



# The Branches

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## Joy

**J**oy comes when you find contentment in where the Lord has placed you. This involves great trust in Him. If you are stuck doing anything you see as a “waste of time,” you need to rest in the Lord, “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). If you dislike what is going on in your life, then consider Ecclesiastes 7:14, “In the day of prosperity be joyful, But in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other...”

Read it twice if you didn't get it. He said to be joyful in the good days, and be joyful in the bad days. Still don't like it? God doesn't say it will be easy, and He doesn't say we have to like everything we must go through. But we can “joy” in the Lord when we can't joy in anything else. He continues to fulfill His covenants with us; He provides for us, He comforts us, He forgave us.

Fight the attitude that says, “Yeah, I know I'm saved, but this is too tough to find any good in. I can't be joyful.” Focus on His Word. People I know often wait for a literal voice from heaven to intervene—what do they think the Bible is? Don't let that be you. He speaks to you, gives you every reason to be joyful even in the saddest and most trying of times, all in the Bible.

Look to the Biblical prophets. When God calls them to action they often replied, “Here I am, Lord.” God needs someone to do the job, and He picked them. I don't believe they were all giddy with excitement at the prospect of bringing frightening news of judgment to a wayward nation. Moses had the incredible job of leading the nation out of servitude, and even *he* didn't want to go. But they responded with, “Here I am.” Christ wanted God to take away His sufferings, if possible, before going through them, yet He still rode into Jerusalem without complaint.

Your job must be significant enough for God to place you there to do it. Trust His judgment as to where He thinks you need to be. Practice controlling your sinful desire to fret, worry, nag, and resent. Squelch your excuses for it.

“Ever shout for joy,” as Psalm 5 says. Get into the Christian soldier's attitude and use David's often-repeated words as your battle-cry, “I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing to You among the nations. For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens, And Your truth unto the clouds” (Psalm 57:9–10).

—Abby Matzke, St. Peter's, Stambaugh, MI

*“Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth!”*

—Psalm 66:1

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**“But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part,  
which will not be taken away from her.”**

—Luke 10:42

As a young Sunday school student I was harsh in my judgment of Martha from Bethany. After learning that she busied herself to distraction with common household chores while Jesus was visiting, I thought, “Who would choose to bake, cook, clean, and sweep while Jesus Himself was near?” My child’s mind and limited experience led me to believe that I would certainly have been like Mary, sitting, in joyful attentiveness at my Savior’s feet, pondering every Word.

But I am no longer a child. Today I am a wife, and a stay at home mother to three young children. No matter what my childish convictions were, an honest look at my life shows me that I am certainly much more like Martha than Mary. I tend to wake up in the morning thinking of the chores that need to be done, hoping that I can accomplish them in between feeding, diapering, potty training, and tending to the kids. An upcoming visit sends me into frenzied action cleaning closets, wiping windows, and dashing away dust. There is little time for rest, less time for personal recreation. Many days have ended as I drop into bed in frustrated exhaustion, sometimes accompanied with tears, as I think “It’s just not possible. There is just too much to do, it can’t all be done.”

I had let the details of my life crowd out the big picture. I had mistakenly thought that by putting my family and household duties first I was fulfilling my calling and would find joy in these tasks. The message on a local church’s sign stopped me in my tracks. It read: J.O.Y.—Jesus first, Others second, Yourself last. Like Martha, I had put Jesus aside while attempting to finish my tasks. Unlike Mary, I had neglected the one thing that was needed.

We should begin each day at Jesus’ feet, through personal devotion and prayer. “But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:2). We look to our Savior’s Words in Scripture for the patience and strength to deal with another to-do list that seems too long. “It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect” (Psalm 18:32). Day after day, true joy is found not in the completion of my daily chores, in and of themselves, but in the big-picture promise that Jesus has redeemed me from death, hell, and eternal separation from God through His life, death, and resurrection in my place. After refreshing my soul with this living water I will go about my daily routine again, working out of love for my Savior. Joy will be a sweet fruit of even these humble Spirit works, just as Jesus promises.

May our Lord graciously grant each of us a renewed desire to read and study His holy Word so that we may find J.O.Y. in all that we do to His glory.

With the Lord begin thy task,  
Jesus will direct it;  
For His aid and counsel ask,  
Jesus will perfect it.  
Ev’ry morn with Jesus rise,  
And when day is ended,  
In His name then close thine eyes;  
Be to Him commended.

If thy task be thus begun  
With the Savior’s blessing,  
Safely then thy course will run,  
Naught thy soul distressing.  
Good will follow everywhere  
While thou here must wander;  
Thou at last the joy wilt share  
In the mansions yonder.

TLH 540:1,4

—Vanessa Wales, Holy Trinity, West Columbia, SC

# Joy in Every Day

**J**oy: a very glad feeling; happiness; delight. This is the definition for “joy” found in Webster’s dictionary. Many things come to mind when I think of the word “joy.”

