



THE GIFT OF  
**LAUGHTER**

**AS I RECENTLY STOOD** in front of the masked and socially distanced congregation I had been invited to address, my very first words were: “Knock, knock.” When I extended the microphone toward the audience, they obediently and in unison responded: “Who’s there?” “No one,” I replied. “We are all quarantining.” My attempt at humor was met with groans and a few giggles, but as I persisted with a couple more and admittedly funnier jokes, laughter finally broke out and we began our time laughing together.

Every public speaker, teacher and preacher knows the benefit of beginning presentations with a bit of humor, recognizing that a moment of laughter will “break the ice” and encourage listeners to be more open to their message. This, however, was not my motivation. Laughter was my message, a critical word for our times and a subject I would like to explore more deeply in this teaching letter.

## Laughter, the Best Medicine


The word laughter appears 42 times in most of our Bible translations. However, there are countless secondary meanings having to do with how or why we laugh. They include being entertained or amused, joking, playing, smiling, making merry or being scornful, to name a few. There are even more simple allusions to laughter, such as joy and merriment. Clearly, the Bible is rife with references to this somewhat mysterious activity. We know from many of those verses that God Himself laughs, sometimes in derision but often with heartfelt joy. And we laugh because we are made in His image.

For decades, however, experts in human behavior have studied laughter trying to determine the scientific and sociological reasons that people laugh, why laughter is “contagious” and what effect it actually has on those who are gleefully engaged in it. Well, the verdict is in and all those experts agree: laughter is just plain good for us. The old saying that laughter is the best medicine has been proven true. As a matter of fact, today laughter is recognized by physicians and mental health practitioners as very real and very strong medicine.

Physically, the effects are profound. The act of laughing relaxes the whole body and relieves physical tension, with effects that last up to 45 minutes. Laughing boosts your immune system,

increases infection-fighting antibodies, improves overall resistance to disease, improves the function of blood vessels and increases blood flow, decreases pain and even burns calories! The mental health benefits are equally as impressive. Laughter diffuses anger and puts problems into perspective, decreases stress hormones, eases anxiety and tension, improves mood, increases energy and focus, adds joy and zest to life and strengthens resilience. And a study in Norway found that people with a strong sense of humor

outlive those who don't laugh much. It's no wonder that doctors, psychologists and countless websites are encouraging us to let go of defensiveness, release our inhibitions and bring some good old humor into our lives. Perhaps it explains why comedy has been by far the most popular viewing or streaming genre throughout the COVID-19 lockdowns during which people looked frantically for ways to keep themselves and their families occupied.



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## The Connector

I'd like to suggest that the most important effects that laughter provides are perhaps the most ignored. I am referring to the social benefits of laughing, which are very well

documented and extremely important, especially in the post-2020 environment we are living in. Laughter promotes the body's production of endorphins, those naturally occurring feel-good hormones that cause you to relax and make you happy. However, endorphins also promote social bonding, making you feel comfortable with and drawn to those around you, as well as causing others to be drawn to you. They are why we often feel so good after having been with friends or family. Endorphins actually strengthen relationships, which is perhaps why the world-famous Mayo Clinic

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states that couples who laugh together often have stronger and more long-lasting relationships.

Laughter is indeed strong medicine. It draws people together in ways that trigger healthy physical and emotional changes in the body. And that, I believe, is a gift from God. His Word encourages us that a joyful heart is good medicine (Prov. 17:22). Ecclesiastes 3:4 tells us that there is a time to weep and a time to laugh, while Job 8:21 makes it clear that God Himself is the one who will *“fill your mouth with laughing, and your lips with rejoicing.”* Psalm 126 uses the same terminology as the expression of the joy of God’s people as He blessed them with their return from exile. Job and the Proverbs 31 wife were able to look with courage at the future and laugh at fear. Luke 6:21 promises that those who weep will someday be rewarded with laughter. Dozens of other verses express the same unbridled joy, confidence, courage and faith that filled the hearts of God’s people as He blessed them with laughter and drew them together as a community of faith.



