

Thought for the day: 19-25 October 2020

by Jo Willis

Monday

Does God have a sense of humour? The answer to that is usually, 'Well, have you seen a duck-billed platypus?!'



Laughter is not mentioned many times in the Bible, but laughter is incredibly good for our own wellbeing, and there are seven proven health benefits listed on helpguide.org. They are:

Laughter triggers the release of endorphins, which are the body's natural feel-good chemicals.

Laughter relaxes the whole body. A good, hearty laugh relieves physical tension and stress, leaving your muscles relaxed for up to 45 minutes after.

Laughter boosts the immune system. Laughter decreases stress hormones and increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies, thus improving your resistance to disease.

Laughter lightens anger's heavy load. Looking at the funny side can put problems into perspective and enable you to move on from confrontations without holding onto bitterness or resentment.

Laughter protects the heart. Laughter improves the function of blood vessels and increases blood flow, which can help protect you against a heart attack.

Laughter may even help you to live longer. A study in Norway found that people with a strong sense of humour outlived those who don't laugh as much.

So, each day this week, we will start with a winner of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival Funniest Joke, which will hopefully raise a smile. Today's joke is from 2019 by Olaf Falafel:

'I keep randomly shouting out "Broccoli" and "Cauliflower" – I think I might have Florets'

Let's have a laugh this week.

A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. (Proverbs 17. 22 - NIV)

Tuesday

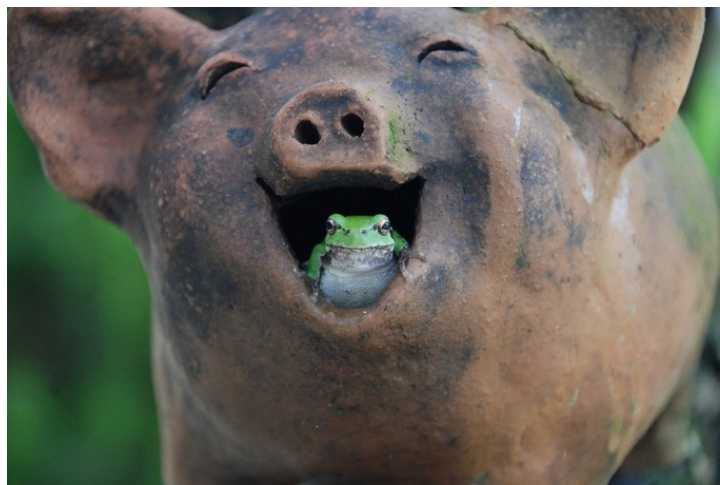
'I'm not a fan of the new pound coin, but then again, I hate all change.' (Ken Cheng, 2017)

Can you remember the last time you had a really good laugh? Or a specific memory that made you laugh at the time?

One of the Willis traditions at Christmas is to play the Name Game – acting and guessing people drawn from a hat. To set it in context, this was Christmas Day evening, so a glass or two of wine may have been consumed. It was Rod's turn, and he had to act out Agatha Christie. How would you have done that?

He started crawling around on the floor, sniffing, and then chopped himself on the neck and rolled onto his back with his legs in the air. We were a bit flummoxed, so he did it again with more gusto – and then (sadly a sign that I know him too well) I realised what he was doing and started laughing. I managed to gasp out “Agatha Christie!”, and the rest of the family started laughing, too.

Have you worked out his logic? He was ‘acting’ out *The Mousetrap* – and once we had got that, we could not stop laughing; it was just too silly. Both daughters were holding their stomachs curled up in their chairs; son was attempting to photo the scene but kept dropping his phone through laughing, and Rosemary literally fell off her chair. That memory will always make me happy.



What are the memories of laughter that you have? Think of one or two today and be happy.

*Our mouths were filled with laughter,
our tongues with songs of joy.*

Then it was said among the nations,

"The LORD has done great things for them." (Psalm 126. 2)

Wednesday

'I've decided to sell my hoover – well, it was just collecting dust.' (Tim Vine, 2014)

Laughter can also mask pain. How many times have you said 'If I don't laugh, then I'll cry'.

One of the mentions of laughter in the Bible is in the story of Sarah and Abraham, when Sarah overhears the visitors promising that she will have a son within a year. That must have been a source of huge sorrow to Sarah, but she laughed to herself on hearing that promise; not really acknowledging her real feelings, although God was well aware of them.



We all use laughter or humour as a shield on occasions to avoid the pain of reality, but it can also be the way that we cope with those feelings.

Repeating one of the benefits of laughter from the beginning of the week: **Laughter lightens anger's heavy load** – it can also lighten the pain of disappointment or sadness or despair. It will not make it go away, but it may make it a little bit more

bearable for a while. The flip side to this is to be sensitive to friends and family who may be smiling on the outside, but hurting on the inside; how might you support them? Help them to have a laugh?

In the end, Sarah laughed with joy – pray for those you know who are currently in need of happiness:

Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." (Genesis 21. 6)

Thursday

'I heard a rumour that Cadbury is bringing out an oriental chocolate bar. Could be a Chinese Wispa.' (Rob Auton, 2013)

Laughter is usually good natured, happy, fun, enjoyable – when you are doing it WITH others. But it can also be used as a weapon if you laugh AT someone who is either being used as the butt of a joke, or is being bullied; to show that you are superior or better than they are, or just to put them in their place. Surprisingly, many of the references to laughter in the Bible are used in this context.

