

Laughing All The Way

Stories of humor, joy and laughter

By Steve Goodier

Readings taken from favorite Life Support System books.

<http://LifeSupportSystem.com/books.html>

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Introduction

Studies have repeatedly shown that humor is an important part of good physical and emotional health. We can literally laugh our way into happier and healthier lives – and have fun doing it! Here are some stories from Steve Goodier, gleaned from several of his books, that will help you find more joy in living.

Read this book. Print it out. Share it with friends. Life is too short not to enjoy.

Sign up for Steve Goodier's FREE e-mail of Life, Love and Laughter:
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The Power Of Laughter

Did you follow the 1987 football season when the Denver Broncos played the Cleveland Browns for the AFC title?

Less than two minutes remained in the game and Cleveland was ahead by a touchdown. The Broncos had just fumbled the ball out of bounds on their own 1/2-yard line. Hostile Cleveland fans were already throwing dog biscuits onto the field and celebrating a sure Cleveland win.

While the announcer was discussing who Cleveland would play in the Super Bowl and Denver fans were nursing bruised egos, the Broncos huddled in their own end zone. Quarterback, John Elway, was known for miraculous wins, but this situation was almost impossible.

All-pro left tackle, Keith Bishop, looked around the huddle at his teammates, took a deep breath and said, "Hey, now we got them right where we want them!" Tense silence was broken by laughter. One player laughed so hard he fell down! Somehow the joke lent perspective to an absurd situation and a sense of calm confidence replaced anxiety.

What followed has been dubbed in the annals of football lore as *The Drive*. In less than two minutes, John Elway and the Broncos drove the length of the field and tied the game with just seconds left. They won in overtime and went on to the 1988 Super Bowl (which, judged by the Broncos' poor showing, was itself a kind of joke...).

An amazing shift occurred in the huddle that day. Laughter prepared them to bring their best to a demanding situation as nervous, negative energy was swept away in the absurdity of the moment.

Laughter has a way of creating positive change in any tense and stressful circumstance. But, as Mark Twain said, laughter is the greatest weapon that we humans possess and it's the one we use the least. Daily, we have countless opportunities to use the power of laughter to make a positive difference.

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Serious Humor

I heard of a mortuary director with a sense of humor. He signs all his correspondence: “Eventually Yours.”

Laughter is a wonderful coping device. It helps us to successfully traverse dangerous currents along life’s journey, as well as assisting us to fully enjoy the placid times of still waters. Humor is something I can get serious about. It is nothing less than an extravagant gift – to be frequently used and shared! I believe it was Billy Graham who said that “a keen sense of humor helps us to overlook the unbecoming, understand the unconventional, tolerate the unpleasant, overcome the unexpected, and out-last the unbearable.”

The best part of all is that you have already received the gift of laughter! Will you use it and share it often today?

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Bluebird of Happiness

A sign in a pet store read, "If anybody has seen the Bluebird of Happiness, would you please notify this pet store?"

Happiness seems to be in short supply for many people. If the results of recent surveys can be trusted, there is a general decline of happiness in today's world. And people were not all that cheerful a few years back! It was Oliver Wendell Holmes who stated, "I might have been a minister for aught I know, if a certain clergyman had not looked and talked like an undertaker." (I have to say, though, that some clergy and undertakers I've known could teach the rest of us something about joy!)

Joy and happiness are not always the same things. Happiness can be thought of as more of a temporary, emotional condition, often based on outside circumstances. Joy, on the other hand, is deeper. We can be basically joyful, regardless of a particular unhappy situation that we may be enduring. It is often just a matter of keeping perspective on our troubles, and especially when those troubles seem to be in long supply.

You may know the story of the man who had a marvelous way of keeping joy in his life. He was a carpenter. He followed the same ritual every day when he came home from the job. He stopped by a small tree in his front yard and placed his hand on a couple of branches. Then, when he walked into his home, it was as if a magical transformation had occurred. All of a sudden, the stress was lifted from him. He became energetic and joyful, able to fully interact with his children and his wife.

He explained it this way: "That tree is my trouble tree. When I come home I stop by the tree and, just like I leave my tools in the truck, I leave my troubles outside of my home. I hang them on that tree before greeting my family. Anything that does not have to come in my house stays outside. Anything which I do not have to deal with at home, I leave on that tree. And in the morning, I stop by the tree and pick up the troubles I left there in the evening."

