



**LET MY LAUGHTER
RESOUND!**

By

Ron G. Christian

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As author of this book, I wish to express my deep appreciation to Shirley Ruiz, who dedicated her great skills, abounding energy, and many hours of her time in typing the entire manuscript as well as adding illustrations in this book. I feel certain that her committed hands will bring great blessings to many persons.



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INTRODUCTION

Notes the missionary/evangelist/writer, E. Stanley Jones: "There are three levels of laughter: the lowest level, the one who laughs only at his own jokes; a little higher, the one who laughs at the jokes of others; third, the one who can laugh at himself. I would add as the highest, the one who laughs at the rhythm of things - a constitutionally happy laugh."

One of E. Stanley Jones' popular statements is this: "There is more unalloyed joy in being a Christian to the square inch than there is to the square mile outside of him."

A well-known writer, Elton Trueblood, once wrote a book entitled 'The Humor of Christ'. There are statements (and parables) from the lips of Christ that, when they were heard for the first time, must have brought either a smile or an outright laugh from the hearers of Christ. We have read many words (first spoken by Christ) so many times that we fail to appreciate the humor in some of Christ's words.

Here is one (of many) statements that must have caused a reaction of laughter among Christ's listeners: "You strain at gnats while you swallow camels!" A vivid description of the hypocritical actions of some religious leaders!

HAVE YOU LEARNED TO 'LAUGH AT YOURSELF'?

The Christian, who experiences an inner wellspring of joy, is the same person who finds it easy to laugh - to laugh not 'at' persons', but to laugh 'with' persons! Most of all, a joy - indwelt person finds it easy to 'laugh at himself! As a result of his growing relationship with Christ, the sensitive believer is learning two realities: One, he is learning that it is vitally important that he take God and God's Word (commandments) very seriously.

He never is light-hearted or flippant regarding his relationship of obedience (discipleship) with God. But, interestingly enough, as he 'fixes his attention' more and more upon the lovely Christ (His

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nature and His Word and His mission), he, consequently, discovers that he is thinking less and less about himself. He 'gazes' at Christ, and, consequences (as the disciple of Christ), he increasingly only 'glances' at himself.

The second lesson, then, that he learns is this: Because he takes God very seriously, he (a disciple of Christ) learns to take himself less seriously. In other words, he is able to laugh at himself, and he is not sensitive to other persons, if others (his friends) choose to laugh because of something that they see (about him) as 'funny' (even though he may not think something that he does as particularly 'funny').

He has his focus on God, and he is learning to 'die' to his overly-sensitive inner nature, therefore, with his mind off himself, he is able to be light-hearted and good-natured. He can laugh at himself, and he is glad to allow others to get a good laugh (even if, at times, the laugh is at his 'own expense').

He does not take himself too seriously (and he light-heartedly accepts his own unique oddities). He has learned to 'laugh at himself'! He does not 'wear his own feelings on his coat shelve', but, instead, he is 'good-natured' while others (innocently) laugh because of some of his 'unique' words and his 'unique' actions!

For instance: If I can 'laugh' because of my 'very bald head', I should have no problem, if, for some reason, my friends have 'fun' teasing me (in good jest) regarding my 'very bald head'. I should, as a joy-filled believer, be so 'at ease' with myself (my identity in Christ) that I am not offended if others wish to 'tease' me because of some unique feature that I have.

I should, in fact, laugh with my friends, even if the (innocent) laughter of my friends is at my 'own expense'! It is the somber, self-centered person (lacking the 'joy of the Lord') who is 'overly sensitive', 'defensive', and 'ill-at-ease' - and it is this type of person who finds it impossible to 'laugh at himself. And certainly such a person would not be able to let others laugh at anything (words or actions) that would possibly 'infringe' on his own 'person' (even if his friends are totally innocent in their laughter, and had no intention to 'hurt' him).

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Such a person (with a low self-esteem) cannot take a 'joke', and such a person certainly is not 'constitutionally happy' (that is, he does not have an accurate 'picture' of himself, in light of the true revelation of the nature of God; such a morbid person is ingrown, and he has no release from guilt and condemnation, and he is not delivered from the 'bondage of self-centeredness').

FINDING RELEASE FROM THE 'BONDAGE OF SELF-CENTEREDNESS'.

