

The Laugh

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[0:00] It's good to be back with you all. As Gabe was sharing about having a passion for Bible translations, I was like, you know what? In order to have a passion for Bible translations! and getting it out into the world, you first must have a passion for the Bible.

If not, then what's the point of it, right? You won't get fired up to try and get the Word out there if you're actually not fired up for the Word itself. And I think that's what we're trying to do here. We're trying to cultivate and nurture in us a passion for the Word.

I just got back from England and I got to visit a lot of different churches, some of the churches that I grew up in and just different kind of places and had a lot of conversations with past mentors and brothers and sisters with churches that are doing well and churches that are struggling.

And often the question always is, well, how do we have a church? What's a good church? And I was like, you know what? I don't even know. But I do know what God is looking for. I was reminded even as we were worshipping in John 4 where Jesus himself says, the Father is looking for worshippers who worship him in what?

In spirit and in truth. Paul talks to the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 14 and says, I will sing with my mind and I will sing with my spirit. Right? So you need both.

[1:12] You need the Word and then you also need the Holy Spirit. And in order to have that truth is to go into the Word. That's why I keep trying to shame you to bringing your physical Bible in.

It's an important part of my journey. And as we're gathering here, we're just saying, it's got to be about the Word. And actually, hold us accountable. If you ever come into church, and actually, I joke and laugh, but you can actually go into churches and who somehow manage to go through a whole service without really acknowledging the Bible or Christ.

It is possible. I assure you, it is possible. But we gathered here. That's surely what we have to be about. And for us to have that passion for the Word itself. So just an encouragement to you.

If it's something that you're thinking about, please go and talk to Gabe a lot more about it as well. So I just got back. I was away for three Sundays. Went to what was the formerly Great Britain.

But less so great now. It's been a good few weeks. Lots has happened since that time. Alex, Lee and Cara have welcomed the new baby. Two couples got engaged. So lots of things have happened in the time away, which is very exciting.

[2:24] But as someone who did grow up in England, I'm most concerned right now of just the wait. The wait that continues because it's not coming home again.

It's great to watch the England footballers win in a meaningful game last night, of course. But the wait is very real. 60 years waiting.

The term, it's coming home, was made popular 30 years ago where the song, The Three Lions, came. And of course, it's a painful, painful song that we keep singing to ourselves every four years. And the wait is very, very real. But actually, being in England, you get used to waiting. I realized having not been there for a few years, waiting, even in restaurants, waiting for someone to come and take my order, waiting for the food to come, waiting to get their attention so I can pay them. All of it is just, I'm like, wow. I realized since I came back, I came back two days ago, I realized I understand why because we all use those QR codes now and we order here and we don't have to talk to anyone, which I think there's a downside to.

[3:37] There's so much waiting. So much waiting. There's so much waiting when it's even for trains and buses. Just seeing constantly the sign saying delayed. And I realized I'd gotten so used to Hong Kong life when I came back this morning.

Francis and I, we walked to the MTR station and I glanced and I saw four minutes on the MTR platform. Four minutes! How dare the MTR make me wait for four minutes? But true to Hong Kong

form, it doesn't come in four minutes because suddenly after two minutes, it turns to arriving. I was like, praise the Lord, all is right. But in England, oh my goodness, in England, waiting is a very, very real thing. Today, I'm going to be talking about the wait. We're going to be talking about what it means to wait. The question I want to ask you is, what are you waiting for? What are you waiting for? Everyone is waiting for something. I'm currently waiting for my Taobao order.

That's something. And that's annoying. I'm someone who, when I buy something, I like to have it immediately. So that is an annoying thing for me. But we're all waiting for something.

[4:41] In fact, we have gotten so used to waiting. We grow up, we're waiting to graduate. Once we graduate, we're waiting to get the job that we want. Once we've got the job we want, we're waiting so we can share the money that we now have with someone in our lives.

So we're waiting for someone to date. And once we're waiting for someone to date, and then we're waiting for them to propose. And finally, after so many, so many months of waiting, Nathan finally proposes. And so we're waiting for that.

And then we're waiting for the wedding. And then after that, we are waiting for a baby. And this is where suddenly it starts to get a bit painful, right? Because you start watching other people go through, and you're like, oh, I'm still waiting.

And suddenly the waiting isn't as fun anymore. And then you're waiting, and you're showing up at other people's weddings. And then it gets a little bit harder each time you show up. Because you're still waiting.

