

2010

God Laughs Study Guide

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Study Guide

Prepared by Nathan Lorick

God Laughs is a study of some of the uncommon characteristics that we might not know about God along with some of the more expected aspects of what makes God who He is. The purpose of this book is to help you reflect on the heart of God, because when you know God better, you can worship Him better and serve Him better.

This study guide has been prepared to help you understand and embrace some of these surprising things about God as well as some of the more well-known things about Him. If you are using this study in a small-group setting, be sure that each member has a personal copy of the book and reads through the assigned chapters before the session begins. The pastor or study leader can use the questions and faith challenges to guide group members through a better understanding of God as found in the book. The pastor or leader should help group members make practical application of the aspects of God as they learn them in the book.

Session One: God Is Love

Chapters to Read: 6, 8, 14, 23, 24, 34

God is love, and understanding the vastness of that love will help us to better realize the sacrifice He made for us through Jesus Christ. This, in turn, will help us to see our lives with His love as the backdrop. This should lead us to experiencing and expressing His love to others.

1. In chapter 34, the authors write, "To say that God is love makes Christianity unique among the religions of the world." How does this relate to you as you strive to be a Christian in a world that is continually rejecting God's love? In what ways can you show others that the God of Christianity does everything on the basis of love? How can you communicate that God's love is completely different from any other religious figure?

1. In chapter 6, the authors state that God thinks about us constantly and that we are never out of His mind. How does it make you feel to know that you are constantly on the mind of God? Does this change the way you think about Him? Does this express to you the significance of God's love for you?
2. As the authors relate in chapters 8 and 23, although God anguishes over our sins, He chooses not to remember them after we confess them to Him and seek His forgiveness. Are you able to see God's love in His decision to no longer remember your sins once you confess them to Him? Should this cause you to forgive others and remember their trespasses against you no longer? How does that fact that God does not remember our past sins relate to His love for us?
3. In chapter 24, the authors write, "Just as water quenches our bodily thirst, so fellowship with God quenches the yearnings of the soul." In what ways are you and your church seeking the quench the needs in your community any communicating God's love? Do people see God's love through your life? Do they see God's love through your church?
4. Do you feel that people understand God's love by watching the way you live your life? Do you understand the sacrifices of God's love for you? Does this affect your life daily?
5. What are some practical ways that you can show God's love to your family, your friends, your neighbors and your co-workers? Will they be able to connect the dots between your deeds and God's love?
6. In chapter 14, the authors state, "God loves to provide for His people, but notice His provision is based on *relationship*. . . . You must obey if you want God's provision." In what ways have you experienced God's love through His provision? Have you ever seen God provide in abundance? Are you living in obedience to God so that you may experience His provision?

Faith Challenge

1. Make a list of the times that you have experienced God's love in your life. On this list, document your circumstances and reflect on the times in which you felt closer to God because of the love that He showed to you.
2. Take a week and study John 3:16. Meditate on what it means for God to love you with such passion and sacrifice. Make a list of the things in your life that hinders you from daily experiencing and expressing God's love.
3. Make a commitment today to show God's love to others. Make sure that you are living your life in obedience to God's will so that others may see Jesus through you. Try to impact five people this week with an act of kindness that communicates God's love.

Session Two: God Is Holy
Chapters to Read: 2, 16, 20, 26, 27, 35

To understand God's sovereignty, we must first understand His holiness. God is holy because of who He is. His holiness is something that we are to strive to attain. In fact, He tells us to mirror His example and to be holy (see Lev. 11:44-45; 1 Pet. 1:16). His holiness should lead us to be set apart in our lives for His glory.