- Cleaning my house—and having it stay that way for more than one day!
- Seeing a grant through from a concept to a completed project.
- Preparing a meal for a friend.
- Helping Joy: a very glad feeling; happiness; delight. This is the definition for “joy” found in with spring tillage (and not having broken any of the equipment).
- Picking up branches and sticks after a storm and getting the lawns mowed.
- Attending the Christian Women’s Retreat.
- Participating in the Christian Music Festival.
- Hearing my six-year-old nephew say that when he goes to school at ILC he’s going to be in the musical just like Christopher (my youngest son).
- Spending Banquet weekend with my children and their friends—and they enjoy it, too.

I will be the first to admit that my sinful nature rebels against doing many of the things listed above. Finding joy in cleaning my house, cooking, sitting in the tractor for long hours, picking up sticks, mowing the lawn, completing the paperwork that comes with being awarded a grant, and paying for the gas for the long trips is often easier said than done. However, it is very important for me to realize that all of these things should be done in joyful service to the Lord.

As I think about joy in my life, I realize that it is part of everything that happens each day—the spring weather, planting the crops, spending time with my husband, visiting my children, celebrating an event with my parents and siblings, being at our camp site by the river, fellowship with fellow Christians, visiting with friends, and even going to work. All of these are wonderful blessings from the Lord.

What a treasure to know that our Savior, Jesus, who feeds the birds of the air and clothes the grass of the fields, cares for us enough to bring us joy in everyday events. More importantly, this Jesus came to earth, lived a perfect life in our place, suffered on the cross for our sins, suffered the torments of hell in our place, and rose again victoriously, so that we may spend eternity with Him in Heaven.

**“These things I have spoken to you,  
that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full”**

John 15:11

—Jan Voit, St. John’s, Okabena, MN

## Won’t You be a Pen-Pal?

**W**e have recently received a request from a homeschooled teenage girl seeking a new friend her own age as a pen-pal.

A suggestion was made by another reader that perhaps adult readers of *The Branches* could acquire friends to swap letters with also.

For information concerning either of these inquiries, contact Abby Matzke, editor, via regular mail at 302 N. 6th Street, Crystal Falls, MI 49920, or via email at [abby\\_matzke@yahoo.com](mailto:abby_matzke@yahoo.com).

# Where Joy Is

Where do you go?  
What do you do,  
When you need to find joy  
Since you're feeling quite blue?

Where do you look?  
Whose advice do you seek  
When the days seem so long  
And the nights are so bleak?

Just stop—look and hear!  
There's Joy everywhere.  
Use the senses you have  
And a heart that will share.

The song of a bird,  
The wind in the trees,  
A fast running brook,  
Blooming flowers—all please.

A gosling so fuzzy,  
Some sheep by a stream,  
A glorious sunset,  
Are not just a dream!

Joy comes from feeling  
New life in your womb.  
While Grandmas enjoy  
Touching tummies in 'bloom'!

And the touch of a spouse  
As your hands clasp in prayer,  
Or the soft, velvet bottom  
When a newborn is bare.

And oh, what Joy  
That can warm your heart  
The eyes of a child  
Or a giggle can impart.

The Joy that you feel  
In lending a hand  
Or greeting a stranger  
With a smile is so grand!

And what Joy divine  
In your heart of hearts  
When a *Christian* friend  
From this world departs!

Belief in our Savior  
Gives Joy beyond measure.  
Adults being baptized  
Who know their real treasure!

Creation itself  
At work day and night.  
The seasons don't fail  
Nor does dark and light.

Our God is awesome!  
He sent us His Son  
Whose death on the cross  
Our salvation won.

Because He arose,  
We all will rise too,  
And seeking Him first  
Brings ALL JOY to you!

—Jacquelyn Radichel, Grace Lutheran, Fridley, MN

**"The cup of joy is heaviest when empty."**

—Marguerite de Valois

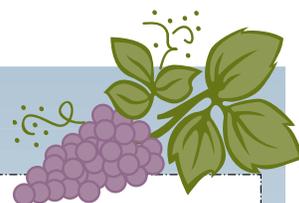
# Food Section

As we celebrate this month's theme, Where to Look for Joy, I often don't need to look too much further than a good dessert. We have a wonderful collection here to sweeten your summer.

In our last issue, we asked for recipes which remind us of loved ones or bring back fond memories. My own dear mother-in-law, Lois Mackensen, is now in a nursing home, but my memories of her wonderful baked goods are very fresh. Thankfully, she often passed along her recipes to family members. We will share some of those here.

We also have recipes using those wonderful summer staples, jello and rhubarb. En-joy!

—Gail Mackensen, Messiah, Hales Corners, WI



## Delicious Dishes

### Waffle Iron Cookies

1 c. sugar	2 eggs, beaten
1/2 c. butter	1/4 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. vanilla	1 1/2–2 c. all purpose flour
1 tsp. baking powder	1/2 c. milk
2 oz. unsweetened chocolate, melted	1/2 c. nutmeats (any kind), opt.