But let's say some people who do end up getting married, and then the next thing comes, and you're waiting now to start your family. You're waiting for a baby. And then this is where it gets really, really painful.

[5:41] Because you start seeing the people around you start to get married and have kids. And then you're like, okay, I'm still waiting. Of course, just when you have your kids, just when you think that that's over, and you've stopped waiting, that is not the case, right?

Parents will know you're still waiting. Still waiting. I'm still waiting for Micah to understand that he needs to go to the toilet. I'm waiting for Ruben to put his socks back in the right place.

I'm waiting for them to study, and waiting for them to study well, and so that they can graduate. And then I'm waiting. And then the waiting game continues, and continues, and continues. The question is, waiting is a part of life.

And it often is painful. But do we wait well? Do you wait well?

You're waiting for that project at work to finish, so you can finally relax. You're waiting for that exam to finish, so you can finally relax. But what's funny is, after that, suddenly there's the next exam.

[6:45] Suddenly there's the next project. And we are constantly waiting. We see in Scripture today, we are going to be looking at someone who has been waiting for a long, long time. We're going to be looking at Abraham.

And these last few weeks, first Gabe, and then Joe has been taking us through the journey from Genesis 15 to Genesis 17, where Abraham is still waiting. Let me just rewind your mind and go back to Genesis 12.

Abraham is 75 years old. He's called to go. So Genesis 12, he's called to go, and he's been told that he will have a kid. Not only will he have a kid, he'll be a father to many. That's Genesis chapter 12.

You go all the way to Genesis chapter 17, where Joe left yesterday. It's been 24 years. 24 years when the promise came. How many of us are waiting for God to deliver something, but we're not expecting to wait 24 years?

So in the middle, something happens. In Genesis chapter 15, Abraham hears from God again. This time he's 85 years old. So it's been 10 years since that first promise.

[7:47] And God says, you will be a father of many. The chapter after that, and the year after that, his wife says, you know what? That's enough. 11 years of waiting is too much. Maybe God promises in another way.

Maybe God needs us to be creative. Let's take the matter and draw our hands and let's create a baby in a different way. So what happens? The servant, Hagar comes in. Okay, and then suddenly, suddenly they try and do it in their own way and it doesn't work.

At this point, they're 86. It happens. Of course, it doesn't really satisfy them. In fact, the moment it happens, Sarah, it was her idea. After that, she turns on Abraham straight away and says, it's your fault that this happened.

Now I'm filled with resentment. Now I'm filled with bitterness. Abraham just kind of just ignores it, puts it to the side. Genesis chapter 17, God shows up again in his vision and says, hey, Abraham, you will be a father to many.

I'm going to change your name. Your name meant exalted father, which would have been quite comical for a long time anyway, but now it's going to be father of many. How ironic would that have been?

[8:50] And then of course, Abraham, hearing this promise again in year 24, how would he have felt? Again, God, you're promising this, but I'm not seeing anything.

Each time, every time an England manager says, this is the year, I've got the right team. It's the right mindset. We're going to bring it home. Sooner or later, you lose hope.

But Abraham does something very interesting. He listens to God again and he's getting this interaction with God and he's like, okay, there's a covenant. And so the next thing that he does, he circumcises his whole house.

And so last week, Joe talked a little bit about this, the identity change leading to the mission, but also the pain that comes, the sacrifice that comes, the circumcision of the heart that comes as well. So at the end of chapter 17, what you see here is Abraham circumcises his whole house waiting for the promise to still come.

And it tells me something about the whole ordeal of waiting that I wanted to share with you, which is that John Oldberg says this, biblically, waiting is not just something we have to do until we get what we want.

[10:04] Waiting is part of the process of becoming what God wants us to be. Let me say that again. Biblically, waiting is not just something we have to do until we get what we want. Waiting is part of the process of becoming what God wants us to be.

So there's something about waiting that God is using to mold you, to sanctify you. If you look from God's vantage point, he can do anything. He can gift you whatever you're waiting for immediately, yet somehow he's withholding.

Somehow he's holding it back. The question, therefore, is why? And let me tell you, I think I know the answer to that question. Why is God making you wait? And I can answer it in three simple words.

I don't know. For some of you who have been waiting for a long time, I don't know why he's asking you to wait. But I do know that he is making you wait.