1. In chapter 35, the authors quote the following from A.W. Tozer: "We cannot grasp the true meaning of divine holiness . . . it stands apart, unique, unapproachable, incomprehensible, and unattainable. The natural man is blind to it." By what standard do you use to measure holiness? Do you rely on a pastor, a Sunday School teacher, a hero of the Bible – or do you hold God as the standard of personal holiness? Does God's holiness give you a desire for personal holiness?
2. In grasping God's holiness, we must also see that because He is holy there are things He hates. In chapter 16, the authors state that God absolutely hates selfish pride: "These seven things that God hates deal with inward sins of the heart, not outward sins. Our inward motives always determines our outward actions, our inward selfish pride is the source of our sin that God hates." What are some things in your life that show evidence of selfish pride? What are some things in your

church that are more focused on the congregation than on God's glory? What are some things you can do to change the selfish focus in your life or church?

3. Not only does God hate certain things, but He also gets angry. In chapter 20, the authors state that God " has standards of holiness, and when people break His laws or principles, He becomes angry at their sin." God gets jealous when we put things ahead of our relationship with Him, and He punishes our sin (see chapters 26 and 27). What are some things that have taken the place of God in your life? What are some things that have happened in your church that have angered God? In what ways have you seen God punish sin? Because God's anger is a sign of His love for us, how can we show God's love to others through His anger?
4. In chapter 2, the authors state, "Because God is holy, when we meditate on Him, we will slowly become holy like God." However, sin that is not confessed can keep us from attaining the holiness that God desires in our lives. Is there sin in your life that has not been confessed? Are you clinging to something in your life that is detrimental to your personal holiness? If so, what will you do about it today?
5. God not only desires for individuals to be holy, but He also desires for believers corporately to be holy. What are some areas of your church that could be improved upon in order to better mirror the holiness of God? Is there need for reconciliation? What are some ways that your church can communicate God's holiness to unholy people?

Faith Challenge

1. Take a week and study some of the Scriptures that deal with God's holiness (e.g., Exod. 15:11; Lev. 11:44-45; 20:7,26; 21:8; 22:32; Ps. 24:3; 77:13; 99:9; Isa. 5:16; Rom. 6:19; 7:12; Rom. 12:1; 2 Pet. 3:11; Rev. 4:8.) Meditate on what God's desire for you to be holy means in your day-to-day life. Make a list of things in your life that you need to eliminate in order to pursue personal holiness.

2. Seek out anyone in your life who you need to forgive or from whom you need to receive forgiveness. Contact that person and seek reconciliation. Express your desire for holiness and unity.

Session Three: God Is Good

Chapters to Read: 11, 17, 18, 30, 31, 36

God is good all the time, and all the time God is good. God's reveals His goodness to us in many ways, and His goodness should motivate us to be good to others. We have the ability to show others the love of God by living out the goodness of God in us.

1. As the authors relate in chapter 36, God's goodness is expressed through His mercy, grace, benevolence and patience. How have you experienced God's mercy? What are some times in your life that God's patience was evident? Is your church currently seeing the evidence of God's goodness?
2. In chapter 17, the authors relate how God heals protectively, which is another example of God's goodness to us. As the authors state, "God has compassion for His children. He wants us to live healthy lives of worship and service. God never planned to save the souls of His children and neglect their physical bodies." Have you ever experienced God's healing? If so, in what ways? Has God revealed His goodness to you through your health? Are you doing the necessary things to maintain the goodness of God through your health?
3. In chapter 18, the authors state that while there is not much in the Bible that describes God laughing, we do see that He rejoices over lost people being saved (see Luke 15:10). In this way, we see the goodness of God manifested in the salvation of people. He laughs and rejoices over each soul. Reflect on the day of your salvation—the day God rejoiced over you. Do you remember what it felt like to accept Jesus in your life? Did others know that your life had been changed? Do people know now that Jesus is real in you? Is your church seeing God laugh? Are you seeing people receive Jesus? What can you do as a church to hear the laughter of God through peoples' salvation more often?