How can such a person stand 'on tiptoe with joy' when he does not see God as a loving God, when he does not see himself as the object of God's special love, when he does not see his fellow men as persons who are loveable and who are creatures worthy of being served. He is ignorant of the true dynamic in the 'triangle of life' (God, Self, Others).

Only the individual who properly 'relates' to God and to Self and to Others - only that person is 'constitutionally happy'. Happy because he loves God, supremely; Happy because he loves himself wholesomely, not selfishly; Happy because he loves others sincerely, issuing forth in caring.

What others think of him is not that important, for he is living for his God, and God's 'smile of approval' rests upon him. He is 'free' in Christ, and he is diligent to serve Christ (and that call of God upon him is 'no laughing matter'). Because of that freedom that Christ has given to him, he is 'free' to give himself away to others (in a self-forgetful way).

To live in this God-centered, humble manner, truly defines 'real living'. To get one's 'Self off of his hands', means that one is prepared to serve God effectively and to love others truly - and to manifest true Joy and (at times) hearty Laughter!

LIVING THE LIFE OF TRANSPARENCY!

The disciple of Christ (free from the bondage of 'self-centeredness' and 'self-preoccupation'), has nothing to hid, and, because of his

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life of transparency, he is not afraid to 'give himself away' to others. Living a transparent life means that the disciple of Christ is not afraid to be vulnerable. He knows that he is far from 'perfect', but he also knows that he is daily making 'progress' in living more and more like his dear Lord.

He is not afraid to confess his faults to his close friends, and he desires to be accountable to them, for he wants to become a more fruitful servant of his Lord. And 'open relationship' with others (especially with his close friends) means that, amidst his 'serious talks' with friends, he is free to laugh at himself (with his blunders).

He is not (in pride) wearing a facade. Of course, appropriately, he maintains the dignity of his private life, but, nevertheless, he is very 'open' regarding the 'revelation' of his life. "Confess your faults (sins) one to another, that you may be healed!" (James 5). He acknowledges (in the presence of his peers) that he is only a 'Christian in the making'!

He laughs at his own 'faults and blunders and weaknesses and oddities', and he is not overly-sensitive or defensive or offended when others (friends and family) find it easy to laugh at some of his 'words and actions'.

My wife's grandmother (saintly soul that she was), many years ago told someone (regarding me and my two brothers-in-law) - all three of her grandchildren, by marriage - that she loved all three of us, but she said "They are all a little odd!" When I heard about her statement (her evaluation of the three men who married her three granddaughters), I had to 'laugh' inside! Of course, a surrendered believer must think about himself (for obvious reasons), but he finds himself being 'lost in wonderment and love' as he gradually learns to 'think Christ's thoughts after Him'.

LIVING A LIFE OF SELF-FORGETFULNESS!

As he (Christ's disciple) is 'lost' in Christ's projects (which always, in one way or another, involves being lost in caring for others), he finds that he is increasingly delivered from the 'bondage of self-centeredness' and the 'bondage of self-preoccupation'.

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To the extent that he is delivered from his self-preoccupation, to that same extent does he experience 'true freedom', 'true lightness of heart', 'true enjoyment of other people whom he desires to serve'. When he 'gazes' at the person and the mission of Christ, he has little time to think about himself and his own selfish interest. And, when he is 'lost' in praise and love for Christ, he finds himself wanting to do the same things that His Master does!

Just as Christ came to earth, to 'seek and to save the lost', so, as a disciple, he wants, likewise, to be involved in Christ's projects of 'reaching out in love' to the lost and the dying! He wants, like his Master, to be meek and lowly, and to lift the burdens of others. By kind words, by charitable deeds, by fervent prayers, by availability to the lonely and the grieving ones, by generously giving money to the poor persons!

The more involvement he (as Christ's disciple) has in the 'world of needy persons', the less time he has to be ingrown and self-pitying and self-centered in pursuing his own petty projects. As a disciple of Christ, he wants to be out in the 'harvest fields', where he can have the joy of 'harvesting souls' for the Kingdom of God. The person of reverence (a Christ-centered person) sees all of God's creation as 'brimming with joy'.

LEARNING TO EMBRACE THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD!

Because a believer is assured that God is sovereign (i.e., that God rules the world and that God will have the 'final word', in spite of the presence of rampant evil), such a believer has a sense of joy in all that he does and in all that he encounters in human relationships.