And I do know that he's making something out of you as you wait. The question, therefore, then becomes, do we wait well? Now, before we jump into chapter 18, I want to share something a little bit.

[11:09] It's been 24 years Abraham's been waiting for this baby that God promised him. 24 years. It's been quite a few years also since they made the mistake where they took matters into their own hands.

At this point, that son, Ishmael, is 13 years old. He's 13 now. And yet, the satisfaction isn't there because they took matters into their own hands.

So Ishmael's around but they're like, oh, it's just something just, can you imagine just living with that guilt for all that time? Look, I promised you, you promised me and I believed you. It didn't happen so basically I've taken matters in my own hands and now I've got evidence of that and it's here and my wife and I are still distanced.

She's still resentful and we're not going anywhere. And so God, you finally speak again. Okay, I'm going to act. I'm going to circumcise my whole house. And then he's just sat there and now he's 99 years old and still waiting.

And it's at this moment where he's probably the most weak. He's just had a fairly significant surgery done to him and to his whole household.

[12:15] Just bear in mind here, Abraham, okay, so this next story that we're going to read in chapter 18, we always imagine it's just Abraham and his wife in a tent. It's not. A few chapters ago, he had 318 young men who actually went into battle with him.

So if you think about that, a lot of scholars believe there's at least 1,000 people in Abraham's whole kind of entourage. So at least 318 but probably close to 400 or 500 men were all circumcised and all in pain and all waiting.

Guys, we're just going to sit in that moment just for a second. It's in that pain that we then get chapter 18. This is where I invite you to stand for the word of the Lord.

Matthew is going to come and read to us Genesis chapter 18 verse 1 to 15 and maybe before that I'll just quickly pray. God, we lean on your word and only your word and actually we can only understand your word through your Holy Spirit.

So Holy Spirit, as we read this word that comes from you, would you help us digest? Would you help us understand?

[13 : 35] And then would you help us apply? The stage is yours. Lord, we love you and we want to hear from you.

The word of God from Genesis chapter 18. Genesis chapter 18. The Lord appeared to him by the oaks of memory.

As he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day, he lifted up his eyes and looked. And behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth and said, O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant.

Let a little water be brought and wash your feet and rest yourselves under the tree while I bring a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves and after that you may pass on. Since you have come to your servant.

So they said, do as you have said. And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, quick, three sears of fine flour knead it and make cakes. And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good and gave it to a young man who prepared it quickly.

[14 : 44] Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared and set it before them and he stood by them under the tree while they ate. They said to him, where is Sarah, your wife?

And he said, she's in a tent. The Lord said, I will surely return to you about this time next year and Sarah, your wife, shall have a son. And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years.

The ways of women had ceased to be with Sarah. So Sarah laughed to herself saying, after I am worn out and my Lord is old, shall I have pleasure? The Lord said to Abraham, why did Sarah laugh and say, shall I indeed bear a child now, now that I am old?

Is there anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time, I will return to you about this time next year and Sarah shall have a son. But Sarah denied it saying, I did not laugh for she was afraid. He said, no, but you did laugh. Thank you both. This is the word of the Lord. Please take a seat. The most awkward end to the conversation.

[15 : 48] We'll get to the end there in a little bit. I just want to paint the picture again. Okay, so he's waiting. It's been 24 years now that he's still waiting. He just had the surgery probably a couple of days ago.

His whole household is just keeled over, just in pain. And he's waiting and he sat in the heat of the day. Okay, so verse one, we're just going to go through chapter 18, verse one.

And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. My goodness, I was in England for three weeks, not a single drop of rain and no air con. And the heat wave was unreal.

It was unreal. It was okay in the day because I'm used to it because I've been in Hong Kong, but nighttime, not being able, just sleeping with nothing, no air con was just terrible.

But in the heat of the day is where he was sat. Now, this is the afternoon siesta time. So he's sat there. There's not really much going on. He just had surgery. So he's just basically resting. And it's in this moment he has the most fascinating interaction with three different people.

[16 : 48] And so what we see here is he lifted up his eyes and looked. So he's, again, what is he thinking? Well, first thing I think I would be thinking if I was a hair I was like, what have I done? I've weakened my whole household and we're all in pain.

And actually, it's been 24 years. What did I just do? And so he sits and he's waiting and then he sees three men come from afar.