4. In chapter 31, the authors use the example of Napoleon and the lowly lieutenant to illustrate how goodness displays His goodness when He is pleased with us. Napoleon's officers were appalled when the young man asked the general to give him an island the French army had conquered in the Mediterranean Sea, but they were even more shocked when Napoleon consented. When asked why, Napoleon said, "He honored me with the magnitude of his request." In the same way, if we want to please God, we must have as much faith in our heavenly Father as the lieutenant had in Napoleon. Does your faith please God and invite His goodness in your life? Are you pleasing God with what you are doing for Him? Is His goodness evident in your church through your faith?
5. As the authors state in chapter 11, "God seldom yells to get our attention." God, out of His goodness, whispers to us in a still, small voice. He also satisfies us and gives us strength (see chapter 30). In what ways have you seen evidence of this goodness of God in your life? Is His goodness exercised on a daily basis in you? Are others encountering God's goodness, mercy, grace, benevolence and patience through your life?

Faith Challenge

1. Write down all of the ways that you have witnessed God's goodness to you in the last month. Think about all the times that God had to be patient with you. Find someone this week to whom you can show the goodness of God.
2. God's goodness is expressed in so many ways, one of which is your health. His goodness for your health coexists with your efforts to maintain a healthy body. So evaluate your health this week. Think of ways in which you can make your body more like the temple it was created to be. In doing this, you will exemplify the goodness of God to others.

Session Four: God Has Person-like Traits

Chapters to Read: 1, 3, 9, 12, 13, 22, 32, 37

One of the greatest things we know about God is that He has person-like traits. He has the ability to hear us, talk to us, feel our pain, comfort our hurts and love us beyond all comprehension. That fact that God has these traits should lead us to a stronger love for Him and a greater understanding of Him.

1. In chapter 37, the authors explain how God has many person-like traits: He has a mind, He remembers, He reasons. What are some ways that you have seen God exhibit these person-like traits in your life? In what ways has God exhibited these traits to your church? During what times do you most feel God's personhood?
2. The Bible tells us that God has a "nose" (see chapter 12), He has "wax in His ears" (see chapter 13), and even that He whistles (see chapter 22). Another very human-like trait that we see of God is that He has emotions. When do you believe God has been grieved at something you have done? When do you think He expressed love? When do you feel that He was kind to you? When do you think He was angry? Have you ever seen the emotions of God in your church?
3. In chapter 1, the authors state that "God has a heart that reaches out to those He loves." He sees our tears and collects them in a "bottle" (see chapter 32). The fact that God cares for us this deeply and has this person-like trait should make Him even more real to us. Have you ever sought the heart of God? Have you experienced God's heart rejoicing with you? What are evidences that your church is seeking the heart of God? Are you wholeheartedly trying to find the heart of God in your life?
4. In chapter 3, the authors show how God actually sings over us—He sings "because we have done something to make Him rejoice." Are you living your life in such a way that God is singing over you? In what areas of your life or your church would God be singing? Are there areas in which He would not rejoice?
5. In chapter 9, the authors note that "God sees all we do and writes a record in His book." God reads and writes for our benefit! He keeps a record and will one day reveal everything He has written to us. What kind of things is God writing about you? Are these things beneficial or detrimental to the Kingdom? Are you living

your life in such a way that God is writing continually in a positive manner? If not, what can you change in your life to make God write with a positive pen?

Faith Challenge

1. Take a week and study the personal characteristics of God. Meditate on what cause Him to exhibit these person-like traits. For example, when He sings, why does He sing? Make a list of these characteristics and evaluate how present they are in your life.
2. Spend some time praying this week. Ask God to reveal more of Himself as a person to you. Make a prayer list, asking God to reveal certain personifications to you, and then mark them off your list as He answers each one.

Session Five: God Is All-Powerful

Chapters to Read: 4, 7, 10, 38

God is all-powerful and cannot be stopped by anything. He has unknowable secrets. He rules and reigns over the entire universe. There is nothing too small or big for Him to do. This should give us confidence that God can and will take care of us in this life.

