

UNRAVELLED

SEEKING GOD WHEN OUR PLANS FALL APART

What happens when our world falls apart? How do we press onward when our tightly-knit plans unravel into loose ends? What do we become when our identity—or the path we're on—comes undone? What if all this is not the end we fear it will be?

In our unraveling, sometimes life surprises us with unexpected joy, love, and hope—with a new beginning we couldn't have imagined. Sometimes we need God to unravel us, for we long to be changed. Throughout the summer we will explore biblical stories of unraveled shame, identity, fear, grief, dreams, and expectations. There are stories where God meets us in the spiraling, unraveling our plans—and us—into something new.

“Unraveling is not always the end we fear it will be. When the worst has happened, when death or tragedy has undone us and the vision we had for our lives tears apart, we come to an end, but that is not the end. Our story continues. Sometimes unraveling becomes an opportunity—to untangle ourselves from broken pattern or toxic situation, or to become unwound from a path or identity that no longer serves us.” Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Genesis 18:1-15; 21:1-7 – Sarah Laughs Today we encounter Sarah, wife of Abraham. Even though God promised many descendants to Sarah and her husband, Abraham, she carries the pain of childlessness into her old age. When an angel appears and says that she is going to have a child, the surprise, disbelief—and perhaps joy—that comes with that message are likely as deep as her hurt had been. Our prayers aren't always answered in this way, but what we can trust is this—sometimes, even after life seems to fall apart, God can surprise us and unravel our plans with unexpected joy if we are willing to receive it.

Guiding Questions:

- What has unraveled and/or is unraveling in this story?
- How does God respond to Sarah's and Abraham's disbelief and doubt? How does God respond to us when we are closed off to newness?
- Consider Gen. 18:14: “Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?” Some translations include: marvelous, difficult, astonishing, impossible. How do these translation variations expand God's power in this passage?
- Theologian Walter Brueggemann writes of this passage, “Laughter is a biblical way of receiving a newness which cannot be explained. The newness is sheer gift—underived, unwarranted.”¹ What might it look like for our disbelief to unravel into joy?

Prayer or journal prompts:

- Write a short prayer to God naming something that has unraveled in your life, or asking God to unravel something in you that you wish to release.

- Write a short prayer naming a plan that has fallen apart or a time when you felt unraveled.

O God, when I need it most, unravel me with blessed newness and boundless joy. Amen.

¹ Brueggemann, Walter. Interpretation: Genesis. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1992. 182.

Scripture for June 16, 2019 – Unraveled: Sarah Laughs

Genesis 18:1-15 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

18 The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. ²He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. ³He said, “My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. ⁴Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵Let me bring a little 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.” ⁶And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.” ⁷Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. ⁸Then 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.

⁹They said to him, “Where is your wife Sarah?” And he said, “There, in the tent.” ¹⁰Then one said, “I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. ¹¹Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. ¹²So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?” ¹³The Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ ¹⁴Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁵But Sarah denied, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. He said, “Oh yes, you did laugh.”

21 The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. ²Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. ³Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. ⁴And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. ⁵Abraham was

a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶Now Sarah said, “God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.” ⁷And she said, “Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

Romans 5:1-8 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

5 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we ³boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

⁶For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

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