Now, bearing in mind in the ancient world, it's not like Hong Kong. You don't see people all the time. So he sees them from afar and what happens during that time is that actually you must engage with those people that you don't know.

You must engage with those strangers because why? They could either be allies or they could be enemies. So it's very important for the livelihood of Abraham's household that he engages them very quickly to find out whether they are allies or whether they're enemies.

So he sees them from afar and the first thing that he does is he actually runs towards them. He's probably not running very fast. Why? Because he's 99 years old and because he just had a surgery. So he runs towards them the best way that he can and he goes up to them and actually he treats them with hospitality.

[17 : 53] And this is my first point. When we are waiting, how do we wait well is that actually we still wait with a spirit and a sense of openness of what God might do. We might be waiting for that one thing but actually sometimes we're so obsessed with waiting for that one thing we completely ignore the rest of life that God has given us.

We are completely not open to all the other things because you're only going to be happy once you get that one thing. Am I right? That's what we keep thinking. Once I pass that exam, once I have that person, once I do this, once I get over this illness, then and only then will I be happy and only then will I serve you and do all these other things.

But what we see here is that when we're waiting, even when we are in pain, even when we are weak, we still have to be open. And there's a hospitality here that he shows straight away and he says this, O Lord, now bear in mind, if you've got a Bible, you can see that the Lord here is capital L and then lowercase for O-R-D.

He doesn't know that this is God just yet. He thinks this is just a stranger. In Hebrews 13, 2, it references this event and he says, actually, Abraham's just entertaining strangers, unaware that actually they are angels and we'll talk a little bit more about that later.

So he goes to them like they would have in the ancient world, greeting this person that they don't know with hospitality. O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought and wash your feet and rest yourselves under the tree while I bring a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves and after that, you may pass on since you have come to your servant.

[19 : 22] So he says, hey, I'm so glad that you're here. I'm bored out of my brains. The Wi-Fi isn't working. I'm in pain. All I want to do is just distract myself. You've come. Can I just look after you?

Can I offer you some water? Can I offer you some bread? And after that, you can go. I just want to show you that I'm friendly, that I am hospitable to you. So the three men agree and say, do as you have said.

But he lies. He doesn't just bring water and bread. He brings everything. He kills a calf. He brings milk. He brings yogurt. He brings a cake. Can you see that there is an extreme level of hospitality that comes?

And this is my point. When we are waiting, my first point is, can we be open to the fact that whilst we are waiting for that one thing, there are still so many other things that God wants us to see and do.

Can we be hospitable? Can we be friendly to people as we are waiting? Now, as your pastor, I would like to tell you that I have been trying to put this into action myself this week.

[20 : 21] And one of the ways is, actually, there's a stark difference between the two cultures of the East and the West is when you're in the East, you don't talk to strangers. Not only do you not talk to strangers, you do not actually even look at them or smile at them at all because it goes against our culture's way.

So we basically just ignore everyone and we just stay on our phones and that's it. But in the West, I noticed something very interesting. Because everyone's so used to waiting, they greet each other, they smile at each other, they talk to each other and they have lots of conversation with each other. It does actually happen, maybe outside of the big cities. There's something about the city which is the worst, by the way, which then makes me think we are in Asian culture in one of the big cities. We have to be very much aware of this.

We are not good at being hospitable to strangers. Are you good with strangers? When was the last time you had a conversation with a stranger? Oh, Agnes said last week, tell us about it.

That is so amazing. That is so amazing. I'm so glad that Agnes said that because actually that reinforces my point. I love talking to taxi drivers because they know the world.

[21 : 25] They see so many people, they listen to so many things. I love talking to taxi drivers and Uber drivers and also they rarely ever get cared for. So to hear there's someone in our church who actually is willing to talk to people and you realize that there are pains going on in people's lives and then you realize actually I have problems in my life but when I speak to other people I realize they have problems in their lives and you realize these are all opportunities.

Are we willing to be hospitable to strangers? So I took that into action because I am one of those people when I get into the lift I slam the close button as fast and as long as I can as though if I can press it faster it'll close and there'll be less people coming into the lift.

That is me. But yesterday for the first time in many years I was like I'm just going to wait. This morning we had someone who managed to make it onto the lift and I was like I'm so proud of myself that that happened.

But to be hospitable to strangers is something that I think we deeply, deeply lack. I want to challenge all of you as you leave here today can you strike up a conversation with someone who you don't know?

