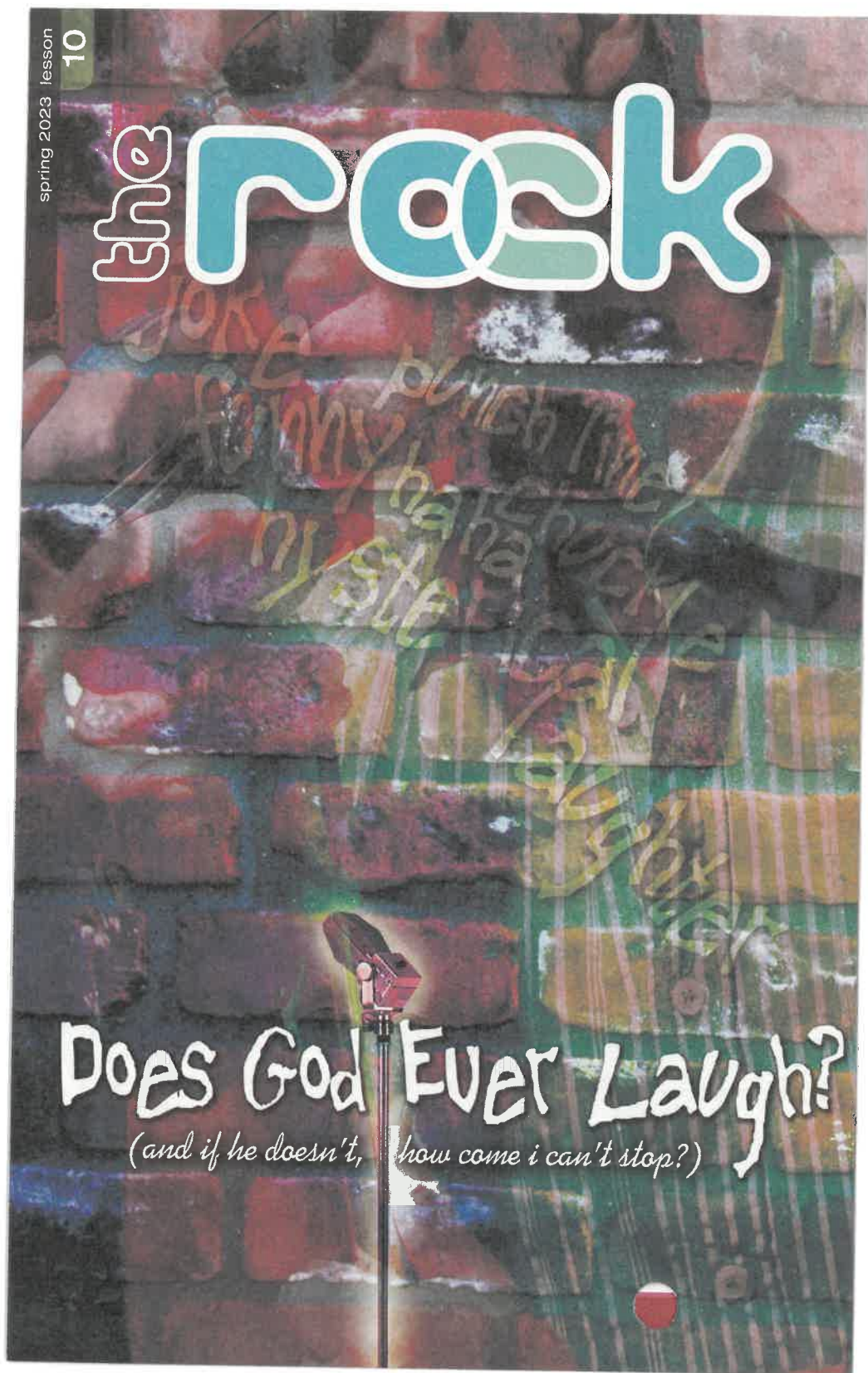


the rack

Does God Ever Laugh?
(and if he doesn't, how come i can't stop?)



Does God Ever Laugh?

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Barry is a teenager in disguise. He's really a born stand-up comic with wit beyond his years and a grown man's repertoire of jokes in his intellectual back pocket. At school, Barry sees himself as a "man of the people." Barry is clever. He's smart. And he knows how to work a room. Young Barry studies comedy like a scientist but delivers his art like Picasso.

But, you see, Barry is also a Christian.

