**WE LAUGHED:**



Proverbs 17:22

*A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.*

**When I was a Rally boy I learnt to laugh.**

Going to my first Rally Camp we woke early and carrying wooden sleds climbed a dew-covered hill. Racing down that glistening hill had every boy laughing out loud as we roared over those slippery slopes. At the same camp, stalking and catching frogs had every boy laughing as we let the slimy creatures slip out of our hands.

Once, on the way to Rally I foolishly put my shoe on the open road and sparks from my metal heels ignited and drifted down the motorway. All the boys watching laughed. An angry policeman pulled us over and gave the Rally leader a ticket for dangerous driving. The policeman tried to detect who the culprit had been. He failed and left. When he was gone we all laughed.

On another occasion, while my Rally boys watched, without thinking I jumped into a very hot pool where only old people were soaking. In immediate pain I sank to the bottom then rapidly leapt out. My skin was as red as a tomato. We all laughed. Stupidly I then joined my friends in the cold pool. My skin was shocked once more. Again, we all laughed.

**When I was a Rally boy I learnt to laugh.**

You see, in the home that I grew up in I don’t remember laughing. There was too much tension with men coming and going and alcohol flowing every weekend. Most days there was a nervous energy to avoid being beaten. I had to stay alert to adult dysfunctions in order to survive.

School was fun and playing with friends was always good, but I can’t ever remember rolling around laughing. The only time out of Rally that I recall laughter was when someone convinced me to hold my breath and spin as fast as I could. I did exactly that and dizzily fell over and went unconscious. I woke to hear my friends laughing, but with my headache I didn’t think that was funny.

**When I went to Rally I learnt how to laugh.**

At Rally, during every part of the programme I was more than amused – I was laughing. Not because anybody got hurt playing dodgeball or ‘stacks on the milk’ (where a bunch of boy’s pile on top of you). No, I was laughing because here in this alive, positive and safe environment I was happy.

Playing games distracted me from the demands of home because at Rally, laughing at winning or losing was acceptable. During hobbies we laughed at the crazy crafts we created. Rally made me glad because I was rewarded, believed and affirmed. This cheered my heart more than I can express and made me laugh with hope. I laughed as we sang, I laughed with the Bible stories, I laughed at the kindness and I laughed with the joyful pleasure of being allowed to be me.

**When I was a Rally boy I learnt how to laugh.**

Dear Rally/Youth leader, as you embark on an uncertain year of programmes, whatever you do surround yourself with happy laughter. Make your children laugh. Allow them to laugh. Teach them to laugh. Many children this year could experience another onslaught of anxiety and apprehension as the world works through the Covid crisis. Some may be disadvantaged and in despair with their home, health and hopelessness. Those children, all children, need the medicine of laughter. They need to know that with you they can laugh, discover joy, hope and peace because with you they are loved and accepted.

All Rallies and youth programmes in our churches should create an environment that is safe and secure from social insecurities. Every activity needs to be positive, upbeat, genuine and happy. We must aim at never crushing a child’s spirit to the point they are overwhelmed. We must be intentional about providing lively programmes and teaching the joy of God’s love as we grow cheerful hearts. That’s the best medicine we can give, and the best indicator is when on the way home from each programme, you hear laughter.

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