Beat sugar and butter; add eggs, one at a time, and beat well. Add melted chocolate and vanilla and beat. Combine all dry ingredients except nutmeats. Alternate adding 1/3 of the dry ingredients with 1/3 of the milk until both are used.

Drop two or three teaspoons of dough the on hot waffle iron which has been lightly sprayed with cooking spray; depending on iron configuration, one can make 4 "cookies" per time, with dough in each of the quadrants. Bake until they "let loose." Cool completely before frosting. Frosting is optional.

Best to use a waffle iron with the smaller squares and indentations; I have not tried it with a Belgian style iron.

**FYI: 3 Tbsp. cocoa and 1 Tbsp. shortening = 1 unsweetened chocolate square.**

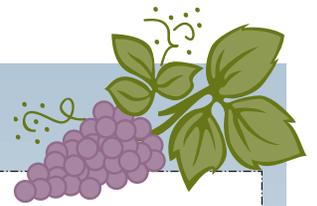
Usual reaction by people seeing these: "Hey, these look like waffles!"

—Submitted by Ruth Amundson (Lois Mackensen's daughter); The recipe for these delectable treats came from Norma Schwichtenberg who was a member in a Tomah/Warrens area church in the late 50's.

**"But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You;  
Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them;  
Let those also who love Your name Be joyful in You."**

—Psalm 5:11

## Delicious Dishes



### Chocolate Pudding Cake (Baked Chocolate Pudding)

1 c. flour                      1/4 tsp. salt  
3/4 c. sugar                    2 tsp. baking powder  
1/2 c. milk                      2 Tbsp. melted butter  
1 tsp. vanilla                 1/2 c. chopped nuts  
1 sq. melted unsweetened chocolate

Mix flour, salt, sugar and baking powder well with fork. Add remaining ingredients and pour into buttered 9 x 9 pan. Top with 1/2 cup each of white and brown sugar and 1/4 tbsp. cocoa. Pour 1 cup water over all (Do not stir in). Bake in 325° oven for 40 minutes. The dessert is just as good with less sugar added in the final steps of the recipe.

—Submitted by Gail Mackensen; recipe from Lois Mackensen, *Our Redeemer, Red Wing, MN*

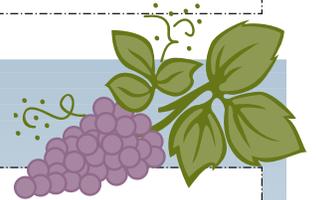
### Fruit Cocktail Cake

1 1/2 c. all purpose flour (can use 3/4 c. white flour and 3/4 c. whole wheat)  
1 c. sugar                      1/2 tsp. salt  
1 tsp. baking soda         1 beaten egg  
1/2 c. brown sugar         1/2 c. chopped nuts  
1 16 oz. can fruit cocktail

Mix flour, 1 cup sugar, salt and soda. Add fruit cocktail (including juice) and beaten egg. Pour into a buttered 9 x 9 pan. Sprinkle brown sugar and nuts over the top. Bake in a 350° oven for 35–40 minutes.

—Submitted by Gail Mackensen; recipe from Lois Mackensen, *Our Redeemer, Red Wing, MN*; This recipe is a favorite in my house because it is so easy to put together and tastes great. My mother-in-law's note at the end reads "Of course, a scoop of ice cream or a plop of whipped cream wouldn't hurt a bit!"

## Delicious Dishes



### Rhubarb Dessert

6 c. diced rhubarb         1 1/2 c. sugar  
3 Tbsp. cornstarch         1 yellow cake mix  
3/4 c. melted butter         1/2 c. chopped walnuts  
1 can cherry or apricot pie filling

Butter a 9 x 13 pan. Set oven to 350°. Combine sugar, salt and rhubarb. Let sit for at least an hour until it creates at least 1–2 cups of sugar syrup. Drain syrup into a 2 cup measure. If there's not enough syrup, add water to equal 2 cups liquid. Pour liquid into saucepan. Blend cornstarch with liquid and bring to a boil. Cook until thick and add cut rhubarb. Pour this mixture into prepared pan. Spread pie filling evenly over this layer. Sprinkle dry cake mix over pie filling layer, breaking up any large lumps. Sprinkle walnuts evenly over this layer, covering all with the melted butter. Bake 45–60 minutes or until top is golden brown.

—Submitted by Hertha Blumhardt, *Redeemer Lutheran, Bowdle SD*; Bonnie Gill, *Leola, SD*

### Ribbon Jell-o

2 (3 oz.) boxes black cherry Jell-o  
2 (3 oz.) boxes cherry Jell-o  
2 (3 oz.) boxes orange Jell-o  
2 (3 oz.) boxes lemon Jell-o  
2 cans evaporated milk

In 11 x 13 inch pan, layer the Jell-o in the following manner.

