

INTRO

When was the last time you laughed really hard? What happened? Were you alone, or was someone else there? Most people probably have had the experience of joyous laughter, either in the company of family, friends, or at the antics of a comedian or a movie or show. But have you ever had that experience in church, or worship? Have you had that experience reading scripture, or having a Bible story told to you?

Sometimes the subject of “God’s sense of humor” is a joke in itself. Like, “That sound

you hear while you make plans for your life is the sound of God laughing.” Or, “Of course God’s got a sense of humor, just consider [insert person, humanity, the platypus, or other ridiculous thing].”

HOLY GOD HOLY BIBLE HOLY HUMOR

But humor is a part of life. We value having a sense of humor, staying in good humor, “humoring” people when they’re being difficult, and even associate humor with health.

Humor is also in the Bible. While its stories are often read in a reverence that hides it, the Bible’s humor can look like: Jonah and whale are satire, Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar are ironic, Balaam and his “donkey” are hilarious, and Paul preaching a boy (named Eutychus, by the way, which means “lucky”) to his *death* is dark comedy.

So, what about God? Does God have a sense of humor? Does humor enliven or cheapen the Bible? And if creation’s inhabitants (that’s us) experience humor, what does that tell us about our Creator, and the purpose of humor? Let’s talk and laugh about it.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

What makes you laugh? Can you make others laugh? Was there laughter in your household growing up? Why, or why not? What is the point of humor and laughter? Do you think God has a sense of humor? What is your experience of humor and laughter in church? Are there Bible stories that strike you as funny? What is the relationship between religion and humor? Who has the best sense of humor you know? Who has the worst? Are either of them religious? Is it troublesome or dangerous when someone lacks a sense of humor?

BIBLE BASICS

- **Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7** – God gives old Abraham and Sarah “Laughter.”
- **Psalm 2** – God laughs. How does God laugh here?
- **Jonah** – Read it. Pay special attention to how blown out of proportion everything is.
- **Samuel 24:1-7** – An encounter between David and Saul, at an...unfortunate time.
- **Acts 10:7-12** – Paul preaches to death, then raises, a man whose name means “Lucky.”

ESSENTIAL READINGS and LISTENINGS

Between Heaven and Mirth

An excerpt from a book by James Martin, SJ. A priest's exploration of why humor and religion aren't incompatible, but actually partners.

Discovering Humor in the Bible

A book review of Howard Macy's *Discovering Humor in the Bible*.

Does God have a Sense of Humor?

An article by JoHannah Reardon, exploring that exact question in "Christianity Today"; written in 2010.

Humorless Religion = Dangerous Religion?

In 2015, religious extremists attacked the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* for its portrayal of the Prophet Mohammed. In this response, Jonathan Ryan writes about the dangers of humor-less religion.

Humor in the Bible

Professor Michael Rogness writes for Luther Seminary's *Word & World* about humor in the Bible. A little long, a bit scholarly, but skim it, read the conclusion, then go back for more.

BONUS READINGS (for the nerds...)

Articles on God & Humor

A whole 2012 journal publication on faith and humor. Browse at your leisure. Maybe especially "Laughter on the Journey" by Howard Macy.

Analysis of God's Blessings relative to Atmospheric Conditions

A satirical article by The Onion reflecting on God's blessings.

Catholic Jokes by a Catholic (21:41)

A compilation of Catholic jokes by comedian Jim Gaffigan (...who is Catholic). Only PG-13, but maybe skip if you're religious-humor impaired.

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