

Laughter: Indeed the Best Medicine

In our busy, over-committed world, laughter seems to have been lost along the way. We don't find much of it in our everyday lives. We have to choose to follow after it. As we age, it is so easy to get overwhelmed with the varied challenges we face, and we neglect the very thing that will help us deal with our issues and challenges.

Laughter is one thing we can choose to help us in our circumstances. I've been studying a lot about laughter and the potential power it has in our lives. Of course, my favorite is affirming, loving words from someone who thinks I'm terrific and makes me laugh. I had one such phone call today, and after I hung up, I had a little smile in my heart and on my face all day long. Maybe you should make such a phone call to a friend of yours?

If you choose to smile, even when you don't feel like it, others will almost always respond automatically with a smile in return. A friend of mine said, "Smiling is rather like a kiss—in order to get any good out of it, you have to give it to someone else." However, that isn't necessarily so. We can choose to smile or even laugh when we are alone and lighten our own life.

Physically, a smile requires the use of approximately 36 muscles, but a frown uses 97 muscles. Also, a smile releases the muscles on your scalp, which in turn lets the blood flow more easily, which brings more oxygen to the brain, which results in a buoyancy in your personality. At the point of choosing to smile and laugh, you may not feel happier, but as you continue to smile, releasing the oxygen into the brain, you actually become happier!

There is another benefit to smiling and especially laughing. Medically, doctors know that good blood flow to the brain is critical for efficient and comprehensive brain functioning. So when we laugh more, it stands to reason we should have a better functioning brain. Maybe that's the reason I keep forgetting where I put my glasses; I'm not laughing enough!

If we are going through a stress-filled day, and make the decision to have even one moment in the day for ourselves, to experience laughter and joy, it will change our lives. We must train ourselves to keep looking at the possibilities in any situation rather than the problems. As we take time to dwell on the possibilities, we will amaze ourselves as our subconscious works and solutions appear, enabling us to handle the challenge more effectively.

Where can we find joy and laughter when our lives are stressed out and everything seems to be crashing around us? As I have had to learn for myself, there are resources; we just have to choose to tap into them. One easy place to find laughter is to go to funny movies or watch them on TV. Sometimes it is only in the laughter provided by external sources that we can find relief.

Some time ago I was traveling and had put in a long 8-hour day on the road. In addition to the exhaustion of driving, I also had insurmountable difficulties in my life at the time, and so most of those eight hours were spent "mullygrubbing" around in the mess of my life.

As I was looking for a hotel that evening, I noticed a comedy was playing at the local theatre. Thankfully, it was also a PG13. It's been said that laughter is like scrubbing out our insides, and so I went to the movie and chose to laugh. Afterward, the tragic circumstances of my life had not changed, but inside my body, I had changed. I was more relaxed and able to face my life.

I have studied enough about affirming words and laughter to know that good, out-loud laughter actually releases endorphins into the brain. When endorphins are released into the body, and oxygen is released into the brain eventually, we will feel up-lifted and relaxed.

But what happens when we don't have someone to encourage us, and life gets tough? I imagine most people are like I am; we have all had formidable issues in life, perhaps some more than others. But even during the difficult times, we can choose our attitude about life. We may not be able to change the circumstances, but we can choose how we respond to them.

Viktor Frankl, concentration camp survivor wrote a book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. He said it was in the concentration camp experiences that he learned, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

Our attitude is the most important characteristic of the quality of our life, as we deal with various aspects of aging. There will often be circumstances we can't change or control, but our attitude determines how we define our existence.

One bedrock source that will help us keep a good attitude in times of tragedy is to remember to pray about our lives, about our circumstances. Does it feel like I've changed the subject? Not really. The wisdom of King Solomon supports my approach to a good attitude and laughter as well: "*A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.*"

As we continue processing our lives in these years over 50, our faith in God, our dependence on Him, and our attitude will shape our relationships and circumstances. When we stay in faith and walk in excellence, we will see God's plan and destiny for our lives unfold.

While our past history may teach us about our mistakes, it is

in choosing to live in the moment, choosing to look to the future God has for us, that will enable us to live in Hope, Joy, and Love. As we seek God's wisdom, walking through the events of our lives, we will be able to move from success to lives of significance.

I believe that keeping our faith strong in the Lord, combining that with a love for adventure, an appetite for learning, a curious mind, and a sense of humor will help us in these challenging years from 50 and beyond.

Underline this verse in your Bible to remind you of one of God's promises: *"Since my youth, O God, you have taught me and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare Your power to the next generation, Your might to all who are to come."*

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