**1st layer**—1 box Jell-o mixed with 3/4 cup hot water and 3/4 cup cold water

**2nd layer**—1 box Jell-o mixed with 3/4 cup hot water and 3/4 cup evaporated milk

**3rd layer**—1 box Jell-o mixed with 3/4 cup hot water and 3/4 cup cold water

You will continue on to create 8 layers, alternating colors and the use of evaporated milk and cold water. Each layer needs to "set" for at least half an hour before you add the next layer.

—Submitted by Arlene Bernthal, *Messiah, Hales Corners*

# Rejoice in the Lord!

***“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”***

—Philippians 4:4

**R**ejoice? Don't I know how? Isn't that what the Christmas season is all about? Like when I see someone open the present she hadn't even dreamed about. The joy I feel when I tear the ribbons off the gifts with my name on them. That good feeling when the family is gathered together and enjoying one another's company. What a shame it only comes once a year. How are we feeling half way through the year? Do we lose that joy and wait to find joy again at the Christmas season?

There is nothing wrong with Christmas joy. But it dare not end with this. Paul wasn't thinking about people or presents when he encouraged the believers at Philippi, "Rejoice always." How could he have been? The apostle was imprisoned at Rome, jailed unjustly for the crime of talking about his Savior. He also knew what the usual exit from a Roman jail was—a beheading. Yet he urged his beloved fellow believers, "Rejoice always."

"In the Lord," he reminded them. Here's the key for joy that lasts from one Christmas to the next. As Paul put it, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). And then he added, "Thanks be to God!"

As a believer, I have joy that never ends because I have a God whose Grace is unending. In Jesus, He gave me the best gift He had, the Savior from sin in whom I can rejoice every day of my life. I have joy because of Him.

—Kathy Kauno, *Redemption, Alderwood Manor, WA*

## Encouragements

***“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.”***

—Ephesians 1:7-8

**A**s I watched the bright, beautiful sunrise on this lovely Spring morning, two words came to mind: Amazing Grace. My favorite hymn is Amazing Grace. Almost everyone knows the first part: "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me." I saw a t-shirt once that said "I am the wretch the song refers to." Wish I had bought it.

Recently, I heard an analogy of grace that had been "ranchified." I don't personally know the man who gave this example, but it was thought provoking. He described grace as a blanket we receive from God that is wrapped around us, to cover us with God's love. Then he compared it to when you are grafting a calf onto a cow. Grafting a calf is when a cow has lost her own newborn calf, and you "graft" another on to her. It can be a difficult process at times and many methods are used. One of the older methods is to take the skin from her original calf that has died, and put the skin on the calf you are trying to graft on to her. The new calf will smell like her calf, and she will love it as her own... Remind you of anything? Jesus Christ, dying on the cross, pouring His precious blood out over us to cover our sins, so the Father can love us as His own. O.K... maybe the cow analogy was a bit graphic for some, but it's real ranching life!

*Continue on next page*

## Encouragements—Continued

Grace is a gift given to us by our Savior Jesus Christ. I cannot earn grace. It is given freely. I did some research on crucifixion just before Easter this year. You know, each year I hear in church how Jesus was scourged, tortured, and crucified. I never fully realized what an excruciating death it was. Many died from the scourging alone because of the blood loss. Jesus did all of this willingly, because He loves us. As He stretched out His arms on that cross, He was thinking of us. None of us is simply a number in the crowd to Him—He loves us with a deep love we can't begin to comprehend!

We are God's own dear children. We have His grace wrapped around us, covering us with His love. What Amazing Grace!

—Julie Schopp, St. Luke's, Lemmon, SD; Visit the Encouragements website at: [www.encouragementsbyjulie.com](http://www.encouragementsbyjulie.com). Or email Julie at: [encouragements@sdplainswb.com](mailto:encouragements@sdplainswb.com).

**"One hour of joy dispels the cares  
and sufferings of a thousand years."**

—Baptiste

## Book Review

### **When Bad Christians Happen to Good People, By Dave Burchett**

In a small tan box on the back of this book it says: "Help for those who have been harmed by Christians and those who have inflicted wounds." I immediately thought, "That book is for me. I have been hurt by Christians. I want to know that I am justified in my pain and suffering."

It didn't take but digging into the first few chapters of this book to realize "Hey, this book is talking exactly about how I have been that bad Christian." There were times I had to stop reading and put the book down because it really brought into focus how hypocritical I really am. It isn't until the last half of the book that Burchett talks about really forgiving and asking God to help us not hate and stew in our pain.

I found the book scripturally sound, even with the use of very modern translations of Bible passages. I found myself with my Bible open right next to me to compare texts. He had a good grasp on faith and grace, not works. Mr. Burchett uses what I feel is a great mix of practical life stories and a bit of sarcasm, much of which he uses to make fun of his own hypocritical behavior, making it very real for the Christian reader. He is very willing and able to see where he himself has failed, making it easier to relate to what he is saying. He has also experienced a very painful rejection of a disabled child by the church. He knows. He's been there.

