

A Laugh a Day

☒ Laughter is a universal language that needs no interpreter. It is also a gift. Not everyone can play the piano. Not everyone can sing or paint or sculpt images from clay. These forms of special gifts have been doled out sparingly.

But laughter is a gift God has given to all of us. No special tools are required. Not even a practice run is necessary.

Laughter is good medicine, too. It is as cleansing to me as a good cry and less expensive—if you consider the cost of mascara.

Remember the words of Proverbs 17:22: “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones” (NKJV).

Solomon knew it 4,000 years ago. A man named Robert Burton realized it 400 years ago. In a book titled *Anatomy of Melancholy*, he notes, “Humor purges the blood, making the body young, lively and fit for any manner of employment.”

Laughter as Therapy

Recently, scientific studies have confirmed laughter is good for your health. At the Primary Health Care Center in Motala, Sweden, Dr. Lars Ljungdahl (with a name like that, you need a good sense of humor) conducts laugh therapy. After years of research he has determined that laughter suppresses the hormones that cause stress.

Laughter also reduces pain. And a good laugh increases

the blood flow to the brain and the oxygen level in the arteries and veins by releasing valuable endorphins into the body. These endorphins act as a “brain-made” drug that sets off biological processes that make people feel good—immediately.

Dr. Ljungdahl believes his research is universally applicable. He says, “The people of Motala, Sweden, have a reputation of complaining, so if laugh therapy will work with them, it will work anywhere.” His goal is helping people give a higher priority to humor in everyday life.

I read about Dr. Ljungdahl in Steve Simms’ book *Mindrobics: How to Be Happy for the Rest of Your Life*. Simms explains that for 13 weeks Ljungdahl meets with his patients as they review books, comedy records and humorous videos.

But then for homework, he asks patients to keep a journal of funny happenings they observe. They are to rank them on a 1-to-5 scale from barely funny to hilarious.

The results? In the course of the therapy, all the patients experienced a reduction in their levels of pain. Their immune systems improved, as well as the overall quality of their lives.

Dr. Ljungdahl says, “The humor perspective is a way of getting distance from your problems. Since every person has a sense of

humor and every child laughs, it's not so much learning something new as it is regaining what you once had."

Jesus Laughed

Does that sound familiar to you? Can you hear Jesus saying that we must "receive the kingdom of God like a little child"
(Luke 18:17)?

Speaking of Jesus—stop and think about the possibility of His laughing. Just try to imagine what it might have sounded like. Do you think he was a snorter or a guffawer?

In her book *Managing Your Life and Time*, Jo Berry says, "I used to puzzle over why the Holy Spirit didn't direct the authors of the gospels to write, 'Jesus laughed,' as well as 'Jesus wept.' I've decided the reason is because it's so obvious that the Lord would laugh. It goes without was human, as well as divine, so of course He laughed. He enjoyed life, relished close friendships, and took great pleasure in being with children."

Berry reminds us that the classic Westminster Confession of Faith declares it is our Christian duty to enjoy God. And Martin Luther once said, "It is pleasing to God whenever you rejoice or laugh from the bottom of your heart."

Is this sinking in yet? Do you get my point? God created you to laugh.

Since I am a comedian, it should come as no surprise that

I would write about laughter. But all comedy aside, laughter should be a big part of your life—because laughter is an incredible medicine created in us by God. No matter how much your heart may be hurting in this season of life or how tense and anxious you may be on this particular day, I want you to just try to find a little piece of life that gives you the hope of a chuckle.

I am well aware of the paradox inherent in considering laughter as medicine: On the one hand, healing takes time; it is a process that cannot be forced or rushed. On the other, I've repeatedly seen that laughter does its healing work as we allow it to—in no time at all.

Taking Your Medicine

Laughter not only releases endorphins that help you feel better, but also is sometimes the key that will open the door of your heart. I suggest you engage in a bit of your own laughter therapy. Here are some ideas for how to get started:

1. Spend time with several people whose humor you appreciate, people who have made you laugh in the past.

It's not clear why, but laughter is contagious. One study shows that gathered groups laugh 30 times as often as people who are alone. And people laugh more at television shows with laugh tracks than

at the
same shows without the canned laughter.

2. Go to the ballpark and watch 6-year-olds play T-ball.

Their shirts and pants barely fit. All the hats are too big for their tiny heads. And when someone hits a ball, everyone chases after it, pounces on it, wrestles for it and when someone finally pulls free, he or she will hold it high like a trophy and then fling it as hard as he can in whatever direction he happens to have come up for air. And if the ball should land in the grass again, the whole gang gets up and stampedes for a second time (and even a third if necessary).

But the kids seem to love to play the game that way. On the way home after many games, my son, Zach, would be drinking his free drink and licking the powders from a grape Pixie Stix while asking,
“Hey! Did we win?”

3. Rent The Ghost and Mr. Chicken, starring Don Knotts.

My pregnant friend Alison laughed so hard at this movie she went into labor. (Have you ever seen anyone laugh and scream at the same time?) We had to pause the VCR and head to the hospital. (And I’m certain it was not very polite of us to be laughing about this movie while she was in so much pain.)

4. Watch Andy Griffith reruns. Especially look for the episodes with Floyd.

5. *Do something out of the ordinary.* Lose your inhibitions and skip down the sidewalk or swing from the old tire swing one more time.

6. *Tell someone you trust about one hilarious memory of yours.* Surely you have one, somewhere in there. I understand if you're overwhelmed with grief, this may be hard. You may cry before you get to the laughter.

But just try it. Let the emotions roll down like a river. I recently read an article about Bill Cosby and a funny moment that happened at his son's funeral. Cosby's daughter had laid a fishing pole in the casket with her brother, Ennis. Cosby said, "Now he's going to heaven, and up there they have the finest fishing poles ever. Don't embarrass him by making him drag that old thing up there."

Do you get the picture? Are you seeking out a laugh or two? Work at it!

If you do, eventually the medicine will work its wonder. The endorphins will flow, your heart will open and comfort (in the form of the Spirit) will enter.

Sometimes when I'm sitting on a plane, I think of something that made me laugh once before and I laugh again. I do the same thing when I'm walking through a grocery store or filling the dishwasher.

You see, I collect laughs like others collect marbles or butterflies. I mean that in two ways: I collect the sounds of

laughter;

but I also collect the memories that make for repeated laughter.

It works like this. On a particularly happy day author Henri Nouwen wrote in his journal, which later became known as *The Genesee Diary*: “I hope that the day will come when the memory of my present joy will give me the strength to keep giving even when loneliness gnaws at my heart.”

He wanted “the memory of [his] present joy” to help him get through some future bleak days. He knew the storm clouds would return. They always do.

Maybe you can start your own collection of laughs. This very day you can do something that will add to your permanent collection of pleasant, laugh-worthy memories. Remember, there is no child-proof cap on this bottle. And there are unlimited refills.

So when was the last time you had a good laugh? When was the last time you got those old endorphins flowing? It’s time to take your medicine.

Chonda Pierce is a comedian, inspirational speaker and author. She has appeared frequently at Women of Faith and Aspiring Women Conferences.