

Are They Laughing with Us or At Us?

I remember many years ago, when I was in fifth grade in elementary school, I thought of myself as a class clown, always telling jokes and acting up in class.

One day, after I had been extra distracting, my teacher asked me to stay after class so she could talk to me. I thought she was going to punish me by making me stay after class and clean the room or assign me extra homework, or even worse, call my parents.

Instead, she sat me down and told me that she really liked my sense of humor and that it was a gift from G-D. She asked me if I enjoyed it when the other children laughed at what I said and did. I said yes, after all I really did enjoy hearing them laugh. She then said something that was one of the most impactful things anyone has ever told me.

She said that I needed to learn the difference between people laughing with me and laughing at me. She then shared a story from the Bible (yes, when I went to school, teachers still used the Bible stories to teach their students).

She asked me if I was familiar with Isaac and Ishmael. I told her that of course I was. Isaac and Ishmael were two of the sons of Abraham. Isaac was born to Sarah and Ishmael was born to Hagar. She then went on to share what I am about to share.

When Sarah gave birth to Isaac, she made a special proclamation concerning him that we read in Genesis 21:6:

“So, Sarah said, ‘God has made laughter for me! Everyone who hears will laugh with me.’”

Notice that in her joy at Isaac’s birth, Sarah says not only

that G-D has made her laugh, but also that everyone who hears about Isaac would “laugh with her.” In other words, Sarah’s hope would be that everyone who heard about or met Isaac would share in her joy and laughter.

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However, there was a time that we read about where instead of laughing with Sarah about Isaac, someone laughed *at* Isaac. We read about this in Genesis 21:9:

“The child grew and was weaned—Abraham made a big feast on the day Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian whom she had born to Abraham—making fun.”

When we look at the Hebrew word translated as “making fun” in this text, it is the word for laughing at, or mocking with laughter. It is the same Hebrew root word as for the word laughter.

Here we see a biblical example of laughing *with* someone vs. laughing *at* someone. As believers, we always want those around us to see our joy and laughter and to experience those things with us, especially laughter. However, too often, our words and actions cause those around us to laugh at us, rather than with us.

It is very important that our testimony, our words, our actions, cause those around us to join us in laughing with us. After all, Sarah was laughing because of G-D’s miraculous blessing in her life, in reality, “life from the dead”—she and Abraham were past the years of childbirth when Isaac was born.

Unfortunately, too often our testimony, our words and our actions cause people to laugh at us rather than laugh with us. Please remember that it was Ishmael laughing at Isaac instead

of with him that brought about the division in Abraham's family, and the truth is that we already have too many divisions within the body of believers to allow our actions or words to cause more.

So, let's have fun, let's proclaim the miracles of G-D, let's rejoice and laugh *with* each other, instead of at each other, so that those watching will also laugh with us instead of at us.

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