Of course, a God-centered person, at times, weeps with those who weep, as well as rejoices with those who rejoice. A God-centered person has a serious view of life. He knows that, although God has won the victory over evil (as a result of the cross and resurrection), the 'evil one' (devil) is still 'on the loose' in this world.

He is not naively optimistic - that is, he does not ignore the fact that there are countless persons (Christians and non-Christians) who are still 'hurting' and 'suffering', and who need a helping hand

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and a listening ear and a compassionate heart and a fervent prayer. But the man of 'faith' knows, that 'though the wrong seems often so very strong, God is the Ruler yet!' Right will eventually prevail, and wrong will eventually and ultimately be destroyed!

Satan is a 'defeated foe', and his execution date has been set. His ultimate destiny is the 'lake of fire'! The believer knows that whatever happens to him in this earthly life, he is assured that heaven will be his eternal home - if he endures until the end. "Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee a crown of life!"

EXPERIENCING JOY AMIDST SORROW IN LIFE!

For the believer (who is living with a 'clear conscience'), the Bible says that there is a 'joy unspeakable and full of glory!' The Bible says that God has 'give us all things richly to enjoy!' For the children of God there are 'pleasures forevermore'! Yes, there are pleasures and joys forevermore for 'saved persons' in heaven, but there are a great deal of pleasures and joys for the people of God, right here on this sin-cursed earth!

These pleasures on this earth are alloyed with sadness and disappointments and losses and adversities, but even though there is, admittedly, a mixture of joys and sorrows here on this 'stage of testing' (this planet), there are enough joys and pleasures on this earth, to keep a believer 'marching forward toward heaven'!

Sometimes, if not most of the time, it is when a believer is feeling the 'pains' of life the most, that the 'joys' of the Lord are most felt and enjoyed. This is a (strange) paradox that most Christians (who have suffered greatly) attest to! Joy amidst sorrow. Peace amidst chaos. Gain amidst loss. Comfort amidst sorrow. Pleasure amidst pain. Laughter amidst somberness. And light-heartedness amidst tense situations of life.

MAINTAINING A 'SOLID WITNESS' AMIDST A CHAOTIC WORLD!

Amidst the changing circumstances of life (good and bad circumstances), the Spirit desires to impart certain 'fruits' into the life of every believer. Love, joy, peace, patience and several other

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'fruits' are given to the believer (who humbly seeks these qualities). After the Spirit initially imparts these wonderful 'fruits' to a believers, the Spirit intends to develop these fruits (godly traits) in the life of a believer, throughout the remainder of his life.

These fruits (godly traits) are meant to be lasting in the life of a believer - that is, these fruits are 'steadfast' and 'enduring' in the life of a believer. This is to say, that when a believer faces chaos in his environment (home, school, office), this Spirit-controlled believer is able to 'hold steady' in that chaotic environment, and, in face of this difficult situation, to manifest a 'kind of peace and serenity and calmness' among the persons who are 'at each other's throats'!

This does not mean that the 'peace-filled' believer will never engage in discussions or in debates or in conflicts (in his chaotic environment) - for he has emotions and interests like anyone else. But, nevertheless, the Spirit-controlled (peace-filled) man will allow the 'peace of God' (goodwill and desire for unity and reconciliation) to be visibly manifested and demonstrated!

The 'fruit of the Spirit' provides the 'foundation' for the very life of the believer. While the world around one is moving (unstable) and is unpredictable and is volatile (explosive), the life of the Spirit-filled man has a 'foundation' (the indwelt love of God) - and this helps provide stability for a world that so easily can 'come apart at the seams'!

It is the indwelling Holy Spirit who provides stability to a believer, who lives in a very unstable (unpredictable) world. "When all around my world gives way, He then is all my hope and stay!" "On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand!"

The Christian can be 'positive' in the midst of a world that is 'negative' and 'cynical', because he believes in the resurrection (of Christ). He believes that life is stronger than death, that truth is stronger than lies, that joy is stronger than tragedy, that faith is stronger than doubt, that God is stronger than Satan. The Christian believes that, in spite of the evil purposes of the devil, the redemptive purpose of Christ is stronger than the evil purposes of Satan.

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The Christian believes that 'though wrong is so strong, God is the Ruler yet!' The Christian believes that 'where sin abounds, grace super abounds'! The Christian believes that, although this wonderful physical body will finally perish and turn to 'dust', there is a glorious future where God's children shall dwell eternally and where they shall be granted a never-perishing celestial body.