1. In chapter 38, the authors write, "God is omnipotent, meaning He has all power, greater than anything we've ever seen." What are some areas of your life in which you have witnessed God's power? What is your role in God's power? Do you believe that nothing is too big or small for God? If so, what are some practical things in your life that you need to turn over to God?
2. The mind of God is an indicator of His incredible power. As the authors state in chapter 4, Billingsley and Towns state, "We can lose our memory, but God can't. He will know all things eternally. He will not forget anything." Your mind is a gift from God. What kinds of things are you doing to use it for Christ? Are you diligent or lazy when it comes to preparing your mind for the things of God? In what ways is God using you according to your usability?

3. While we may not always know the plans of God (see chapter 10), we do know that God does have plans for all individuals, both believers and unbelievers (see chapter 7). God has the power to save people from their sins and give them eternal life. Have you seen this power of God saving someone whom you didn't think would be saved? Have you ever witnessed someone coming into the plans of God out of darkness? Is your church conveying the message that God has a plan for everyone's life through His power?
4. God is eternal – there are no tomorrows for Him. As the authors state in chapter 33, "When you reflect on the heart of God, you'll realize how urgent *today* is. God has given you the gift of time." What are you doing today that is making a difference eternally? What is your church doing in your community that is changing lives today? Are you focused on tomorrow or today? Is your church focused on the present or overly consumed with looking down the road?
5. God's power is immense, yet we can witness it on a personal level in our lives on a daily basis. Are you plugged into the power that God has for your life? Are you taking full advantage of that power?

Faith Challenge

1. Read some of the Scriptures in the Bible that mention God's power (e.g., Job 36:22; Ps. 68:34; 145:5; Isa. 40:10; Zech. 4:6; Acts 1:8; Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18; Col. 1:11; Rev. 19:1). Recognize some of the areas in your life in which you are not taking advantage of God's power. Come up with an action plan for those areas and begin the necessary work to improve for the glory of God.
2. Observe five people in your church in whom you believe God's power is evident. Study their language, their attitude, their integrity and their other characteristics, and then compare their lives with yours. What common characteristics do you and those individuals share?

Session Six: God Is All-Knowing and All-Present

Chapters to Read: 5, 15, 21, 25, 28, 29, 39, 40

God is not only all-powerful, but His is also all-knowing and all-present. He knows all things past, present and future. His foreknowledge is one of His most fascinating aspects. His knowledge of all things gives us comfort for our past, present and future.

1. Nothing comes as a surprise to God. If it did, it would take away from His power. How would you define God's knowledge of the past, present and future? Do you believe that God already knows about tomorrow? How does God's knowledge of all things affect your day-to-day living?
2. God sees all and is everywhere; therefore, He knows all. In chapter 15, the authors state that "God knows all things because He is omnipresent, that means God is equally present everywhere all the time. Since He is everywhere, He knows everything that's happening." How have you felt God's presence in your life? Does the fact that God is everywhere and sees everything change the way you live your life? Does your church experience God's presence in your worship services? If so, what are the results of God's evident presence in your church?
3. Because of God's knowledge, He knows the appropriate time for all things. In chapter 21, the authors write, "God has purpose when He is waiting. He waits for people to repent of sin and turn to Him." At times, it can also seem as if God is silent (see chapter 5). What are some times in your life in which you felt God was silent? Has God ever waited to answer your prayers? Has God ever had to wait on you to follow His will in an area of your life?
4. The fact that God smiles on us when we are following His desires is an awesome picture of how great He truly is. In chapter 25, Dr. Towns notes that "when God smiles, I know He is happy with me." God is always present and always knows if we are doing what He wants. Have you experienced God's smile on your life recently? If so, why did God smile? God also frowns (see chapter 28) and is broken-hearted when individuals fail to believe in Him (see chapter 29). Is your life causing God to smile or to frown? What about your church? Is it causing God to smile or frown?