Then he adds, "It's a funny thing, though. Every morning I always find fewer troubles hanging there than I remembered the night before."

Here is a man who has no doubt seen the Bluebird of Happiness. Chances are, it is nesting in a tree just outside his home!

There is wisdom in knowing that some problems can wait until tomorrow. And more wisdom in knowing what to hang on the tree and what to bring in. Managing daily problems well is vital to maintaining joy.

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Admitting Our Schnozzles

A humorous story has it that many generations ago, a soldier was sentenced to be flogged. As if something hilarious were about to happen, he chuckled as they led him away and laughed uproariously throughout the whipping.

When the painful punishment finally ended, the officer in charge demanded, “What’s so funny about a flogging? I don’t think it’s a joke.”

“Why, the joke’s on you,” smiled the soldier. “I’m the wrong man!”

Of course, no one would really laugh through a flogging, even if one were to see a humorous side to the situation. But isn’t it true that there just might be a funny side to almost anything you and I are experiencing? Do you look for that funny side?

Comedian Jimmy Durante was known for his prominent nose. He once said, “It dawned on me that as long as I could laugh, I was safe from the world; and I have learned since that laughter keeps me safe from myself, too. All of us have schnozzles that are ridiculous in one way or another; if not in our faces, then in our characters, minds or habits. When we admit our schnozzles, instead of defending them, we begin to laugh and the world laughs with us.”

Sounds like a secret to happiness!

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Call Me Crazy

Bangkok television used to air the American situation comedy *LaVerne and Shirley*. For whatever reason, officials there believed that a disclaimer was necessary for the Thailand audience, so this subtitle was added to each episode: “The two women depicted in the following episode are from an insane asylum.”

Personally, I’m thankful there is a little craziness in the world! And I don’t mind not acting like everybody else. Like the “irrepressible” Leo Buscaglia once said: “I don’t mind if people think I’m crazy. In fact, I think it’s great! It gives me tremendous latitude for behavior.”

It may seem like craziness to most people, but I try to be *joyful* whenever possible. I believe that a joyful response is, more than anything, a habit, just as fear and worry are life-long habits. And maybe I can’t be happy or rejoice *for* all things, but more and more, I’d like to learn to rejoice *in* all things.

Like pleasure. There are too few opportunities for hearty laughter, so none should be passed up! I don’t want to take the good that happens for granted.

And, if possible, I want to feel genuine happiness about those ordinary things and events that make up most of our days. The happier I am with everyday duties and responsibilities, the more grateful I am just to be alive.

But finally, I want to learn to be happy even in those difficult and trying times. I won’t be happy *for* them (who likes problems?), just *in* them. I need the soothing medicine of laughter when it hurts. I also know that at the other end of my problem is a lesson – I’ll emerge wiser, or maybe stronger, or perhaps a better person in any number of ways for having faced it successfully.

So call me crazy, but I want to learn to rejoice in all things. And I am just crazy enough to think it’s possible!

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Laugh About It!

I recently read of a motorist who was caught in an automated speed trap. His speed was measured by a radar machine and his car was automatically photographed. In a few days he received a ticket for \$40 in the mail along with a picture of his automobile. As payment, he sent the police department a snapshot of \$40. Several days later, he received a letter from the police. It contained another picture – of handcuffs!

Humor is an important part of a healthy life. Though often under-used, humor is also an essential problem-solving tool, particularly in conflict. It goes a long way toward building bridges over divisive waters. What might happen if you use humor to get at that aggravating problem you are facing today?

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Joy In The Journey

If you have ever been discouraged because of failure, please read on. For often, achieving what you set out to do is *not* the important thing. Let me explain.

Two brothers decided to dig a deep hole behind their house. As they were working, a couple of older boys stopped by to watch.

“What are you doing?” asked one of the visitors.

“We plan to dig a hole all the way through the earth!” one of the brothers volunteered excitedly.

The older boys began to laugh, telling the younger ones that digging a hole all the way through the earth was impossible. After a long silence, one of the diggers picked up a jar full of spiders, worms and a wide assortment of insects. He removed the lid and showed the wonderful contents to the scoffing visitors. Then he said quietly and confidently, “Even if we don’t dig all the way through the earth, look what we found along the way!”