I kid you not it will be the most shocking thing that will have happened to them. But we always wonder God why doesn't those things happen to you? Why don't I meet an Uber driver who's crying and that I get to pray for and share the gospel I don't get a chance to do that I'm just stuck in my well guess what you have to speak to them you have to ask them questions you have to share with them what you believe and then you have to offer to pray for them.

[22 : 56] Are we open to those interactions? You see Abraham here was because why when we're waiting something that's very important is that we focus not just on the destination but on the journey itself.

I think people who live in slower cultures who are more hospitable they get that because they know there's one destination but there'll be another destination after the destination it just keeps going it's the rat race it just keeps going and going but if you realize that actually the whole of life is a journey that actually we are all sojourners then the driver who's driving you or the waiter who's serving you these are all actual human beings made in the image of God I wonder whether if we had a new conviction today to go out and engage in conversation with a stranger what could happen?

Would we be hospitable to strangers even when we are still waiting? Henry Nouwen says this waiting time is not wasting time that should speak to the Hong Konger's soul the deepest part of the Hong Konger's soul needs to remember and understand this the waiting time is not wasting time he carries on waiting patiently in expectation is the foundation of the spiritual life our spiritual life is a life in which we wait actively present to the moment this indeed is a very radical stance toward life in a world preoccupied with control does that speak to you?

that speaks to me my idol is control and so I want to be in control of everything I don't want to be open to the interactions that God might be leading towards me because I think waiting time is wasting time when actually when we're waiting we have to ask God well why am I waiting right here?

who am I supposed to engage? who am I supposed to interact with? it's so important for us to get that and Betsy Charles Howard says this if we wait to reach out to others from a position of fullness we will never do it if on the other hand we love others out of our own emptiness we will paradoxically find we have an abundance of love to give how often do we do that?

[24 : 58] I'll talk to the Uber driver when I have a bit more capacity when I'm not worried about the thing that I'm waiting for and then I might share the gospel and then I might do this and I might do that we wait till we're in a place where we think we'll be completely full and only then will we do it but we realise that we will never truly be full because we're always waiting for something so what we should do is we should reach out to people when we are even not in our position of fullness think about Abraham he's waiting he's been waiting for 24 years and yet now there's someone who shows up he's still open he doesn't know that's God up until that point God's been showing up in visions so he doesn't know God's actually going to show up right in front of him and yet he's hospitable yet he's open how good are we at waiting?

I know all of you are waiting for something and I want to encourage you that God sees God knows you are waiting God knows how painful that waiting is would you allow him to do what he wants to do in your life even through that waiting?

maybe you're waiting for your child to come back to God maybe you're waiting for that sickness to go maybe you're waiting for that person to come and join you in life whatever it is that you are waiting for can you wait well?

can you appreciate that God is trying to do something? he knows he spoke to Abraham three times and yet he's still making Abraham wait for 24 years God always has a purpose in waiting it's our job as we're waiting well to be open to all the other opportunities that he gives us and to allow him to do whatever he wants to do in our lives whilst we are waiting I think that is a message that someone here needs to hear you are waiting and you might still be waiting for a long time but stay and wait well and be open to whatever God has in store for you the second point that we go here is why did this interaction happen?

why is this passage of scripture here? we carry on in the story the fan keeps changing my pages so what happens here is they eat they're happy verse 7 Abraham ran to the herd took a calf tender and good and gave it to a young man who prepared it quickly then he took curds which is yogurt and milk and the calf that he prepared and set it before them and he stood by them under the tree whilst they ate true hospitality there he is open to what God might have in store for him and then they speak to him remember he thinks they're strangers at this moment and then they turn to him now there's three people there scholars mostly scholars believe that this is the pre-incarnate Jesus and two angels so that's what most people think but actually it's a bit of a mystery we don't actually know who they are because when he talks to them he realizes who they are straight away because suddenly they say where is Sarah your wife wait these are strangers how do you know that my wife well how do you know I have a wife okay but I guess you could guess that but how do you know that my wife is Sarah wait but how do you know that my wife is Sarah and not Sarai because it was only last chapter which was a few days ago where she changed her name who are you and that's when the Lord lowercase Lord suddenly turns into uppercase

