Hathaway finds out she's a princess. I wanted to say. "Shut up!".

So yes, God can and does surprise us at improbable moments in our lives.

In all of our laughter and “Shut up” moments, there is a common truth. We are not just dismissing God’s voice with no consideration. It’s in these actions that we show a willingness to hear God’s voice.

Too often, our ears are so used to what is familiar, that we cannot fathom a time when God would speak the unexpected. Our lowered expectations squeeze the divine voice down into muted and mundane tones.

This is where Sarah exceeds expectations. She hears God’s voice. Even if she hears him speak in a way that seems laughable to her, she listens.

When was the last time God shocked you? When was the last time that God’s clear promises and plans seemed too outlandish to be true? When was the last time you were absolutely certain that you could not do what God was calling you to do? If God hasn’t shocked you in a while, try this. Pray for a divine vision. One that transcends mediocrity. Grant God the space to share with you bigger dreams that you can imagine.

Now while Sarah heard God’s voice. She didn’t hear it very clearly. God said, “I will”. Sarah replied, “I can’t” and “I’m not able”. All of her protests, her doubts, her perceived insufficiency. All of these things dismissed with a single divine question. “Is anything too difficult for God”.
(repeat)

When we find ourselves overwhelmed by God’s promises, the most faithful and honest response we might be able to offer is laughter. To say “I can’t even imagine doing that. It’s laughable”. But in that case, may our next response be. “Lord, if it’s going to happen, you’re going to have to do it with me.

Friends as we close out this sermon series, “Lettuce Pray; a Spiritual Salad”. As we finish today with Sarah’s laughter, the dressing of a prayer of the unspeakable, let us remember this.

Divine love knows no impossibilities. God specializes in extreme measures. Death to life; darkness to light. Extreme measures are routine to God. Think about it, these extreme measures started for us with “Let there be”. So, let’s not limit God’s promises by leaving God out of fulfilling these promises. Let’s leave our own attempts behind and trust in the one who can and does make all things possible.