The Christian believes that, regardless of the kind or the intensity of human adversity that he must endure on earth, God is able powerfully to 'use' that adversity to further develop his 'godly character', to better prepare him for his final home of joy in heaven!

WHERE DOES 'WHOLESOME LAUGHTER' ORIGINATE?

Every truth that has been, thus far, expounded (above), provides the 'background' and the 'context' for this present book on the subject of 'laughter'. Joy, of course, is far greater than 'laughter', but it is also true to say that the 'indwelling joy of the Lord' is the 'inward fountain' from which 'wholesome' and healthy 'laughter' derives!

Wholesome laughter always comes from the 'overflowing fountain of Joy'. The 'joy of the Lord' has many 'streams' in the life of the believer, and one of the many 'streams' is hearty 'laughter'.

When a believer is properly 'connected' with God's universe (with God's Nature), then he is 'constitutionally happy' - and sometimes such a happy person can't help but see 'the funny side' of life. He sometimes has to hold his head back and simply 'laugh and laugh'. If Jesus laughed, then it is no 'sin' for His children to 'laugh'!

DO YOU THINK THAT JESUS OFTEN LAUGHED?

I have a long-time friend who gave me a most interesting (unique) portrait of Jesus. In the picture, Jesus has His head bent backwards, and Jesus has His mouth wide open, in a posture of hilarious laughter! I have never seen a picture of the Son of God, in which He is portrayed as the One who is 'laughing at life'!

Some persons (overly-religious folks) would think that this portrayal of Jesus as the 'laughing Son of God' was far too casual, perhaps even irreverent, but I do not think the portrait manifests any

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irreverence. Maybe 'casual', but not 'irreverent'!

Jesus was, at times, very casual and very down-to-earth, and yet, He was also very serious about life and about people and, especially, about His own Heavenly Father. Jesus knew, more than any other person, the extremes of life's experiences and of life's emotions.

Jesus knew how to laugh, and, on the other hand, Jesus knew how to groan deeply in His 'spirit' as He beheld the sorrow of Mary and Martha who were heart-broken because of the death of their brother Lazarus!

The undertone of Jesus' entire life was 'joy' (for Jesus knew He was fulfilling the will of His Heavenly Father, and He knew He was fulfilling the purpose for which He came to earth), but with that sense of joyous well-being (because He was 'in step with His Father's purpose'), Jesus, when it was appropriate, manifested great sorrow because of the grief of human beings. The Bible records that, at times, 'Jesus wept'!

From the example of Jesus, we (believers) must never laugh when we should be crying, and we should not always be crying, for sometimes it is appropriate (and health-giving) to 'laugh and to laugh'! Jesus, at times, laughed, and at other times, He wept! The follower of Jesus experiences both, at the proper times! Laughing and crying - both and wholeheartedly!

Most portraits of Jesus (as great as they are) usually convey the emotion of soberness and even of sorrow. Certainly, Jesus was sober about the serious (moral) issues of life, and certainly (as mentioned above) Jesus did experience great sorrow and grief (climaxed by the unspeakably great grief and sorrow that He experienced on the 'old rugged cross').

But, while not denying or minimizing the 'side of sorrow' in Jesus' life, we should also not minimize the 'side of joy and laughter' in Jesus' life! It is true that Jesus was a 'man of sorrows', who was acquainted with grief, but it is equally true that Jesus was a 'man who was in love with life and with nature and with God's purposes'!

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DID JESUS LAUGH WITH 'LAUGHING CHILDREN'?

Apparently Jesus loved to play with little children, and some of them likely sat on his lap. He observed the play of little children so much that He used some of the antics (actions) of the children's playing, to illustrate profound truths regarding the kingdom of God (in some of His parables)!

Jesus once said that if a person does not have the simplicity and humility and faith of a little child, that person cannot enter the kingdom of God. Jesus loved children very much, and He liked the way children expressed their simple faith and their unquestioning trust in others. Jesus believed that important lessons - lessons with eternal significance - could be learned, by a careful observation of little children (during their play times).

Do you think that Jesus could spend time with children, talking to them and perhaps even playing with them, and allowing them to sit on his lap, without, at times, laughing with them? I personally think that the portrait of Jesus (with His head bent back and with his mouth wide open in a 'hearty laughter'), I say, I think that this portrait accurately conveys the kind of person that Jesus was, while He ministered here on earth.