[28:12] L-O-R-D if you look at your Bible you'll see the difference verse 10 the Lord said and suddenly it's capitals and so what we see here what Abraham will have suddenly realized here that this is not just a random group of strangers that are lost that this is God himself and you realize why this interaction took place because actually God's spoken to Abraham quite a few times already he doesn't need to show up why does he show up this time and we find out it's not actually for Abraham it's actually for his wife the unveiling here is that these three strangers actually know his wife know that she's called Sarah her new name and they're actually here for her isn't that interesting and so it carries on she is in and then he says she is in the tent and the Lord said I will surely return to you about this time next year and Sarah your wife shall have a son 24 years of waiting finally God shows up and puts a timeline on it and says this time next year you will have a son and Sarah interestingly was listening at the tent door behind him they would have known this because they came for her because they came to speak to her this is really interesting because up until this point all Sarah had ever heard from God or about God was from who

Abraham Abraham would have been the one that told her hey I had a vision I had a dream that God's going to do this and hey we've got to move out because God told us to move out but finally there comes a moment where actually God comes for Sarah herself which is interesting which tells me something else because up until this point Sarah is resentful she is unbelieving why because I think she only knew God through someone else finally God introduces himself to her personally we all need to have that moment where God comes to introduce himself to us maybe your parents are Christian maybe you have that grandparent who is a Christian who dragged you to church whatever it is we all come to church through someone in our lives but the whole point is that actually God doesn't have grandchildren we cannot ever just relate to God as a distant grandfather he must become our father we must have our we must establish our own direct connection with God ourselves and we see here that God comes and finds Sarah specifically to talk to her because up until now she'd only ever heard from Abraham and so it carries on so Abraham hears this now Abraham and Sarah were old advanced in years what a nice way to put it for someone to be advanced in years

Hank I am so sorry I've always called you old but you are advanced in years what a lovely way to put that don't any of you come up to me and say the same thing advance in years and then it gets even better the way of women had ceased to be with Sarah what a lovely way to say that menopause had passed what that is saying is that basically there is no chance of her having a baby anymore it's like I'm God I know that I promised you 24 years ago that you would have a son and

now biologically you cannot have a son in the book of Romans I think it's chapter 4 that says actually her womb was dead it was barren it wasn't capable of having a baby so they were advanced in years and the way a woman had ceased to be with Sarah and so Sarah hears this in the tent even though they are speaking actually to her and then she says to herself she laughs to herself after I am worn out and my lord is old shall I have pleasure this is a really interesting passage and it reminds me of all the people that I've met all the couples who have gone through infertility who have gone through miscarriages and the pain of all of that and how it actually causes such a challenge between a husband and a wife and how it actually just wreaks so much havoc in just your emotional and your spiritual life and it's a wrestle and it's a weight that can go on for so long and can cut so so deep as I'm putting myself in the shoes of Abraham and Sarah I'm imagining 24 years of trying and they had God's promise and yet it still hadn't happened can you imagine that first time where actually she realizes that menopause is happening she realizes that this is the end and she realized the way a woman has ceased to be with her and she's like that promise it's gone and 10 years ago when I tried to take matters in my own hands I guess that's it I mean the chapter before sorry in chapter 17 that's what Abraham says when God's speaking to him when he says I'm going to bless you you're going to have a son he's like oh it must be Ishmael I guess because it can't be me anymore because actually I'm old and Sarah's old too and we biologically cannot have children anymore God so he's trying to make sense of God's promise through his own earthly lens he's like okay this is how it must happen but God doesn't work like that but there's something else that's really interesting here after I am worn out and my Lord is old shall I have pleasure the word pleasure there in the Hebrew actually means sexual pleasure it means intimacy so not only had she passed childbearing age they were actually no longer intimate anymore and you can totally imagine why they're 99 and 90 years old they've suffered this hurt of the waiting for all these years they took matters into their own hands 10 years ago that didn't end up being as satisfying as they thought and so you can totally imagine the distance the chasm between Abraham and Sarah so you can totally imagine the two of them are not even close anymore and so that if you understand it from that context suddenly Sarah's line makes sense she scoffs her laugh is a hopeless one now after I'm worn out remember also in that context childbearing was everything for a woman if you could not bear children then you are worthless in society so this Sarah who was formerly very beautiful popular with all the guys no doubt ends up in a place where she is now just laughing hopelessly to make matters worse there was no biological info there that we have today so Abraham would have completely blamed

