

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

30. Is the Best Medicine Really Laughter?

You are listening to episode 30 of the Encouragement for Real Life podcast, *Is the Best Medicine Really Laughter?* Welcome back and thank you for joining me today! And happy March 1! We made it through the coldest months of the year here in the U.S., and spring is just around the corner! It's gotta be, right? Even if it doesn't feel like it yet, we know it's coming. Hallelujah! I am looking forward to spring! So friend, how are you? How is life in your corner of the world today? I pray you are well, and you are living uplifted and encouraged. In this episode we're discussing a subject I believe we could all benefit from. And it's something I also believe we can all use more of. And that, my friend, is laughter. Last week we talked about how to be the most positive and enthusiastic people we know, and interestingly, laughter can play a big part in that. So, let's get into this week's episode and find some encouragement (and laughter) along the way.

Have you laughed yet today? Well, here's your chance. Because this episode is about laughter, I'm starting off with a joke. Ready?

Why was 6 afraid of 7? Because 7 ate (8) 9. Funny, huh?

Here's another one: What's the best thing about Switzerland? I don't know but the flag is a big plus.

And one more: Did you hear about the claustrophobic astronaut? He just needed a little space.

I say it's good to start the day with laughter, even if it's from what some might call a "Dad joke."

Laughter. It's been said it's the best medicine, right?

But why is that? Why is it considered the "best medicine"? And is it really? Does laughter contain healing properties for when we are sick? Does it boost our immunity to fight off germs or unwanted viruses? Can laughter really make that much of a difference in our lives?

Well, Lawrence Robinson, Melinda Smith, and Jeanne Segal in an article at helpguide.org explain it this way:

[Laughter] draws people together in ways that trigger healthy physical and emotional changes in the body. Laughter strengthens your immune system, boosts mood, diminishes pain, and protects you from the damaging effects of stress. Nothing works faster or more dependably to bring your mind and body back into balance than a good laugh. Humor lightens your burdens, inspires hope, connects you to others, and keeps you grounded, focused, and alert. It also helps you release anger and forgive sooner.

Lawrence Robinson, Melinda Smith, M.A., and Jeanne Segal, Ph.D. at helpguide.org

That all sounds wonderful, doesn't it? We know laughter feels good, but now we know laughter also has many physical, emotional, mental, and relational benefits. No wonder it's called the "best medicine."

When we're not feeling well, it might be a good idea to participate in some laughter. If we feel a cold coming on, it might be wise to turn on our favorite comedian. The next time we're stressed, instead of turning to some sort of numbing vice, an evening out with a fun friend might be in order.

Could it be time for a dose of this best medicine?

Driving home after dinner with a friend one evening last week, I noticed I felt what I describe as "lighter" than I had in a while. Once a month this friend and I meet for dinner, and let me tell you, it's something I look forward to. Because this friend gets me. She and I have much in common. And oftentimes she helps me see life from a different angle. I hope I do the same for her. But we always have an enjoyable couple hours together.

Last week's dinner with her was no exception. And right before we parted ways at our table, we both were doubled over with laughter. For the life of me I can't remember right now what caused our belly laughs, but whatever it was struck us both as hilarious. I'm guessing our uncontrollable laughter interrupted someone else's dinner nearby. It was one of those moments I didn't want to end, because the laughter felt so refreshing. You know those kinds of moments. Where you can barely catch your breath from the laughter. Your cheeks and your stomach muscles ache, and you can't stop, nor do you want to.

When was the last time you laughed like that?

A real, deep-down to your gut laugh. When an unexpected snort escaped among the laughs, or you laughed so hard tears were jumping out of your eyes. (That last description came from my sister-in-law from a time she was doubled over in laughter and tears of joy were a result.) No matter what it was like or how long ago it was, you recall it now and it still brings a smile to your face.

This kind of laughter is good for our souls.

But don't take my word for it. Take the words of Solomon in Proverbs.

A cheerful heart makes you healthy. But a broken spirit dries you up.

Proverbs 17:22 NIRV

Laughter comes from a cheerful heart. Now I know life isn't always cheerful. But we can remain cheerful despite of our circumstances. And Solomon knew what he was talking about. He knew what it was like to have both, a cheerful heart and a broken spirit. Having a cheerful heart does make us healthy.

You know? I can't help but think Jesus was full of laughter. He welcomed little children to come to Him and we know how children are filled with laughter. We'll talk about that in a moment. He didn't have a downcast, broken spirit, but a cheerful one. He was full of light, love, and life, which naturally leads to lightheartedness and yes, laughter.

Yes, laughter comes from a cheerful, happy heart.