Their goal was far too ambitious, but it did cause them to dig. And that is what a goal is for – to cause us to move in the direction we have chosen. In other words, to set us to digging!

But not every goal will be fully achieved. Not every job will end successfully. Not every relationship will endure. Not every hope will come to pass. Not every love will last. Not every endeavor will be completed. Not every dream will be realized. But when you fall short of your aim, perhaps you can say, “Yes, but look at what I found along the way! Look at the wonderful things which have come into my life because I tried to do something!”

It is in the digging that life is lived. And I believe it is joy in the journey, in the end, that truly matters.

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Reason to Smile

Comedian George Burns said that he was advised: “Let a smile be your umbrella.” He said, “I tried that once. I had pneumonia for six weeks and shrunk a \$450 suit.”

All right. Maybe it won't keep you dry in the rain, but there are other good reasons to smile. Author Brian Tracy tells us that the face requires 12 muscles to smile and 103 to frown. (Who counts these things?) He also says that whenever you smile at another person, it puts them at ease and raises their self-esteem. And if that isn't enough, when you smile it releases endorphins in your brain and gives you a feeling of well-being and contentment.

So a smile benefits the giver as well as the receiver. It's like receiving a gift in return every time we give one away!

Rabbi Hirsch gives more reasons to smile:

- ★ Smiling is a universal language.
- ★ People will enjoy being around you when you smile.
- ★ Smiling reduces stress, which may improve your overall health.
- ★ Smiling will change the sound qualities of your voice when you speak or sing.
- ★ A smile costs nothing but gives much. It enriches those who receive it, without making poorer those who give.
- ★ It takes but a moment, but the memory of it lasts forever.
- ★ It cannot be bought, begged, borrowed, or stolen, for it is something that is of no value to anyone until it is given away.
- ★ And finally, some people are too tired to give you a smile. Give them one of yours, as no one needs a smile so much as one who has no more to give.

Why not give out a few extra smiles today -- just for the fun of it!

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Be Glad Today

Yesterday I brought home an Easter lily I found while shopping. I once read that those beautiful and fragrant flowers were named because of their shape! The blossom looks like a trumpet, and trumpets have long been used to announce good news.

There is plenty of *bad* news all around. I came across an article that reported a study of a large group of people who were instructed to evaluate all the information they received for a year and a half. They were asked to record whether what they were seeing and hearing all day long was positive or negative. These researchers determined that ninety percent of the input the group received was negative!

That may not come as a surprise to everyone. Over a half-century ago, Franklin Roosevelt told about an old man who was losing his hearing and went to the doctor for help. He was advised to quit drinking alcohol. When his family asked him what he was going to do, he replied, “Well, I’ve given it a lot of thought and I’ve decided I like what I’ve been drinkin’ so much better than what I’ve been hearin’, I’m just gonna keep on gettin’ deaf.”

There is plenty of bad news. But there is also *good* news. Lots of it. And the closer we look around, the more good news we find. In fact, every day should be a day to share life, love and laughter.

So let the trumpets sound and the bells ring. Celebrate and be glad! And...share some good news.

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Smile!

I am told that the muscles of the face are capable of over 250,000 different combinations of expressions. And one of the most useful is a smile.

Fulton J. Sheen used to say, “A smile across the aisle of a bus in the morning could save a suicide later in the day.” That statement is true. We all need the healing medicine “of the heart” that a smile, even from strangers, provides. And for some, that medicine can save lives.

English essayist Joseph Addison put it this way: “What sunshine is to flowers, smiles are to humanity.” Don’t say you can’t make a difference! Don’t ever say you have nothing to give! Each of us can give a smile, spontaneously and sincerely. Its value may not be at once recognized, but be assured that it will be felt.

*Smiling is infectious, you catch it like the flu,
When someone smiled at me today, I
started smiling too.
I passed around the corner and
someone saw my grin,
When he smiled I realized I’d passed it on to him.
I thought about that smile, then I knew its worth,
A single smile, just like mine, could
travel ‘round the earth.
So, if you feel a smile begin, don’t
leave it undetected;
Let’s start an epidemic quick, and get
the world infected!*

Today you will find plenty of occasions to pass along a heartfelt smile. Remember...it’s the second best thing you can do with your lips!