I hope you will find this book enriching. I found it made me so much more conscious of how I am treating my fellow Christians. It is definitely an eye-opening book. The second book he wrote is called *Bring them Back Alive: A Healing plan for Those Wounded by the Church*. That also is an excellent book to read.

—The writer of this book review wishes to remain anonymous. For an article to be published without the author's name attached to it in The Branches, the editor must be provided the author's information and retains the right to refuse such a request.

# Where did you come from?

**W**hat were your grandparents like? When did your ancestors come across the ocean? Why did they come? Was it famine that drove them to emigrate? A thirst to own farmland of their own? Were they persecuted for their religion, or political views? Why did they leave loved ones behind in the old country, knowing that they would probably not meet again in this world? Whenever anyone dies in a family, it's like a library burns down. That knowledge is lost forever. It seems like the extended family becomes disconnected. Unless someone takes time to write down as much information as possible, much family history is lost.

What can you do to help? Start by asking questions of the older generation who are still around. Ask them what their parents were like, and what they did for a living. Ask them for names and addresses of extended family (second cousins, etc.) or even close members of the family. Sometimes different people have part of the story. Some may have objects that were passed down from one generation to another, that are interesting to other family members. Pull out the old pictures and photo albums. Ask them about the stories that go with the pictures. Identify the people in the pictures. Sometimes pictures jog the memories of older people.

Involve your children in the project. Have them interview their grandparents to find out what their childhood was like. Who were their best friends? What games did they play? What was school like? What motivated them to move from one location to another? Did they have pets, and what were the pets names? I heard of one 4-H club whose members went into the nursing home and interviewed the residents. Then they wrote up a history to pass down to the family. Have someone handy with a tape recorder or video camera to record the interview.

There is lots of information on the internet today. Many thousands of people have done family research and put their results on internet. I found the best way to obtain information was to go to *www.google.com* and type in first and last names of the people I wanted information on. You may be pleasantly surprised with what you find. There is good software available to organize your results and help you write reports. I use Family Tree Maker and am pleased with it. There are many others available.

You will probably become fascinated with how the family was created and flourished throughout the generations. Many family traits are passed down, some physical, some behavioral. Health problems which are inherited may be of interest also.

When you put the information together, write a family history book. It may cost a little to produce, but other family members may be interested in sharing the cost.

Lastly, plan a family reunion. It's a good place to keep in touch with extended family members, correct dates and places in your notes, and create new family memories. Enlist your cousins, as this will be a big job, and it is best shared. At our last family reunion, we posted on the wall a list of all the jobs that needed to be done. People were happy to do their share to make sure the reunion was successful.

Your family and descendants will appreciate that you took the time and effort to preserve the family history.

—Nancy Hansen, Prince of Peace, Hecla, SD



# *In Thankfulness for 40 Years of God's Grace in Our Marriage*

For 40 days and 40 nights  
The rain fell to the earth.  
And only 8 that God had saved  
Could watch the earth's rebirth.

And when He rose that Easter morn,  
For 40 days from thence,  
He showed Himself alive and well  
And spoke of what was hence.

And Moses went up on the mount  
For 40 awesome days,  
As God wrote on 2 slabs of stone  
Commands to guide our ways.

The number 40 oft is used  
In Bible history lore  
For reigns of kings and stripes of pain,  
An age to go to war.

God's children wandered 40 years  
The Promised Land to find,  
Which Moses was allowed to see  
Before being left behind.

And so our union God has blessed  
As husband and as wife,  
For 40 years within His grace  
Enriching us in life.

Jesus Himself spent 40 days  
Within the wilderness.  
Though Satan tried to tempt our Lord  
He didn't have success.

To Him alone all praise be giv'n!  
Our future life to be  
Till death us part; our life beyond  
We live eternally.

—*Jacquelyn Radichel, Grace, Fridley, MN; 8/15/2006;*

*Written on the occasion of our 40th Wedding Anniversary for The Branches*



## A Look Ahead

**Sharpen those pencils and get ready for school!**

**The theme for the October issue will be, "Learning Lessons in Life."**

I'd like all essays, poetry, and other creative projects handed in by **August 15th.**

Consider the lessons we must learn early on (i.e.: the Golden Rule, forgiveness), the ones we must learn repeatedly (i.e.: no gossiping, no complaining), the ones we must hang on to (i.e.: trust and faith in our Lord)... there are more than I can think up. Memories of school days, experiences in leaving home for school, and humor from the classroom would be great fun to hear about.

**Send all submissions to Abby Matzke (contact info on back page).**

# Peace and God's Creation

*"I am always aware of the Lord's presence; He is near, and nothing can shake me."*

—Psalm 16:8 (translation unknown)

For centuries, God, through nature, has provided for our needs. In the creation around us, we find our food, our clothing, and our pets. And often, when we are weary from daily tasks or tragic problems, we find rest and relaxation in nature's beauty.

