

The Mirthful Heart



■ by Janet Irvine, PsyD, Clinical Coordinator

You might be surprised to learn that a lot of laughing goes on in therapy.

While sitting in my office doing paperwork, I am often forced to smile as I hear an explosion of laughter emitting from one office or another. Getting better emotionally means getting to a point where we can laugh gently and mirthfully at ourselves and our life situations. While there are many situations that just are not funny, there are other situations where humor is the key to healing. It is a great tool to find humor and laugh about improving relationships, discovering new ways of behaving, and healing from life's curve balls.



God uses many ways to heal us.

He enables us to shed tears, to share grief and worries, to pray and to seek help when the onslaughts of life attack. He also provides us with a sense of humor, to look life in the face and laugh at its absolute ridiculousness and absurdity. A mirthful attitude enables us to be amused by our own antics, have joy in difficult circumstances and a lighthearted approach to life...usually expressed by laughter.

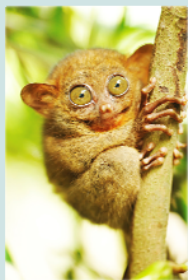
Laughter is a wonderful way to manage the stress of our daily lives. It also affords us the opportunity to take ourselves less seriously and to observe that life is unpredictable and often just plain funny. We ourselves can be eccentric, have odd and unhelpful methods of coping, and yet figure out the most amazing solutions to problems anyone could ever invent. Laughter helps put things in perspective as

we walk through our messy lives. While we weep and sigh and puzzle over the lot that has been given to us in life, we can also laugh uproariously at our own small victories, the joy of working through an issue in unique and surprising ways and startle at unimaginative solutions and creative resolutions as God reaches out to heal and strengthen us.

Many times, I ask clients to "think outside the box" when trying to resolve an issue. Clients can look at an issue and "experiment" with using different approaches. Mirthful laughter can be a surprising response to a bully, an obstreperous offspring, or the constant criticism of another person. Mirthful laughter is different than spite, sarcasm or teasing. Mirthful laughter is gentle but can unobtrusively break down walls and defenses. It can lower the sting of an attack. Mirth can reduce the weight we often carry as we try to manage life and control what is truly unmanageable and uncontrollable. Laughter is a powerful tool which enables us to face life full on rather than to feel victimized by it.

When a person laughs out loud, wonderful physiological changes occur within our bodies. This enables a person to gain perspective and optimism as they look at life's challenges. There are many physical and physiological benefits from laughing. A good belly laugh several times a week is a way to:

- Relax
- Decrease heart rate
- Improve blood pressure
- Provide pain relief
- Boost endorphins (chemicals which enhance mood)
- Help the immune system



Find ways to include laughter in your life! It is important to hang out with funny, upbeat people. Often I suggest watching some of your favorite funny movies. Watch animals and enjoy their antics. God designed some pretty amazing and humorous creatures; with flourishes of unexpected color, features and behaviors that are really quite unexpected and hilariously funny.

God delights in His people. Remember that! While we are grimly slogging along from one activity to the next, remember a God who is smiling on His beloved child who is just doing the best he or she can. Have a laugh with God, knowing you and He are in this together.

While researchers are madly scrambling around figuring this out, God's word, from thousands of years ago, said it well: "A merry heart is like medicine (Proverbs 17:22)."



Dr. Janet Irvine is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist. She enjoys working with clients in our Orland Park, IL location.

Article taken from the Sep | Oct 2014 issue of *PRESSING ON*, a Publication of Chicago Christian Counseling Center
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