A number of Job's laments are that people are laughing at him:
'*Even my friends laugh at me now*' (Job 12. 4)
'*Children despise me and laugh when they see me*' (Job 19. 18)

And some of the Psalmists say that God mocks those who are wicked:

'*But the Lord laughs at wicked men, for he knows their day is coming*' (Ps 37. 13)

'*But you laugh at them, Lord, you scoff at all those nations*' (Ps 59. 8)

Can laughing and jeering at someone else be a good thing? I don't think so if it is intended to belittle or hurt. But is this another example



of using laughter to reduce anger and confrontation which can end in violence? Laughing or smiling at someone who is angry can have a huge impact as it absorbs some of the aggression. Google 'girl smiling in face of protesters' to see a young girl smiling in a crowd of angry anti-muslim protesters – a very powerful image.

Be aware when you are laughing that not everyone may be laughing with you.

*A time to weep and a time to laugh,
A time to mourn and a time to dance
(Ecclesiastes 3. 4)*

Friday

'I've just been on a once-in-a-lifetime holiday. I'll tell you what, never again' (Tim Vine, 2010)

Over the last few years, we have semi-regularly attended Hertford Theatre to see different comics. Some of our favourites have been Sarah Parris, Geoff Northcott, Omid Djalili and Miles Jupp, among others. And we have also been to see, further afield, Miranda Hart and Bill Bailey.

Our preference is for comedians to be clever with their humour, using word play and one liners (Milton Jones is VERY funny) rather than a lot of swearing to try and be shocking. They have all, in their own way, entertained and made us laugh – a lot.

Laughter is definitely contagious in a hall full of people in a light-hearted mood. I remember going to see Jasper Carrott about 35 years ago and, as the gig was being filmed, we were encouraged to laugh during the show, being told, 'You can't

hear smiles'. But once one person started laughing, then it was very easy to follow suit.

Sadly, many comedians are not happy inside. Think of the sad clown act, and the various comics who have had mental health struggles – Stephen Fry, Robin Williams, Peter Sellers, Tony Hancock, to name a few. There have been some studies to see why this might be the case, which are not conclusive, but it is



likely that producing comedy is a way of self-medicating for some. One researcher stated: "They all seem to have a hidden depth to their personalities, and comedy seems to be a way to deal with it, and we all benefit from it".

Hidden depths are, by definition, hidden, but if you know someone who is always hiding behind humour, maybe take the time to ask how they really are.

Even in laughter the heart may ache, and rejoicing may end in grief. (Proverbs 14. 13)

Saturday

'Hedgehogs – why can't they just share the hedge?' (Dan Antopolski, 2009)

What has been your happiest day/event/memory? What immediately springs to mind?

For Rod, it was Sunday 14 April 1992, at about 2.35 in the afternoon as Gary Lineker scored the third goal to put Tottenham 3-1 up against Arsenal in the FA Cup semi-final. He still goes dewy-eyed at the memory.

I also asked my son the same question, and when he replied, 'I have no idea,' I suggested his four days at Glastonbury a couple of years ago. 'Ah, yes. That was good.' And, again, a slightly glazed, happy look came over him. I asked no further questions.

For me, probably our wedding day (I did love being the centre of attention), but honourable mentions have to go to daughter's wedding and the birth of our children. Or the time we were playing another name game where you have to guess the person or character that has been stuck to your forehead, and my mischievous nephew put 'Smaug' (the dragon from The Hobbit) on my mother. It was a long game.



What memories make you smile and give you that warm, fuzzy feeling inside? It may be something many years ago, or something last week. There are a lot of things going on in the world that will not make you smile, so having a bank of happiness to tap into is worth its weight in gold. Hold on to those memories and smile today.

*He will yet fill your mouth with laughter
and your lips with shouts of joy. (Job 8. 21)*

Sunday

'I needed a password eight characters long so I picked Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs' (Nick Helm, 2011)

(I think that is my favourite one – laughed out loud when reading it!)

None of the Gospels mention Jesus laughing at all – he was laughed at but it is not recorded that he had a sense of humour at all. So, if we are called to be like Jesus, is it bad to laugh a lot and find humour in life?

Here is Billy Graham's reply to that question:

'Yes, I believe Jesus did have a sense of humour and made people smile (or even laugh) at some of the things He said. His purpose was serious, but sometimes He got His point across by making people see the ridiculous side of life.'

For example, think for a moment about the image Jesus used to describe how hard it is for a proud, self-confident rich person to enter the Kingdom of God. He said it would be like a camel trying to go through the eye of a needle (see Luke 18. 25). Can you imagine His audience not laughing as they tried to picture this in their minds? I can't. His point was serious — but He used an exaggerated, humorous image to get it across.'

Some of the verses in the Bible have become so familiar that we don't step back and consider how they would have been said. When Jesus called Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John, imagine Him saying, 'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men,' with a smile in His voice, and then looking particularly pleased with himself at the clever pun he had made to the fishermen. And imagine how you might walk around with a

plank in your eye – how many people would you knock over?
(Shades of Norman Wisdom.)

Maybe humour was not as important to the Early Church, but it is important now. And if we are happy and able to laugh, we should also praise God. I hope that you have laughed or smiled this week.



And a final joke:

The Lord said unto John, 'Come forth and you will receive eternal life.' But John came fifth and won a toaster.

Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. (James 5. 13)