Of course, a portrait of Jesus with tears streaming down his cheeks (while he weeps over Jerusalem) is an equally accurate picture of Jesus. Jesus, like all disciples of Jesus, both wept and laughed. But, why is the portrait of Jesus (which I cherish in my office) so rare?

I suppose, because of the seriousness of Jesus' life, and because of the gravity of the mission that Jesus had here on earth, it is difficult for us (conscientious believers) to entertain the 'thought' (belief) that Jesus, at times, was the 'laughing Son of God'!

Can God (in the person of Jesus) actually laugh a lot at a wedding party? Can God (in the person of Jesus) actually take time (out of His busy schedule) to laugh and to laugh with a group of little laughing children who are gathered around Him?

Can God (in the person of Jesus) actually and intentionally use

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'humor' in the messages that He preached along the shore of the Sea of Galilee? ("You strain at gnats, while you swallow camels!" - how could any listener of Jesus keep a 'straight face' when he heard that statement, for the first time?).

DO YOU THINK JESUS LAUGHED AFTER HIS RESURRECTION?

Using the phrase (of E. Stanley Jones) 'constitutionally happy', I believe that Jesus experienced joy and happiness and even 'laughter' at the 'highest level' of ecstasy! Because Jesus 'finished His earthly task', 'completed His mission', 'fulfilled His purpose', as a result of dying for the sins of all the world, and as a result of His resurrection, Jesus was the 'happiest person in the entire Universe'.

Jesus, who was fully human as well as fully divine, said, while He suffered His agonizing death, 'It Is Finished'. The purpose for which I, Jesus, came to earth has been accomplished. I, the Son of God, have done everything that is necessary (to fulfill the requirements of my Heavenly Father) to purchase the salvation for the entire human race (and for each person therein).

I, the Son of God, have perfectly kept the Laws of God; I have fulfilled all the demands of the Law - all because of my own perfect righteousness. No longer does Satan have a 'claim' on any human life, for I have redeemed (purchased) every person's life with my own precious blood. Because of my ultimate sacrifice (my sacrifice of substitution for every person), no sinner need experience the just 'anger' of God! Rather, because of what I accomplished on the cross and through the empty tomb, every sinner can experience total forgiveness of all sin, and every repentant sinner can now enjoy the assurance of eternal life.

WHY SHOULD THE 'FINISHED WORK OF CHRIST' MAKE YOU 'LAUGH'?

Is it any wonder that Jesus, more than anyone else, is 'constitutionally happy' - the happiest person in the Universe? Mankind's chief enemy, Satan, has been defeated, and mankind (through Christ's finished work on the cross and through the empty tomb) is now 'set free' to enjoy fellowship with the Creator/Savior

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of mankind!

These 'facts' are enough to make Jesus' 'laugh' and 'laugh'! It is enough to make the Son of God, hold His head back, and open His mouth wide, and laugh and laugh - in fact, to laugh so loud that all the angels of heaven can hear His resounding laughter of victory.

The victory of Christ has been won! All creatures in the Universe are now subject to the rule and the reign of Christ. All of Christ's enemies are subject to Him, and none of Christ's enemies can again touch Him, to hurt Him or to destroy Him. Christ's enemies are all defeated, and they will someday be destroyed! Who are those that are easily labeled as Christ's 'enemies'? Sin, death, despair, the demons, the devil, the suffering souls in hell who finally and who foolishly rejected His call of love!

Because God broke the 'seals' around the tomb, Jesus arose from the dead in all of His 'glory'. "He is risen! He is risen indeed!" The grave could not hold its 'prey'. Jesus arose and now and forever He is victorious!

Jesus is victorious over 'death'! Jesus is victorious over 'despair'! Jesus is victorious over the 'devil' and the host of demons! Jesus is victorious over 'hell'! Is it any wonder that Jesus is 'constitutionally happy'? That Jesus is the happiest person in the Universe?

WHY IS THE HUMAN RACE SO INDEBTED TO JESUS CHRIST?

Don't you think that Jesus, while He sympathetically looks down upon the world of hurting persons, is also looking down upon the world, with His head bent backward, and with His mouth wide open, as He is laughing and laughing!