That last sentence seems confusing. I don't know about you, but comedy and Christianity don't always seem compatible. Maybe it's that out of the 2,214 pages in my translation of the Bible, I haven't found too many jokes. Maybe it's because I always stopped laughing when my Sunday school teacher came into the room. Or do you think that God Himself has never found anything amusing at all?

Humor is a funny thing. It's got a lot of different names—satire, comedy, amusement—and everyone from your best friend to the guy administering a driving test wants to market it for himself. It elicits responses like chuckles, guffaws, and soda coming out of your nose. So how do we know if God approves of our laughter—and should I just stifle my chuckles now that I'm a serious Christian?

All Laughter Is Not the Same

We need to start somewhere, so let's

get right to the heart of the matter. All laughter is not the same. No matter how funny the joke, no matter how hysterical the word play or shocking the punch line, some humor is simply off limits for a lover of Christ. Humor is a lot like a fingerprint: no two people have exactly the same type, and if yours is covered in dirt, it leaves a black mark behind.

The writer of Proverbs has a lot to say about a rotten, filthy mouth: it brings ruin and invites disgrace. Depending on the translation, it's been called a stagnant swamp, a dark cave, and even poison. In fact, a surprising test of our own faithfulness to God is our natural reaction to dirty jokes. When a cascade of muddy water splashes onto your newly waxed car, you watch the filth bead up and roll off the shiny finish. Likewise, corrupt humor shouldn't penetrate our hearts—nor linger on the surface—but instead have no place to go when it splashes against us. And you know it will. Keep that car waxed and the dirty spots will have fewer places to land.

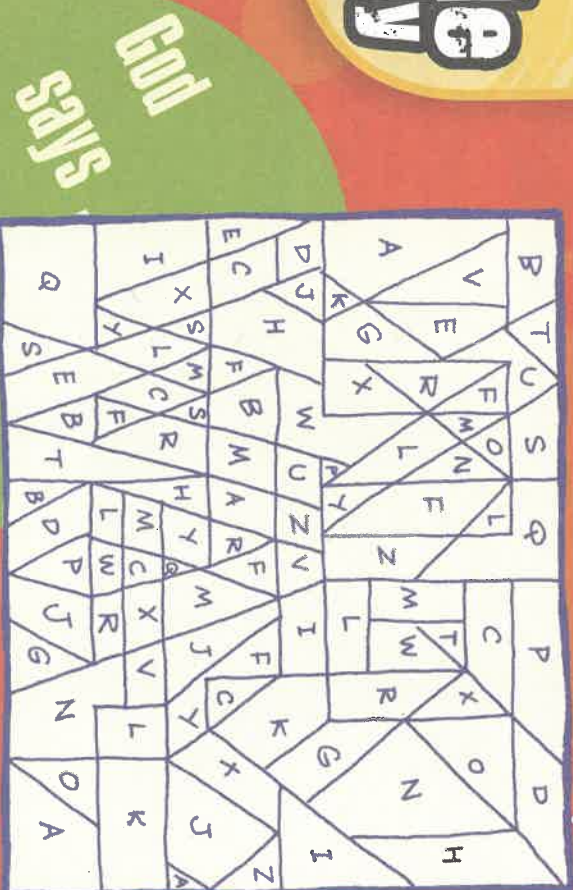
Let's not pretend that just because it's funny, it's all right with God. So many films and television

Continued on page 6.

Simon's

Acts 8:5-25

Bible Study



God Says

For a while, Simon the Sorcerer amazed everyone with his magic power. Then Philip came along. Read Acts 8:5-25. Then fill in each blank with the letter of the correct answer.

4. Peter and John prayed for the Samaritans to receive _____.
m. the Holy Spirit
n. mercy
o. healing
p. salvation

1. Philip was proclaiming _____ to the crowds.

- a. love
- b. magic
- c. the Messiah
- d. himself

2. Simon liked the _____ he got with his magic.

- e. money
- f. attention
- g. glory for God
- h. approval from God

5. Simon offered Peter and John money so that he could have this _____ also.

- q. grace
- r. power
- s. love
- t. baptism

6. Peter rebuked Simon, saying his _____ was not right before God.

- u. magic
- v. money
- w. life
- x. heart

3. After Simon was baptized, he was very interested in _____.

- i. praying
- j. God's Word
- k. helping others
- l. miracles

7. Peter told Simon to _____ and pray.

- y. repent
- z. give more money
- aa. depart
- bb. follow Jesus

Simon thought he could buy God's power. On the next page, shade in all the shapes in the puzzle that have the answers' letters in them. If all your answers are correct, you'll see what God thought of Simon's idea.