Sarah for this problem especially since Ishmael had been born so after Ishmael had been born the resentment would have come well see it's not my problem managed to get her pregnant it's you Sarah can you imagine the distance can you imagine the abandonment so that's why she says earlier God is stopping me from having this can you imagine the hurt that she has now after I'm worn out after I can't even physically have children anymore after my husband won't even look at me let alone touch me how are you supposed to even have a baby is what she's saying can you start to see now why God has shown up to speak to Sarah and not Abraham that's the pain that she's in the Lord then said to Abraham why did Sarah laugh Abraham doesn't know this because Abraham isn't God so she's behind in the tent and then God says shall I indeed bear a child now that

[35:55] I'm old is what Abraham said sorry is anything too hard for the Lord if you see in your Bible there just underneath there's a little hysterics there is anything too hard or anything too wonderful for the Lord it's interesting he says hey Abraham why is your wife laughing why is she saying that this is impossible nothing is too hard for me nothing is too wonderful for me this is a gift that I would give her at this appointed time I would turn to you about this time next year and Sarah shall have a son this is where I know that God actually is interested in Sarah's well-being because actually she could also just give Sarah a baby right then and there he could have actually showed up and says hey you've been waiting for 24 years guess what guess what is in Sarah's womb a baby it's done but he doesn't he says I'm going to come back next year what's he doing there he's not only gifting Sarah a baby he's gifting her a new marriage because why you're going to have to get close to Abraham again for this to happen

I'm going to come back next year and you're going to have some time where you rekindle your romance with your husband you get to be together again and only when you are together only when you have loosened the bitterness and the resentment I'm gifting you a new marriage and in gifting

you a new marriage I will gift you a son isn't that amazing see God doesn't just give us gifts just for the sake of it just because we want them he knows what we want but more importantly he knows what we need and so he comes and that's where we have the interaction but Sarah denied it saying I did not laugh for she was afraid he said no but you did laugh the most awkward conversation and then it just stops and then it just ends which tells me one thing that God just has a sense of humour why he wants to tell her that I know you laughed but I know that your laughter was one of pain I know that your laughter was one of hopelessness but I want to tell you that I know that I know that it doesn't seem possible but I want you to know that nothing is impossible with me and so you end up there and it kind of just stops it's really interesting here because up until this point you don't really sense that Sarah is one who is filled with faith and yet actually later in scripture in Hebrews 11 she's made it into the hall of fame where it actually says that she was considered faithful that she actually continued to believe in the one who made her the promise so something somewhere changes so actually it would have been interesting because these three men said they'll come back next year and by this time next year they'll have a son okay so if you're good with maths then you know that babies are usually in the mother's womb for actually 40 weeks okay from there they had maybe a couple months to keep trying it meant hey you have a few months now to in faith to trust me to re-engage your husband and to re-kindle your marriage and to spend this time together because you are gonna get a son

I want you to engage in your marriage in faith is what he said and so she believes him and then she does and of course later what we see here it is attributed to her that she is a woman of faithfulness isn't that beautiful that God comes to interact with the one who feels abandoned the one who feels hurt the one who feels pain the one who feels as though she's lost her identity and she comes and he speaks to her and so that's the story that we have here and I want to just draw a couple of conclusions from here because why is this strange story here because actually very shortly after he moves on to talking about something else that Gabe will move on into next week but a couple of quick conclusions here from this passage the first thing is this the weight is real some of us are continually still thinking that waiting time is waiting time I want you to know yes the weight is real you are waiting for something let's just acknowledge that and let's acknowledge that that is frustrating let's acknowledge that that is painful let's acknowledge that that is lonely the weight is real and the pain is real as well

I get that God gets that I think that's why this passage is here he's showing you he's showing us that there is also something about waiting that we should do well that we whilst we are waiting for that one thing we should still be open to the other things whilst we're waiting for that one thing that we think will satisfy us we should still be open to all the other possibilities that are out there that we also need to be very much aware of the weight is real the weight is painful but let us wait well let us wait with a hospitality let's go out and whilst we're waiting for whatever we're waiting for still be the human beings still be the Christ followers that God has called us to be to engage with strangers to love them to smile at them to open the door for them to show the love of Christ to them the weight is real the weight is painful but let us wait well sometimes we don't recognize God when he shows up just like Abraham he's in pain sat outside his tent waiting and then suddenly [41:15] God shows up Hebrews 13 let us be hospitable to strangers not knowing that maybe sometimes we've entertained angels let us be isn't that exciting for you that you could walk downstairs and you can talk to someone random who you think is random but you may have set off a series of events that will lead that person to Christ doesn't that excite you it should that there are people that we can speak to and engage with in a different way that no one else does that actually we can share love to sometimes we don't recognize God and he still shows up sometimes even when we've given up let us continue to wait because God also has a sense of humor he knows your pain but he will also sit with you in that pain but he also has a sense of humor but you did laugh it's not happened yet but he knows what he's going to do he does have a sense of humor which is interesting because eventually

