

and named his son, who was yet to be born, Isaac. The grace of God, the extraordinary and powerful grace of God, brought children from the woman who had withered wombs and gave her strength to raise a son.

Genesis 21 reveals the fulfillment of God's promise. "The Lord came to Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what He had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time God had told him." Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, and everyone who hears will laugh with me." She also said, "Who would have told Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne a son for him in his old age." (21:1-7) Fear leads to sin, but grace leads to blessing. Fear causes pain and hurt, but grace yields laughter.

Imagine the sight of that old woman with a newborn, the look on her face, and the look on Abraham's face. It happened because of grace, because of the promise of God. God's extraordinary grace will change us. It transforms our outlook. It overcomes fear, no matter what circumstances we face. God's grace brings blessing to us and those around us. God's grace brings laughter and joy, and life from death.

Questions for Reflection

1. When fear overwhelms you, how do you respond? Do you still trust God? Or do you act according to your own ability?
2. Have you ever tried to manipulate circumstances or to help God stay on your timetable?
3. God's grace speaks to our deepest need and restores our weaknesses. Let us open our mind and heart to invite God's grace in our lives.

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EXTRAORDINARY GRACE (2)
Laughing Because of Grace
Genesis 21:1-7
Rev. Dr. Charles Yoon

How many of you are retired? How many of you are looking forward to retirement? When would be the proper time for retirement? I think most people retire between 65 and 70 years old when they can get full benefits of social security and medicare. I know many retired people have busy schedules, spending their time with their spouse, family, friends, hobbies or community services. But they are busy with what they want to do, while those who are working spend their time with what they have to do. So many of us are looking forward to retirement, laying back, relaxing, and doing what we want to do.

However, at 75 Abram started over with a new life. He had been told that he would become a great nation. "You'll have many offspring, Abram. And one of those offspring way down the line will be the promised Messiah, the fulfillment of God's plan in motion from before the beginning of creation." This was a great promise and wonderful news for Abram. But there was a problem. He didn't have any children. His wife, Sarai, was beautiful, but couldn't have a baby. He may have had the question – "How can God's promise be? How will this happen?"

We don't have any record of Abram's hesitation or question on God's promise. Abram packed up, gathered up, and left. When he and his family reached the great tree of Moreh at Shechem, God appeared to Abram again and said, "*I will give this land to your offspring.*" (Genesis 12:7) He probably saw the Canaanites and their children in the land, and he would ponder how God's promise would become reality since he was already 75 and his wife couldn't have a baby. But, God's promise was clear. Abram would have offspring and he would have children.

Abram built an altar to God at Shechem and moved again and built another altar and continued to move on as God led him to the Negev. As Abram and his household faced the famine there, he decided to go to Egypt. Just as they crossed the border, they became undocumented travelers and Abram's fear rose. Abram told Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are." This was a good compliment for Sarai. Husbands, how many of you say this compliment to your wife? Pointing out her beauty is a good thing. It is called "words of affirmation." But the problem was that Abram's words of affirmation was not for Sarai, but for himself. Abram continued, "When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' They will kill me but let you live. Please say you're my sister so it will go well for me because of you, and my life will be spared on your account."

Abram was correct about Sarai's beauty and the reaction of the Egyptians, because when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they told their leader and took her to the palace. Abram did well with this arrangement, securing his household, flocks, and slaves. But God inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household. Pharaoh was no dummy. He summoned Abram and asked him to tell the truth.

Abram's fear caused him to act according to his own ability. In fact, the problem was not Abram's fear. Fear is a natural response to the situation. Instead of trusting God, however, Abram trusted in himself. For Abram, his fear controlled him. Have you ever been there? Have you ever let the circumstance decide your trust in God?

In the midst of his fear, God appeared to him in a vision. Instead of scolding him for lying about his wife, God told him: "*Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.*" (Genesis 15:1) Abram responded: "*Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?*" And Abram said, "*You have given me no*

children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." (Genesis 15:2-3) He tried to figure things out. He operated by sight, not faith. He told God, "Lord, You said something about offspring, but You must have forgotten I need a son." Abram's fears and worries moved him to manage God's affairs. From Abram's perspective, he reminded God of His promise about the baby, the offspring. He helped God stay on track.

Have you ever been there? Have you ever tried to manipulate circumstances? Have you ever tried to help God stay on your timetable? If so, you are preventing the work of grace God wants to accomplish for you.

In Genesis 15:5 God took Abram outside and said, "*Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.*" Then he said to him, "*So shall your offspring be.*" God, in His infinite mercy, made it clear that he would have a son. This was kindness, a merciful and grace-filled answer. "I know you're afraid. I know you don't understand. Let me tell you again. Listen carefully. You will have a son, and your son will have children, and your son's children will have children." It was God's amazing grace in action.

God's grace speaks to our deepest need and restores our weaknesses. God's grace meets us there. God's grace breaks through our fear. God's grace breaks through our doubt. Genesis 15:6 says, "*Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness.*" If we listen to God's voice and believe his call, our belief will be credited to us. Something God is doing in us will be credited to our account. This is the same message of grace that Jesus brings us. What is extended to Abram is the same grace we are given through Jesus Christ.

14 years later, when Abram was 91, God reaffirmed what He said and reinforced the message with a name change, Abraham, the father of many nations. He also gave his wife a new name, Sarah,