I watch my now 14-month-old grandson two days a week, and let me tell you his little heart is full of cheer and happiness. All the time. He laughs throughout the day. All day long. So much so, his laughter sometimes catches me off-guard, and I find myself laughing right along with him. The more he laughs, the more I laugh. And the more I laugh with him, the more he laughs with me. Laughter is incredibly

contagious! And isn't it true, when we're laughing, we can't help but experience joy, happiness, and a whole lot of fun?

And little children laugh so easily, don't they? Why is that? Why don't we adults laugh like little children? Is it because children have less worries? Maybe. Are they just learning humor? That's possible. Is it from their lack of "filter" we adults have? Possibly. I'm not sure why, but some days I want to be more like little Nolan. I want to laugh throughout the day. I want more laughter in my life. Don't you?

Maurice Chevalier once said, "You don't stop laughing because you grow older. You grow older because you stop laughing."

As I drove home from dinner with my friend that evening, I got to thinking about this more. Why don't I laugh more like I did with my friend at dinner? Is it me or are the people I typically hang with not full-of-laughter people? Has life gotten so serious that laughter has lost its place in life (except when I'm with little Nolan)? Are the pressures of life and its complications robbing me of joy and laughter?

Maybe it's a result of a little of each of these. I don't know.

But I say it's time to add more laughter into our lives.

According to Milton Berle, "Laughter is an instant vacation."

So, what do you say? Could you use a little more laughter in your life too? Could you use an instant vacation?

But how? How do we do that? How can we add more of this best medicine into our lives on a regular--or daily--basis? Because if you're like me, you wouldn't mind all the benefits possible of laughter. Right?

Well, we can ask God to lighten our hearts and help us laugh throughout the day.

We can hang around people who value laughter and who aren't afraid to laugh.

We can read humorous and lighthearted articles and books and watch funny and uplifting movies and shows.

You and I can laugh at ourselves and at the silly things we do. Not in a derogatory way, but in an accepting, loving way. We don't have to be so serious all the time, do we? Mickey Mouse says, "To laugh at yourself is to love yourself."

We can smile throughout the day and give our smiles away to those we meet.

And we can embrace laughter and help others to laugh too.

You and I know how good it feels to laugh. It feels wonderful, doesn't it? We experience and express joy through laughter. And sometimes when this world gets messy (which is often) and life gets heavy (which is often beyond our control), laughter makes everything lighter. It makes difficult days bearable, and easier days enjoyable. We each need laughter in our lives to not take ourselves or this life so seriously.

Plus, people who laugh are more fun to be around, aren't they? Don't you love people who make you laugh?

People who laugh often tend to be grateful people.

What about us? Are you and I grateful? And what are we grateful for?

I ran across this Psalm, and it spoke to my heart regarding all the many things God has done for us. Sometimes we focus on all the bad, but when we stop to think about it, we each have so much to be thankful and grateful for. Here it is:

Our mouths were filled with laughter; our tongues were spilling over into song. The word went out *across the prairies and deserts, across the hills, over the oceans wide*, from nation to nation: "The Eternal has done remarkable things for them."

We shook our heads. All of us were stunned—the Eternal has done remarkable things for us. We were beyond happy, *beyond joyful*.

Psalm 126:2-3 VOICE

When gratefulness fills our hearts because of all God has done in our lives, we can't help but be filled with happiness, joy, and yes, laughter.

How will you incorporate a little laughter into your day today?

How can you and I be intentional all month long to be people of laughter, of this best medicine? It's a great day to begin, the beginning of a new month. Would it help to put a reminder to laugh on our fridges or on our mirrors in the bathroom? Or maybe somewhere in our cars? Can we ask others to help us laugh more this month? Involving others to incorporate more laughter into our lives? What can we read or watch that will prompt us to laugh more?

Some of my favorite Christian comedians are Chonda Pierce, Tim Hawkins, and Jim Gaffigan, and they can each be found in any online search. Maybe a few minutes of their jokes will help us begin or end the day with laughter.

What other ideas do you have? What makes you laugh? We're discussing this all week long in our Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook. I know I mention it often, but it truly is an inspiring and encouraging space. Come on over and have some fun with us over there. Share your ideas and maybe tell a funny joke or two to usher in some laughter. The link to this group is in the show notes.

If you found encouragement in this episode, I invite you to subscribe to the podcast, rate, and review it so others can find this encouragement too.

In closing, whoever termed the saying about laughter being the best medicine, I think he or she was absolutely correct. I believe we could all use a little more laughter in our lives right now. Especially now. And to quote the dear, late Betty White, "Laughter keeps everyone feeling wonderful." I pray you are feeling wonderful from laughter today!

Here are a couple more simple jokes to end this episode.

How does Moses make tea? He brews.

What did the left eye say to the right eye? Between you and me, something smells.

And one more.

What did the 0 say to the 8? Nice belt!

It's good to laugh, isn't it? Thanks for joining me here today. I pray your days are filled with laughter, love, and abundant life. God bless you.

Julie Lefebvre