Before I was born, my parents lived near the West Thumb Geysers in Yellowstone National Park, and I have visited many times since. Hundreds of years ago, Native Americans believed that Yellowstone was haunted. Wide circles were made into the surrounding area to avoid this "place of spirits." The first European men were inclined to believe the Native Americans' superstitions, for an aura of enchantment lingered everywhere. Even today, visitors notice a change in the air while walking on the boardwalks around the geysers. The walk starts at the parking lot, and proceeds slightly down toward Yellowstone Lake. The lake sparkles, brilliantly blue, and tiny waves barely ripple on the surface. Across the lake, the mountains rise with grandeur, tall and solemn. Trees line the lakeshore in every direction. The lake sweeps in gently near the boardwalk, and small geysers hiss steam from tiny islands near the shore. Trees near to the geysers are dead and gray in a chalky white crust. The smell of sulfur lingers in the air.

Peacefulness dominates the atmosphere. I love to feel the sweaty warmth of the steam as I walk through it, and the coolness of the air when I step away. I stop often along the boardwalk to gaze into the deep, boiling pools. Looking at the geysers, I notice the amazing beauty of the colors. As a child, I asked my dad about them, and he told me, "Look at the water. The white and blue algae grow in the hottest water. Feel the water, but don't touch the algae. If everyone touched it, it would die very quickly. Now look as the stream from the geyser runs on. The water cools, and the algae turns to green and yellow, then to orange and red. The brown algae grows in the coolest water before the stream runs into the lake." Looking across the landscape, the colors mix and blend, like a rainbow on the earth.

Amidst the colors and pools, and especially under the cover of the nearby trees, wildlife watch the tourists curiously. Buffalo are common. Sometimes their hooves break through the thin crust, and small holes can be seen releasing wispy feathers of steam.

As the walk nears its end, I stop to listen to the gentle hum of birds and insects as we approach the parking lot. I look up from the colorful algae to the lake and the mountains. I watch a small geyser spout water on the edge of the glittering lake, and can once again feel the strangeness of this captivating place. Of every place I have ever been, West Thumb remains my favorite.

Now living in St. Louis, I am rarely able to return to West Thumb and relax in its beauty. Fortunately, I have many memories and pictures in my head that I can call to mind at any time. When the world has become too much, I can close my eyes and smell the sulfur, picture the sparkling lake waters, and feel the steam on my face. The sense of relaxation reminds me that life is but a journey toward the Father's mansions, and the stresses of the day are transient distractions in the greater purpose of my life.

—Katie Sumey, Faith, St. Louis, MO



# The Healthy Side of Humor

Many years ago Voltaire penned, “The art of medicine consists of keeping the patient amused, while nature heals the disease.” Interest in humor’s healing powers was born in 1979 with the writing of Norman Cousins’ book, *Anatomy of an Illness*. Cousins, given a 1:500 chance of surviving, asked to be released from his hospital bed so that he could better implement a personal plan of care.

He invested in funny videos, the Charlie Chaplin/3 Stooges type, immersed himself in humor, and began to laugh. He experienced less pain—he survived! His belief was that positive emotions promote health and healing. More recently, scientists have studied this further and learned that humor most definitely works for our physical benefit.

Our response to stress is one of our greatest nemeses. We cannot escape stressors. We can only learn to better manage them. Our sense of humor becomes a strong ally in doing so. Laughter is one of the body’s designed, built-in mechanisms to help us physically relax. The effects of a good belly-laugh has been found to last up to 45 minutes after the laugh has ended.

Laughter reduces the amount of stress hormones within the body. Our bodies were respond to a threat by either fighting or fleeing. After choosing either course, the stress hormones dissipate and the body returns to its normal state. The problem is that most of our stresses are emotional in nature; there is no physical fight or flight to provide release. Worry, sorrow, pain, anger, and fear make stress hormones flow. The body has no “down time.” The elevated heart rate and blood pressure, the constant state of being “on alert” becomes the norm. The constantly elevated stress hormones damage the coronary vessel wall. The body repairs it with a “touch” of cholesterol plaque, the plaque increases in size, the plaque ruptures, a clot is born, the vessel occludes, and the person suffers heart muscle damage—a “heart attack.” If humor reduces the production of stress hormones, it can actually decrease the incidence of cardiovascular disease.

Relationships between humor and the immune system have been discovered. Levels of immunoglobulin A, a part of our immune system associated with protection against upper respiratory infections, increase after watching one hour of comedy. All cells in our body react to the body’s chemical messengers. These messengers are the means whereby cells communicate with each other, commanding physical and emotional response. Emotions change the messengers available to cell receptors and influence our staying well or becoming ill. The body reacts negatively to hate, hopelessness, pessimism, indifference, anxiety, depression, loneliness. In contrast, love, hope, optimism, caring, intimacy, joy, humor support well-being.

