

# From the River's Edge

The Pastor's Blog

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## Laughter

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It's the middle of July. The heat and humidity of summer are definitely upon us. So, in these "dog days" of summer, what does one blog about? How about laughter? We could probably all use a good laugh, and experts tell us that laughter is really good for us. Checking out the medical benefits of laughter this week, I came across some specifics from the medical experts at the Mayo Clinic. They tell us that laughter is good for you – and not just for short-term benefits, which are important in and of themselves, but also for long-term benefits.



It seems that when we laugh, whether that's a case of the giggles or a real deep belly laugh, we stimulate the release of endorphins which helps with stress relief. Laughter also soothes tension as the physical act of laughing tightens and then releases your muscles, leading to muscle relaxation. And these are just the short-term benefits. In the long term, laughter



improves your immune system and can improve your mood as it helps you connect with others. We all know how important connection is these days. How nice to know that we can strengthen those connections by sharing laughter. (For more information on the health benefits of laughter, check out the Mayo Clinic's webpage – <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044456>)

With so much of life needing to be planned out these days, it's refreshing to be taken by surprise with laughter. Last week as I was eating lunch, I turned on the TV and, not finding much I wanted to watch in the middle of the day, I tuned in to PBS and found an episode of Sesame Street. I must confess, I do like to watch kids' programming from time to time. I appreciate the way good writers of kids' programming explain complex issues in language kids can understand. It takes a lot of work to do that well.

The day I tuned in to Sesame Street, they were running a "movie" called *When You Wish Upon a Pickle* which originally aired in 2018 on HBO. The storyline revolves around a booth

with a wish-granting pickle that has shown up on Sesame Street. Anyone who's been to a carnival and seen a fortune-telling booth will have some idea about the premise of this storyline. In the movie, various characters make wishes and the pickle grants those wishes, with some surprising results. It's all very cute and clever. But, the one line that put me into a fit of giggles was Cookie Monster's exchange with the wish-granting pickle.

Cookie Monster was trying to understand just what this odd looking pickle was all about. The pickle explained that he granted wishes, whatever anyone wished for. Cookie Monster thought about this and then exclaimed, "So, you're like a really big dill!" (Get it – it's a "dill" pickle, and he's a really big "deal.") I know, it's silly. Maybe that's why it got me into a fit of giggles. It actually had me giggling for the rest of the day whenever I thought about that line. In a conversation with a friend that evening, I shared this little play on words, and he started laughing too. (If you want to check out *When You Wish Upon a Pickle*, it's available on HBO, on PBS Kids, and on YouTube –and don't worry, I didn't spoil the best parts!)



Laughter also occurs throughout the Bible. Sometimes because people are incredulous about the promises God makes, such as when the visitors tell Sarah that she will have a child in a year's time (see Gen. 18:10-12). When God's promise comes true, Sarah laughs once again—this time with delight. And "Isaac," the name she gives her son, actually means "he laughs."

There are also passages that tell us how much joy God took in the creation. In the book of Proverbs, we have a wonderful image of God and Wisdom absolutely delighting as God "made firm the skies above,...assigned to the sea its limit,...marked out the foundations of the earth." (Prov. 8:28-29) Wisdom relates that daily, wisdom was by God's side "rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race." (Prov. 8:30-31, NRSV) God's delight in the world can be our delight as well. Laughter is one way we feel and express that delight.



Now, we know not everything in the world is filled with delight. There are challenges, of course. To meet these challenges, there is work to do. In the larger picture, there is work to do to ensure that all are valued and cherished just as God values and cherishes each one of us. And we know that there is also laughter that is hurtful, laughter that comes at others' expense. That form of laughter tears apart the connections between us and brings others down. That laughter is neither good for our health and well-being, nor does it express the joy God and Wisdom felt at the creation when God declared it all "very good." But, the laughter we share over the things that tickle us, over the things that help us see the joy in life – all of that laughter is "very good." So, during these dog days of summer find a funny book, a funny movie, or just share a laugh with a friend. Share in the joy God takes in your very being. Laugh—it's a really big dill!