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Joy Along the Way

A senator once took Will Rogers to the White House to meet President Coolidge. He warned the humorist that Coolidge never smiled. Rogers replied, "I'll make him smile." Inside the Oval Office, the senator introduced the two men. "Will Rogers," he said, "I'd like you to meet President Coolidge."

Deadpan, Rogers quipped, "I'm sorry, but I didn't catch the name." Coolidge smiled.

A sense of humor is a marvelous gift to have. It is one of the most important means we possess to face the difficulties of life. And sometimes life can be difficult.

I deal professionally with issues which are critical: relationships breaking apart, people losing jobs, people facing serious illness or agonizing with someone close who is suffering, addictions, grief and heartache. Without a sense of humor about my own life, I don't know if I could survive! I take what I do seriously, but I try not to take myself too seriously. Like the New York City cab driver who said, "It's not the work that I enjoy so much, but the people I run into!"

Here is an experiment: look for and find as much joy as possible for one full day. Try to enjoy the people you run into, the work you do, your leisure time and your relationships. Don't forget to enjoy yourself -- and take enough time to enjoy God. Try this experiment for one full day, and by evening you will bask in the glow of a rekindled spirit.

It just takes a day to find joy along the way.

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A Laugh A Day

“She who laughs, lasts.” At least that was Theresa of Avila’s philosophy. Theresa, a Spanish nun who founded the reformed order of the Carmelites in 1562, used to look for novices who knew how to laugh, eat and sleep. She believed that if they ate heartily, they were healthy; if they slept well, they were more than likely free of serious sin; and if they laughed, they had the necessary disposition to survive a difficult life.

Abraham Lincoln must have also known that laughter is good medicine. In writing about Lincoln’s Civil War years, author Richard Hanser says that on September 22, 1862, the War Cabinet was summoned to the White House for a special session. Lincoln was reading a book as everyone came in. Secretary of War Stanton later said this of the meeting: “Finally the president turned to us and said, ‘Gentlemen, did you ever read anything of Artimus Ward? Let me read a chapter that is very funny.’”

The president then read aloud a skit called “Highhanded Outrage at Utica.” Stanton was furious, but Lincoln read on and, at the end, he laughed heartily. “Gentlemen,” he asked, “why do you not laugh? With the fearful strain that is upon me day and night, if I did not laugh, I should die. And you need this medicine as much as I do.” It was at this same session that the president pulled a paper from his tall hat and read aloud the now immortalized Emancipation Proclamation.

He’s right – we may likely die without frequent and sustained doses of laughter. After all, they who laugh, last.

Have you had your belly laugh today?

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A Healthy Dose Of Laughter

I read that a child laughs 400 times a day on the average, while an adult laughs only 15 times each day. Which is puzzling since laughter feels so good and is so good for us!

You may know the benefits of laughter on the mind and spirit, but are you aware of how much a good laugh can help you physically? Norman Cousins used to say that laughter is so beneficial for your body that it is like “inner jogging.”

Mayo Clinic (*Mayo Clinic Health Letter*, March 1993) reports that laughter aids breathing by disrupting your normal respiration pattern and increasing your breathing rate. It can even help clear mucus from your lungs.

Laughter is also good for your heart. It increases circulation and improves the delivery of oxygen and nutrients to tissues throughout your body.

A good laugh helps your immune system fight off colds, flu and sinus problems by increasing the concentration of immunoglobulin A in your saliva. And it may help control pain by raising the levels of certain brain chemicals (endorphins).

Furthermore, it is a natural stress reliever. Have you ever laughed so hard that you doubled over, fell off your chair, spit out your food or wet your pants? You cannot maintain muscle tension when you are laughing!

The good news is that you are allowed more than 15 laughs a day! Go ahead and double the dose and make it 30 times today. (You may begin to notice immediate improvement in your relationships!) Then double it again! You are bound to feel better, you will cope with problems more effectively and people will enjoy being around you.

Laughter: it's just good medicine!

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No More Problem!

One man exclaimed to his friend, “I just had another fight with my wife!”

“Oh, yeah?” the friend said. “And how did this one end?”

“When it was over,” he replied, “she came to me on her hands and knees.”

