

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Laugh Your Way to Grace: Reclaiming the Spiritual Power of Humor Rev. Susan Sparks

Chapter 1

Did you grow up in organized religion? If so, describe the minister, priest, or rabbi you grew up with. If not, what was your impression of clergy? Did they laugh? Smile? Were they warm people or arms-length people? How did this influence your image of God?

Laughter, in a way, is about forgiveness. Think of a time when you were able to laugh at your shortcomings rather than judge yourself. How did that change how you felt about yourself? Did giving yourself a break offer a heightened sense of forgiveness for others?

Recall a time you were in a comedy club or watching a comedy on television with others. When you laughed together at the same jokes, how did you feel? Did you feel a sense of solidarity? Less alone?

Think about Conrad Hyers's statement: "Faith without laughter leads to dogma, and laughter without faith to despair." Do you think this is true? Why or why not? What experiences in your life do those words remind you of?

Chapter 2

Can you imagine God smiling? How does a smiling image of God fit, or not fit, with what you have been taught about God?

How might it feel to laugh in the ear of God? Does this sound blasphemous? According to whom? What thought or image would you need to revise in order to enjoy a bit of the Creator's humor?

How might your prayer or worship change if a sacred clown were present? If you actually laughed with God?

Chapter 3

What images of God do you remember from childhood?

How did your parents act around God? in worship? in prayer? Was God treated like a fearful authoritarian figure or a close friend?

What is your image of God now? Has it changed?

If you treated God like you do your best friend, how might your relationship with God change?

Chapter 4

Do you believe you deserve happiness? If your answer is no, why not? What things have been said to you to make you feel that way? (You may need extra time for this ...) Who told you? What did they tell you? Are they happy? What in their lives do you think made them say it?

Have you ever felt “plutoed”? When?

How do you make time for joy? Do you schedule it in? Do you prioritize it in your life?

Do you pick up a salad plate or a dinner plate when it comes to joy and laughter? What could you do to make more room for joy? (Remember the Titanic...)

Chapter 5

What are the three scariest things on your desk or in your life today? Do any of these things get to the core issues of life? Health? Food? Shelter? In twenty years, will you care?* What clues do your answers give you about your need to lighten up?

Humor is about juxtaposing two opposing ideas, such as the amount of stress and energy we spend on issues that really don't deserve it. Think about these combinations:

- Picture a time you worried about things over which you had no control.
- Remember a moment where you dragged around heavy loads of anger over the lightest and slightest of things.
- Recall a night where you stayed awake with fear over something that never happened.

Can you see the humor here? Are you laughing? If not, keep thinking.

If you allowed laughter into the difficult places of life, what things might you see that you are now missing? Things with your family? A clearer sense of priorities? How do these things rank when compared to the problems that obscured them?

*I'm assuming the answer is no. However, if it's yes, take a preview look at chapter 9. This one's for you.

Chapter 6

Think of someone whom you have judged unfairly. Can you think of what you have in common with them? What might the two of you be able to laugh about together? Families? Kids? Work? Traffic? If you laughed together, how might that change your perception of each other?

Recall a time you laughed with someone you didn't know. Maybe it was in a meeting or in an elevator or with someone on television. Did you feel more of a sense of connection with them? Would you go so far as to say that you were more invested in their wellbeing?

Think of a recent conflict you've had. Was there anything about the situation that could have made you or the other person laugh? How might that have changed the dynamics and/or results of the situation?

Where might you be able to use laughter to diffuse a tough situation to “turn the other cheek”?

Chapter 7

What age do you see yourself at heart? Why? Where is that little kid now? Is he or she welcomed in your life? What made you laugh at that age? Do you still laugh at the same things? Do you allow yourself to?

Do you laugh in worship when you feel joy or experience humor? If not, why not? Who told you it was wrong? How might your prayers change if you offered them like a five-year-old? Like the subway conversation? What words or emotions would be included that otherwise wouldn't have been offered?

Do you worship as if you are in the living room or the den? What would you like to change about that? Would you laugh more in the den?

Chapter 8

What makes you laugh out loud? If you don't know, listen to yourself for the next few days and make a list of what makes you laugh.

The Bible is composed of a collection of books—a canon. That is a holy canon. How about building yourself a humor canon? Think about making a collection of videos, books, cartoons, sounds, images, letters that make you smile or laugh. Can you imagine how these might aid your physical, mental, and spiritual healing?

Chapter 9

Think of the times when you have found yourself in need of an emotional or spiritual ark. What became your ark? What lifted your spirits? Did it include any lightness or laughter?

Have you ever laughed when you couldn't cry? What happened? Did the tears eventually come? How did you feel after the release?

What second chances do you need in your life? How might cultivating a sense of humor help you get there?

Where could you look for places and people who could help you smile more?

Chapter 10

What is your experience of infectious smiles? Have you ever watched a smile “travel” around a room of people? How have you seen such a smile change people?

Have there been times in your life when you have felt that God was silent? Do you have specific expectations of how God should sound? of when or where should God show up?

What are your “thin places,” places or times when you feel closer to God, spaces where the veil between human and holy is thin? Is laughter a part of this place?

Think of a time when you were helpless with laughter. Have you ever considered incorporating such laughter in your spiritual journey? using it as a sign of spiritual surrender? letting go in front of God?

Chapter 11

How’s it going with your “dash in between?” Are you predominantly an Eeyore or a Tigger? Do you smile more or complain more? How does that affect those around you? What would you like to change?

If you could write your own funeral eulogy, what would it say at this point in your life? What do you want it to say?

Find one tiny thing to smile or laugh about today. It doesn’t matter what it is. Find it and share it with a friend or a loved one or even better with a stranger. At the end of your day, reflect on the joyful handprint you shared. Think about how it may have begun a tiny but significant chain reaction—a healing for your community and for your world.