Tired of the treadmill? Try laughter! It has been described as “internal jogging” because of its effect on heart rate and blood pressure. Heart rates remain increased up to five minutes after a good belly laugh. Thereafter, the resting heart rate lessens. Likewise, blood pressure increases with laughter, only to drop to lower levels at rest. You can give your heart a good workout several times a day simply by laughing!

A sense of humor can be groomed. We can learn to appreciate humor and we can become funnier people. Paul McGhee, a psychologist who has done extensive research in the field of humor as well as in improving personal humor skills, offers his eight step humor development training program for our consideration.

## **Step 1: Determine the Nature of Your Sense of Humor. Surround Yourself With Humor You Enjoy.**

Your sense of humor reflects your particular values, knowledge, sensitivities, and experience. You may want to map out your own humor profile. Ask yourself things like: what sitcoms, comedy films, and comedians, and newspaper cartoons do I find amusing? Incorporate outside sources of humor into your life. Spend time with friends and family who laugh, collect funny films and comedy videos, watch TV favorites, try comedy tapes when you exercise or drive, read cartoons or humorous books. Remember, it’s never too late to lighten up!

## **Step 2: Learn to Adopt a Playful Attitude. Overcome Terminal Seriousness.**

Key ingredients for a healthy life include love, humor, and fun (humor in action). Who knows how to have fun better than our kids? Spend time with kids and rediscover the playful outlook you had when you were a child.

*Continue on next page*

## **The Healthy Side of Humor—Continued**

A great bonus of playing with kids is that the behavior involved, by reason of one's company, is acceptable in public. Play is enjoyable because it's not associated with a goal. Have fun and realize that in doing so you have not diminished your commitment to handling life's real problems. It is possible to be competent, responsible, and professional in your work and still let a little kid live in your big body.

### **Step 3: Laugh More Often and More Heartily.**

The first hour of the day strongly influences your mood and general effectiveness throughout the morning. Start off with a laugh. It jump-starts your positive mental attitude. Laughter becomes a stress deodorant. If you're lucky, one application in the morning may get you through the entire day. Chances are, however, you'll need to repeat applications all day long. If for no other reason, recognize that "A big smile increases your face value." (If interested in procuring an audio-tape of infectious laughter, contact Ruth.)

### **Step 4: Play With Language, Puns, and Other Verbal Humor.**

Look for multiple meanings in written words; listen with an acute ear. Take note of ambiguity in everyday conversations. Look for humor in newspaper headlines. Exaggerations can be humorous—come up with some on your own. Allow yourself to enjoy nonsense. Two examples: in which business were these signs found?

1. "The best way to get back on your feet—miss a car payment"
2. "We would be delighted if you send in your payment. However, if you don't, you will be!"  
(1. Car dealership 2. Electric Company)

### **Step 5: Find Humor in Everyday Life**

The famous Dr. Suess once said, "From there to here and here to there, funny things are everywhere." Steve Allen had this to say: "Nothing is funnier than the unintended humor of reality." Phyllis Diller's take on the subject: "You've got to realize when all goes well, and everything is beautiful, you have no comedy. It's when somebody steps on the bride's train or belches during the ceremony, then you've got comedy." So be on the lookout. Be watchful. If you have a mind-set to look for humor, you'll see situations all daylong that are funny. So, get started—

1. Write it down. Make notes of anything that strikes you as funny to reinforce the humor.
2. Ask friends and colleagues about the humor they see. Remember that your view of what's funny is just as valid as the next person's and vice versa.
3. Share the humor you observe. (Be a bit careful here!)
4. Watch for funny signs, ads, and newspaper headlines. I was raised in Sleepy Eye, MN. Even as a kid two signs just outside of town really tickled me. The first asked, "Where will you spend eternity?" The next sign down the road read, "Sleepy Eye welcomes you!"
5. Pretend you're Allan Funt of the renowned Candid Camera TV show. Develop your own candid camera.
6. Look for coincidences. Remember Murphy's Law—"The improbable always happens." When you're the "victim," don't be annoyed. Try making a game out of it; find the humor therein.
7. Look for irony—some aspect may be just the opposite of what was expected.
8. Look for rigidity of behavior. My church friends have cashed in over the years with my obsession about having the chairs set straight in front of the tables. They should be around when I position stamps on envelopes!
9. Find humor in people's misuse of the language and/or facts and information (e.g. A baseball manager was quoted as saying, "Half this game is ninety percent mental.")

*Continue on next page*

10. Young children's everyday conversations provide one of the best sources of unintentional humor. I think I spent entirely too much time when I was raising my kids suggesting that they be quiet! Write down the cute things your kids say. They may put a smile on your face on days when their behavior is less than cute!

**Step 6: Take Yourself Lightly. Laugh at Yourself.**

Paul McGhee suggests that Terminal Seriousness is the #1 symptom of Acquired Amusement Deficiency Syndrome. Blunders can leave us feeling embarrassed, angry, anxious, and depressed. Why not laugh and leave the emotional baggage behind? You can take yourself lightly but still hold yourself in high esteem, command respect, and be competent. Remember: You are not the center of the universe. Your attitude or perspective is just one among many that are possible. Refuse to carry around a sense of heaviness when you made a mistake. See the funny side of your own circumstances, your own points of view or pet peeves. I look at this in another way. When it comes to laughing at yourself, get ahead of the crowd. If you don't laugh at yourself, your children, if not others, will!