His friend looked puzzled. “Really? Now that’s a switch! What did she say?”

“I think she said something like, ‘Come out from under that bed, you gutless weasel.’”

Before your conflict escalates to that point, consider trying to solve your problem creatively. The novel, and sometimes humorous, approach is often the most effective!

A few years ago, I caught a story on the radio about a Baptist church that had a problem. It was with the Methodists down the street. Some Baptists were unable to find a space in their own parking lot because members of the nearby Methodist church, which met earlier than the Baptists, got there first. So the Baptist church had a problem.

Now, they *could* have towed the Methodists’ cars away. Or they *could* have patrolled their lot Sunday mornings. Or they *could* have written a letter to the offending church members imploring them to park elsewhere. But they didn’t.

Instead, they did something else. One Sunday morning they stuck a bumper sticker to every car in the lot – Baptist and Methodist alike. They all got one. The sticker read: “*I’m Proud To Be A Baptist!*”

No more problem.

Maybe that problem you are confronting will be solved more quickly and more effectively if you consider a more creative and humorous approach. What have you got to lose...except your ulcer?

From *A Life That Makes A Difference* (available soon!)

A Child Within

It was an annual winter tradition. Every year we packed the children into our family car and spent the day at “The North Pole at Pike’s Peak,” a year-round Christmas resort not far away. And each year they took turns on Santa’s lap while we snapped pictures.

This wasn’t any ordinary Santa, either. Maybe it was the *real* beard. Or maybe it was the twinkle in his eyes when he talked to our kids. Or maybe it was the warmth that could only radiate from the genuine Santa. But this kindly old man was Santa Claus at the resort all year round and, for our family at least, he was the real thing.

One year, after we finished with pictures, I said to him, “You must really love children.”

“Yes, I do,” he said. “And adults, too. Many adults want to sit on Santa’s lap for a picture!”

“Do you really have adults come to visit Santa?” I asked in amazement.

“Oh, yes,” he replied. “As a matter of fact, one day 14 of the first 20 people who came to visit Santa were adults. All of us have a child inside of us. It’s a terrible thing when you lose that.”

I think I know what he meant. Children are enthusiastic. They’ve not forgotten how to have fun. And they still feel awe and wonder and...mystery.

“It’s a terrible thing when you lose that,” he said. I don’t think he meant that we are to be childish and immature. Rather, childlike. Fun loving and ready to embrace life and love. Children are not yet jaded by exhausting problems or cynical about people. They know there is plenty about this universe they do not completely understand, and the mystery is likely to fill them with more awe than doubt.

Several years later, I had the honor of speaking at this Santa’s funeral

service. We remembered him as a man who always kept his childlike sense of enthusiasm about life. I'm sure he was one of the youngest old men to ever die.

Writer Randall Jarrell said, "One of the most obvious facts about grown-ups to a child is that they have forgotten what it is like to be a child." Santa never forgot. I hope I don't, either.

From *A Life That Makes A Difference* (available soon!)

Your Face Value

Ted Engstrom in *High Performance* (Here's Life Publishers, 1988) tells the story of a trusted advisor of President Abraham Lincoln who recommended a candidate for Lincoln's cabinet. Lincoln declined and when asked why, he said, "I don't like the man's face."

"But the poor man is not responsible for his face," his advisor insisted.

"Every man over forty is responsible for his face," Lincoln replied, and the prospect was considered no more.

Lincoln, of course, was referring to the man's expression and disposition rather than his features. A face conveys the thoughts and attitudes nurtured in a mind. We are responsible for how we will "face" each day.

One woman reported that she had just paid for some purchases when she heard the cashier say something. Not understanding, she asked her to repeat it. "I said have a happy day," the cashier snapped. "Are you deaf?" Here is a person who seems to be unaware of how she is facing others.

Earl Nightingale put it like this: "Our attitude is something we can control. We can establish our attitude each morning when we start our day. In fact, we do just that whether we realize it or not."

You are already choosing your attitudes every day. Your ultimate happiness or misery depends as much on your disposition as on your circumstances.

Face the day with hope and confidence, generosity and love, and you'll find yourself choosing to be happy. And you may be surprised at how much others like your face!

From *A Life That Makes A Difference* (available soon!)

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