## A Heart Connection



Perhaps the most compelling example of God's gift of laughter as not just a social but a spiritual connector as well is found in Genesis where Sarah learns of God's plan to bless her with a son: *"Then the LORD appeared to him [Abraham] by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground"* (Gen. 18:1–2).

Judaism teaches that Abraham was widely known for his gift of hospitality, and here we see it in action. He is quick to welcome these strangers, prepare food for them and provide a safe and comfortable place for them to rest. However, it is clear that these were no ordinary visitors, and Sarah is shocked by the message they bring. *"And He said, 'I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.' (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.) Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?'"* (Gen. 18:10–12).

This isn't the first place, however, that God revealed this plan. He had already informed Abraham of this amazing development, and Abraham had the very same reaction as Sarah: *"Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, 'Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?'"* (Gen. 17:17).

However, the Lord's response to Sarah's laughter is different. "And the LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, saying, "Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?" Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.' But Sarah denied it, saying, 'I did not laugh,' for she was afraid. And He said, 'No, but you did laugh!'" (Gen. 18:13–15).

The traditional interpretation of these verses suggests that Abraham fell on his face and laughed with joy and faith that the impossible could happen, while Sarah laughed with derision, unable to believe that even God could cause such a thing to happen. God is not pleased with Sarah's reaction and rebukes her. However, the same word for laughter is used in both occurrences, and the same incredulity is apparent in both responses: a man who is 100 and a woman who has grown old? There is no substantive reason to believe that Abraham's reaction was somehow righteous while Sarah's wasn't.

The Lord's reaction might be better understood by a closer look at the Hebrew words used in His response. The word translated "hard" is *pala*. Both *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* and *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* define *pala* as meaning to be marvelous, extraordinary and wonderful. It expresses the idea of doing or making a wondrous thing. The word for



Sarah knew that the gift  
of a son would bring joy  
and laughter.

anything is *devar*, meaning a word or utterance. Finally, the Lord's response to Sarah's denial can be translated, "Keep laughing."

Perhaps the Lord was reassuring Sarah, not chastising her. Is this not a marvelous and extraordinary word from the Lord? Is this not a wonderful promise from God Himself? He further encourages her by reiterating the promise, that He would return and Sarah would at that time have a son. In response to Sarah's denial, He tells her to keep on laughing. And that is exactly what she does: "*And Sarah said, 'God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me'*" (Gen. 21:6).

Abraham named his son Isaac, which means laughter. Sarah knew that the gift of a son in their old age would bring joy and laughter to their entire community...the gift of laughter, that connector that would draw them together and draw them to the Lord.

## A Word of Caution

We are still living in troubled times. Though we are hopeful that a vaccine will soon eliminate the threat of COVID-19, we continue to deal with difficult political and social situations. The isolation that many felt during the pandemic of 2020 continues to have an impact on many people, and division exists between those who would choose to have the vaccine and those who would not. It is a time when people worldwide are in desperate need of connection, a sense of community and belonging. It is a time when we need to laugh, and like Sarah, keep on laughing—with each other and with the Lord.

We also need to be cautious. The enemy of our souls is attempting to use the gift of laughter that God has given us as a heart connector with Him to instead deny Him by finding humor in what He hates. The entertainment industry would have us believe that fornication, drunkenness, drug abuse, prostitution, bullying and emotional abuse are somehow funny. A recent movie about an underage woman and her journey to get an abortion was advertised as a hilarious comedic adventure. Sin is poison and when we find humor in it, we can be assured that laughter is no longer the best medicine.

Let's focus on what is righteous, finding the joy in each other and the joy that is around us. Remember, laughter is ours because we are made in the image of God. He delights in laughing joyfully

with His children, sharing joy with those He loves. And we can take delight in knowing that our lives, our relationships and our choices are bringing joy to His heart.

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Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

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## TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God's chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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