5. God's presence and knowledge should have high priority in your life and in the life of your church. Does the fact that God watches what you do all the time have an impact on what you do? Does the fact that God knows whether or not you choose sin over Him lead you to actually choose Him over sin? Does God's presence make you desire to be more like Him? What about your church? Do you see an awareness of God's presence and knowledge at work in your congregation?

Faith Challenge

1. Change your time schedule for one week and make an effort to spend more time alone in the presence of God. As you do, you will experience a deeper appreciation for His knowledge and presence in your life.
2. Identify those things in your life that you know God would not want to include in His presence. Seek out an accountability partner who will hold your feet to the fire on these issues. This will benefit you and will allow you to experience God's presence in your life at a greater level.

Session Seven: God Never Changes

Chapters to Read: 19, 33, 41, 42

One of the most comforting characteristics of God is that He has not, does not, and will not ever change! God cannot improve upon Himself; therefore, He is who He is for all of eternity. This should be a great relief to believers who live in a constantly changing world. God is our foundation of stability.

1. God never changes, but He does get weary. As the authors note in chapter 19, "God doesn't get physically tired or exhausted, but God can get weary dealing with our sins." Just because God is never changes doesn't mean that we should not be changing! What are some things in your life that are "wearying" God that need to change? What are some things that don't need to change?
2. The message of the cross can never change. However, does this mean that our churches should never change? Are you in a church where you sense that your

method of reaching people should be changed? If so, what would you do differently? What happens to churches that much such changes? What happens to churches that reject change?

3. If we are going to look more like Jesus, in what areas should we change our public persona? Should we look more like the world? Should we look less like the world? Why or why not?
4. Because God has no tomorrows (see chapter 33) and does not change, does this mean that He is still doing what He did in the Bible? Do you still see Him move like He did in the past? If so, where and when have you seen Him move? If not, why do you think that God doesn't move in such power or use those same methods any longer?
5. God is *Spirit*—hi is immaterial, invisible and unchanging (see chapter 41). Does the fact that God is Spirit and does not change bring you comfort? Should you place our faith in the fact that He is not going to move? Does God not changing alter the way you look at Him? Does it change the way you look at the culture? Does it change the way you read the Bible?

Faith Challenge

1. List some of the events in your life in which you were able to place your faith in an immovable God. Now go back and write a paragraph about what God taught you during those experiences.
2. Write out some of the ways that your church could change its method of reaching the lost without changing its message. List 10 ways in which your church could be more relevant in this culture without compromising the unchanging God and His message.

Session Eight: God Is Three in One

Chapter to Read: 43

The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the unique aspects of the Christian faith. The fact that God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit the Helper are all three unique in their roles, yet the same in their nature, is awesome and mind-boggling. All three are living and active in our lives today.

1. How do you explain the Trinity to those who inquire? Do you believe that the Three are One? Does your church embrace the doctrine of the Trinity?
2. God's ability to be Spirit is in fact essential to His sovereignty. As the authors state in chapter 41, "To understand God as spirit is also to realize He can be omnipresent, or present everywhere at the same time." Do you feel God's presence through His Spirit? Do you know that His Spirit is with you all the time? Does this make you want to glorify Him with your life?
3. When you pray, do you pray to the Father, the Son and the Spirit? If not, why not? Do you believe that God the Father is equal to Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit?
4. Although all three persons of the Trinity are active in your life, how does the Spirit relate to you on a day-to-day basis? How does Jesus affect your daily life? What does God do for you each day?
5. When you worship, do you worship all three members of the Trinity? Does this affect how you worship? Does it change your song selection in your worship service?

Faith Challenge

1. Reflect on the list of the attributes of the Trinity and the work of the Trinity in chapter 43. Make a list of all the ways that you see the Trinity at work in your life. Categorize these events by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Meditate on the ways each of these persons of the Trinity have made you look more like Jesus.
2. Write out a list of all the sins for which the Spirit is convicting you. Take time to thank God for sending His Son to die for you so that you may lay down all of these

sins before Him. Take the necessary steps to repent and turn from those sins with the help of the Trinity.