But how does one start laughing at one's self? Hang around people who are good at laughing at themselves. Collect jokes or funny stories about your own political party, church, ethnic identity, etc. This will help you ease into taking yourself less seriously. Now, I do take my faith life seriously, but I still laughed heartily as I read *Growing Up Lutheran* by Janet Martin and Suzann Nelson. I recommend the reading.

**Step 7: Find Humor in the Midst of Stress**

"When life deals you lemons, make lemonade." The secret ingredient to making good lemonade is a sense of humor. "You cannot prevent the birds of sorrow from flying over your head, but you can prevent them from building nests in your hair" (Chinese proverb).

Humor distracts. "A smile confuses an approaching frown." And the quote I love the most, "When you're down in the mouth, remember Jonah. He came out ok." (Thomas Edison). Here are some suggestions on how to practice finding humor in the midst of stress:

1. Observe how other people use humor to cope with stress. Seek out friends who are good at finding humor under stress.
2. Look for humor in stressful situations in your own past. Make a list of minor hassles that you encounter on a typical day and start looking for the humor in these situations. Then graduate by looking for tomorrow's humor in today's crises.
3. Remind yourself that something good often comes out of a bad situation. Adopt a wait and see attitude. Practice seeing the glass half-full instead of half-empty.

**Step 8: Integration of Steps 1-7**

Practice everything listed and you will discover that you are the proud owner of an improved sense of humor. Paul McGhee encourages us with these words: "You cleanse your body every day by washing it, and you nourish it by eating. You keep it in good condition to perform physical tasks by exercising it. You nourish your mind by reading, listening to the news, and talking to people. What daily activities do you engage in to cleanse and nourish your emotions? Establishing loving relationships with others helps, but you also need a regular means of letting go of the negative emotions that accumulate on high stress days. Laughter provides an emotional release that is just as cleansing as the soap on your body. It is nourishment for your soul. And when you experience this cleansing yourself, you'll inevitably pass it on to others. So do what you can to put more 'Mirth on Earth.'"

We all know that no article prepared by a Lutheran can end without a Bible passage. Our most beloved authority, our God, also has a word to say about humor. In Proverbs 15:15, He speaks: "All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast." I say, "Enjoy your meal!"

—Ruth Ahrens, *Grace, Valentine, NE*

\*McGhee, Paul E., *Health, Healing and the Amuse System*,  
Second Edition, Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1996

# Gone is the Child

Gone is the child who willed her rope swing to and fro  
Hair flowing free in rhythm with the breeze  
Studying clouds above and violets beneath  
And dreaming of a future yet unknown  
Gone is the swing once so inviting to her senses  
Left behind with hairless dolls and dented bikes  
Gone the tree, which crumbled when the child left  
Leaving empty spot in yard and heart.

But vision moves beyond that empty spot  
To nearby yard and sees the present scene  
Another tree, another swing, another child  
Hair flowing free in rhythm with the breeze  
Studying clouds above and violets beneath  
Dreaming of a future yet unknown  
And life continues as before  
In different spot and different dreams

Then vision moves beyond, into the future  
Where in this spot once graced by child of mine  
Another tree, another swing, another child  
Hair flowing free in rhythm with the breeze  
Studying clouds above and violets beneath  
Dreaming of a future yet unknown  
Waits for life to open to her dreams  
And each is in the loving Father's hands

—Eunice Roehl, *Messiah, Eau Claire, WI*

## From the Editor

An article in April's issue has raised some concern from readers. I apologize to both the author and the readers for allowing any misrepresentation of the true teachings of Scripture. Though this women's publication is not an official CLC project, we aim to provide trustworthy reading material, something you should be able to read with more trust than most publications. We are instructed by Scripture to test everything for soundness, to make sure it is in accordance with God's Word. I am glad to see that you are doing so.

We do have readers who are not of the same confession of faith as ourselves, and we do not want to lead any of them (or ourselves) astray or encourage weaknesses in faith. We do realize that there are Christians in all sorts of walks, and sadly, they even exist under banners that are false-teaching. We are to combat false-teaching religion. In the future I will be more careful when screening material against possible misinterpretations of the author's intent.

—Abby Matzke, Editor



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***I am the Vine,  
you are the branches.  
He who abides in Me,  
and I in him,  
bears much fruit;  
for without Me  
you can do nothing.***

—John 15:5

***“There are joys  
which long to be ours.  
God sends ten thousand  
truths, which come about  
us like birds seeking inlet;  
but we are shut up to them,  
and so they bring us nothing,  
but sit and sing awhile  
upon the roof,  
and then fly away.”***

—Beecher



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