Take Time To Laugh!
by Gordon Botting

The power of laughter as an aid to healing has become a specialized science during the last 30 years. It began with Norman Cousins, professor of medical humanities at the Los Angeles School of Medicine, who described in his 1976 bestseller, Anatomy of an Illness, how he used laughter to help him overcome a serious disease. At age 50, he had suffered from a chronic debilitating illness that involved severe inflammation of his joints and spine. By daily watching humorous television programs, such as Candid Camera, and Marx Brothers films, Cousins discovered that 10 minutes of hearty laughter resulted in two hours of pain-free rest. He called laughter “inner jogging.” Since then, laughter has become part of medical science with its own name: gelotology (in Greek, “gelos” means “laughter”). A gelotherapist is not a dietitian who sends you a dinner tray with Jello on it, but a specialist in laughter who studies the effects of humor on the human body.

The Science of Laughter
In laboratory studies, research has shown that there is health and healing in laughter. Science has clearly shown that mirth improves circulation, fights off infection, blocks pain by using the body’s own painkiller endorphins, and relaxes the muscles in the face and in the stomach area. Scientists estimate that 100 chuckles a day could have the same effect on the cardiovascular system as 10 minutes of exercise. If people would take the advice of Solomon that “A merry heart doeth good like medicine” (Prov. 17:22), they would have fewer visits to the doctor.

In a crisis. Humor can often soften the crises of life. When families talk about the collapse of Idaho’s great Teton Dam in 1976 and the devastating flood that followed, they remember how they survived that moment. After reaching the safety of higher ground, they were able to reduce their loss and tragedy with humor. As their homes floated by, one of the stranded family members spoke up: “There goes the Jorgensen’s place. They’re just trying to keep up with the Joneses,” whose home had floated by minutes before.

In our spiritual life. The New Testament speaks often of the need for Christians to exhibit the fruits of the Spirit. One of these positive fruits is JOY, which should include lots of smiles and laughing with others and even a few laughs at ourselves when we say or do something silly or ridiculous. In your daily prayers, ask God to develop a sense of humor in your life that will not only benefit you, but will uplift others. Failure to use this God-given gift is poor stewardship.

Final Thought
I wouldn’t be surprised if God, as He sits on His throne, sometimes says with a chuckle to the angels seated by Him, “I can’t believe what that Christian just did!”

Distributed by: North American Division. Director: DeWitt Williams
Produced by: North American Division Health Ministries. Director: DeWitt Williams
Coordinator—Editor: Gordon Botting. Design—Assistant Editor: Ed Fargusson
hill and is amused at their arrogance. Instead of destroying the people with His wrath, He says, with a twinkle in his eye, “Let us make a babble of their language.” (Gen. 11:7, Moffat). Imagine the confusion and panic that ensued from God’s compassionate sense of humor. David, in the Psalms, describes the divine reaction to the self-confidence of the wicked: “He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision.” (Ps. 2:4 RSV).

Another example in the Old Testament that I’m sure made God chuckle happened to the false prophet Balaam. In Numbers 22 we find Balaam saddling up his donkey to go and curse the nation of Israel at the request of Balak, the Moabite king. However, Balaam has a difficult time controlling his animal. First, the donkey turns off the road, then it squeezes Balaam’s foot against the wall, and finally sits down, refusing to go any farther. Balaam gets so mad he proceeds to beat the beast unmercifully, when suddenly the donkey speaks, “Am I not your faithful beast of burden? Then why are you beating me?” The original “Mr. Ed!” Balaam is so upset that rather than wondering at the donkey’s sudden ability to speak, he actually holds a conversation with the animal.

The third illustration is Jehovah’s guarantee of a son for Abraham’s family. The Bible says that when God announced the fulfillment of His promise, Sarah laughed. It was the only way a 90-year old lady could handle God’s telling her she would get pregnant for the first time. I’m sure she laughed out loud with tears running down her face, exclaiming, “God, have you forgotten basic biology?” To remind her of that moment, her newborn son was named “Isaac,” the Hebrew name for “laughter” or “he laughs.” (Genesis 17:19; 21:6).

**Did Our Lord Use Humor?**

One of the most humorous stories in The Gospels is the one in which Jesus is explaining to his disciples how difficult it is for the rich to get into heaven. “Jesus looked at him (the rich young ruler) and said, ‘How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’” (Luke 18:24-25 NIV). Some people try to interpret the “eye of the needle” as referring to a specific gate entrance in our Lord’s day where they unloaded the belongings of the eastern traders or a gate where the camels had to kneel down to get through. I’m sure that the crowd, particularly the ladies in the audience, smiled when they heard Jesus say this as they imagined licking the camels nose so it could be threaded through a needle. Of course, the real laughter and the point of the message would come as they visualized the difficulty of getting those two humps on the camel’s back through the needle.

Another classic passage is found in The Beatitudes when Jesus says to the throng, “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and with never a thought for the great plank in your own?” (Matt. 7:3 NEB). In effect, our Lord, if He were speaking today, would exclaim, “Why in the world are you trying to take a minute speck of dust out of your fellow member’s eye when you have a telephone pole stuck in yours?”

**How To Add A Dose Of Humor**

1. **Collect humorous memories.**
   Think back to the things that made you laugh as a child. Remember with fond memories the school pranks and stories you shared with your teenage friends. Often, just a word, such as “camping,” will make those in your immediate family break out into uncontrollable laughter about an episode that relates to a long-ago campout. Clip favorite cartoons and humorous stories and place them in a laughter file. Begin a scrapbook of silly bumper stickers, strange comments, and some of the most ridiculous items and stories you have read in your favorite magazine or newspaper. Before you know it, you will have a repertoire of humor.

2. **Mix with people who smile.**
   Humor has a way of making others feel accepted. Differences in culture, education, or social standing melt away in the warmth of a smile or the telling of a funny story. That’s probably one reason people loved Jesus, because He cheered them with the humor in His parables. And I’m sure the children caught on quickly to his light-hearted illustrations.