Acts 8:5-25

⁵Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. ⁶When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸So there was great joy in that city. ⁹Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, ¹⁰and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is rightly called the Great Power of God." ¹¹They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. ¹²But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw. ¹⁴When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. ¹⁵When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers

there that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶Because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money ¹⁹and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

²⁰Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! ²¹You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. ²²Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. ²³For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

²⁴Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me." ²⁵After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

Does God Ever Laugh?

(and if he doesn't, how come I can't stop?)

Continued from page 3.

programs find their comic purpose in either 1) crude situations and language, or 2) humiliation of others. Neither one is appropriate, and both will surely compromise your purity of heart. It's no surprise that across thousands of public campuses, students are writing their own little micro-scripts (perverse and humiliating, too) that mimic the comic storylines they have sadly memorized.

Laughter is also a not-so-funny way of coping with pain and loss. How many comics have you heard of who merely used humor as a hide-out, a flimsy little tent to cower under when they really needed a fortress? If you look for the truth behind the class clown, you may be surprised at what you'll find. What if that class clown is you? Are you using laughter to hide something troubling?

The Joy of Laughter

So, if some laughter is born in a dirty little swamp, other laughter is born in the joyful light of day. Those little spasms of joy inside a private family conversation, those hysterical moments with friends when you can hardly stand up, those ridiculous situations when laughter practically bubbles over the surface—these are the healing moments that God gives us to balance out life's heaviest concerns.

I love watching how different families design their own style of humor. Every family has one. My family was

coolly formal on most days, not given to public hoots and hollers, but lock us in a station wagon for a three-day road trip, and we could've sold tickets. My husband's family is the opposite, snapping off one-liners and come-backs like callers at a square dance. On most days, you can hear my husband's laugh halfway down the street even when our doors are locked.

How do you know when your brand of humor is born of God? God's humor always brings life. It is a medicine, not an illness. It lifts up rather than reaching for the lowest common denominator. It celebrates your friends rather than exposing your weaknesses. And it always grows in the sunshine instead of creeping, mold-like, around in the dark.

**I am now certain
that God laughs.**

**Are you ready
to join Him?**

Things aren't always what they appear to be. A good trick illustrates this truth. Here's a simple one for you to pull on your friends and family that gets 'em every time.

A Tricky Coin Trick

Etc.

Ask your "victims" for two coins of the same denomination, such as two quarters or two dimes. (Tell them your trick works better with larger coins!) Tell them, "Now look at these coins very carefully so that you can positively identify them." After they are satisfied that they can identify the coins, put them behind your back. Play this up, acting as if you are really doing some sleight of hand. The longer you take, the more your audience's expectations will build.

Now bring the coins back in front of you, heads up. Ask, "Which of these coins did you give me?" Your "victims" will tell you, "Both of them." Say, "Are you positive you gave me both of them?" They will look very hard at the coins and tell you, "Yes, I'm sure." And at this point you grin, pocket the coins, and say, "Thanks!"

That's it. And it works every time!

Tricks like this one are harmless fun. But God's Word warns against using trickery or deceit to get things. God wants His children to live their lives honestly, trusting Him to give them the things they need.

Dan Stultz

every day devo

You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives. James 4:2b-3a

LET'S MAKE A DEAL

We've all been tempted to bargain with God at one time or another. Other times we resign ourselves to the idea that if there is something we want very badly, it must not be God's will. How can we tell if our motives are right?

MONDAY Psalm 20:4 says, "May he give you the desire of your heart." List two or three "desires" you'd like to ask God for.

TUESDAY John 14:14 gives us the most important guide when asking God for anything. What is it? Look at your list from yesterday. Is there anything on that list that you could not ask in Jesus' name?

WEDNESDAY Read Luke 6:38. Write down two or three examples of times you've given to others. God is just as generous with us. He gives us everything we need. Thank Him for His generosity to you.

THURSDAY There is one final motive check we can run on our requests. Look up 1 John 5:14. What is it? What promise do you find in verse 15?

FRIDAY Reread the verses from Tuesday through Thursday. What do these verses have to say about our motives for asking God for things? For example, do you want a new 21-speed to make your friends jealous, or to get to the part-time job you need? See the difference? Rewrite your list from Monday keeping these verses in mind.

SATURDAY Write a poem or make a collage, combining the ideas presented in this week's memory verse and the other verses you studied this week.