Isaac does get born and what does the name Isaac mean it means laughter what's even more interesting and I have to read this to you in Genesis chapter 21 she finally has Isaac chapter 21 verse 6 and Sarah said God has made laughter for me and everyone who hears will laugh over me and she said who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children yet I have born him a son in his old age I'm a 91 year old woman who is nursing a baby people are going to laugh people are going to find it ridiculous that I'm doing that and you know what when you meet Christ

when you realize that he is good for what he promised you when you realize who he is you don't care what other people think anymore she spent her whole can you imagine again just another bit of context Abraham Sarah they were the heads of this household of a thousand people what would they have seen on a yearly basis their servants their families all getting married and having kids constantly being surrounded by kids and they would have been laughing especially when they changed their name oh did you hear about our boss did you hear about

Abraham he's changed his name the father of one has changed his name to be a father of many isn't that funny and his wife's old advanced in years they would have been laughing at her but now when it has actually happened she actually rejoices God has made laughter for me and everyone who hears will laugh over me I don't care that they're laughing about me now because God is the one who is in my corner God is on my side and God has fulfilled his promise isn't that an amazing turnaround for Sarah the wait is real the wait is painful let us wait well can we recognize that God shows up even in places that we don't recognize him he has a sense of humor and he brings laughter to the hopeless and he turns the laughter of hopelessness into the laughter of hopefulness that is our God can we wait well this whole scenario seems very impossible and you wonder why it's here but really what it's also doing is saying actually this isn't the end of the story why is this story here because something even more impossible happens years and years later where an angel shows up to someone who isn't married in the book of Luke

Luke almost knowing that the readers would have drawn this parallel writes about an angel showing up to a teenage girl called Mary and he says hey you're going to have a son and she's like well I'm not even married at least Sarah was married so that is impossible and yet what does Luke say the angel says but nothing is impossible with God nothing is impossible with God and what you see then is his parallel brings his completion through Christ who also comes he is the real Isaac he is the one who brings laughter to those who are in sorrow he is the real son of promise and you realize that story with Abraham and Sarah was simply just a foreshadowing simply just a signpost to the most impossible story you know what's even more impossible me and you living forever me and you living forever that's even more impossible than these women having babies and yet that's the miracle that we have why because of

Jesus and only because of Jesus because he was the true Isaac he was the true son of promise he was the one that was given and he was the one that has given us victory and he is the reason why we are all truly coming home so you don't have to keep waiting for England to win the World Cup to feel like you're at home you don't have to keep waiting for whatever that you're waiting for it's already come Jesus has already come the son that was promised who would save mankind has already come isn't that beautiful doesn't that make you laugh doesn't that fill you with joy that's even better than England winning the World Cup how do we have a passion for Bible translations is that we have a passion for the Bible how do we have a passion for the Bible is that we realize what it says inside which is that we who were dead who had no hope who are still waiting in the dark the light has now shone into our world the victory has come we now all belong and have an identity and have a home in him because of the son of promise that came into this world may that fill us with joy today may we laugh may we engage strangers with a smile may we wait well knowing that our [47 : 22] Christ has already come let's pray well before we respond to you in worship just to sit in this moment for a little bit and acknowledge that we are waiting and the wait is real and the wait is painful but Lord we want to wait well we want to wait with hope we want to wait with love and faith let each of us bring to God whatever we are waiting for let us all say to him Lord I am waiting for this but I want you more waiting for the day where we truly get to come home but until that day we wait well so even though the wait is real the pain is real we gather this morning we almost force ourselves to remember that God you are good you are faithful your promises are as real as the wait and that you will come through but in the right time we identify with Sarah today but may we also be recognized as people who are faithful even with our doubts even with our mistakes even with our pain we declare in one voice in one song that God you are good