Why is Jesus laughing in the heavens? Because Jesus knows that the devil has been defeated! Because Jesus knows that the entire world has been 'redeemed' from all of its sins and it is now possible for every person to appropriate Christ's gift of redemption for himself!

Why can Jesus laugh? Because Jesus knows that the final outcome for human existence has been established. That is, the final justice

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of God that will be vindicated, and the unlimited mercy of God that will be demonstrated.

Jesus knows that, in the end of time, the 'books will be balanced' (i.e., justice will be properly rendered and mercy will be properly manifested). Why wouldn't this blessed Savior, along with the Father and the Spirit, be now 'standing on tiptoe with joy'?

Why wouldn't this Creator/Savior be 'laughing' and 'laughing' and 'laughing', when He knows that the 'mystery of God' (hidden for ages) is now no longer a 'mystery'! The 'mystery' was wrapped up in a person - the person of Jesus Christ - who came to earth to 'openly die' for the ransom of all mankind! All human beings now have access into the 'holy presence' of God - to make their wants and their wishes known unto an open-armed and a welcoming God.

WHAT IS CONTAINED IN THE UNFOLDING MYSTERY OF GOD?

The mystery, now revealed through the life and the saving mission of Christ, is: God loves all, and God is willing (through repentance and faith) to forgive all sin, and to save all to the 'uttermost' - to take every person to his/her God-prepared place in Heaven! Aren't these 'facts' enough to make you shout and shout - even to make you bend your head back, and to make you open your mouth widely, and to make your tongue resound with a loud and a hearty 'laugh'? Join the blessed 'laughing Son of God', and let the joy of your own salvation become a little greater every day!

Let your 'holy laughter' pierce the atmosphere every time you think about the victory which Christ has decisively won for you! To know that, through your trust in Christ's 'finished work', you are 'saved' from hell and that you are 'saved' for heaven - such a glorious reality ought to make you shout a 'holy shout', and make you 'laugh' with a 'holy laughter' (a laughter something like the 'laughter of Christ').

'Constitutionally happy' - that is God's goal for you - yes, for you! How wonderful it would be if you and if I would leave this earthly life with a 'constitutional happiness' in our heart! To die happy, and then to enter the place of perpetual happiness - that surely should cause us to 'shout and sing and dance and laugh'! A 'holy

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laughter' is the 'highest form of laughter'!

EXPERIENCING THE 'MIRACLE' OF GOD'S TRANSFORMATION!

The beautiful Jesus, who is 'constitutionally happy', because of His successful saving mission for mankind, is the same Jesus who wishes to share His 'happiness' with every lost person. When one (sinner) comes into a right relationship with God, that converted person (who is transformed by grace) increasingly experiences joy and happiness and a sense of well-being (peace).

This newly-converted person receives from the Savior a new inner 'fountain' - a 'fountain of joy'. He feels 'good' about God (who saved him). He feels 'good' about himself (whose inner soul is at peace). He feels 'good' about other persons (whom he now sees as individuals to serve, rather than as individuals to battle).

When a person feels good about God, about himself, and about others, he feels like he is properly aligned with the 'Universe'. He now feels that he is fulfilling the purpose for which he was created! Thus, as he continues to think rightly about God and about himself and about other persons, the joy of the Lord will increasingly be felt in his life!

Someday the joy of the Lord will so greatly increase (as he continues to 'walk with the Lord'), that he will declare that he experiences the joy that is unspeakable and full of glory! He will find himself resounding with a 'holy laughter'! He can't help but release his inner 'fountain of joy', and one stream of that 'fountain' (among the many streams) is 'laughter'! A 'holy laughter' which is the 'highest form of laughter'!

IS GOD CAPABLE OF TRULY EXPERIENCING BOTH 'WEEPING' AND 'LAUGHTER'?

The fact that human beings are created to enjoy hearty laughter is, I believe, an indication that our Creator is pleased when we humans are (occasionally) engaged in laughter (that is, in laughter that, not only refreshes the one who is laughing, but that enhances and builds up persons with whom he is laughing).

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Not cynical or sneering laughter - not laughter that 'makes fun' of another or that belittles another! That kind of laughter is below the dignity of a human being, and that kind of laughter reduces life to the 'beastly level'!

Engagement in wholesome laughter is an expression of the uniqueness of the 'human creature'. God created us in His own image, and that must mean that, because we humans 'laugh', we must be a 'mirror' of God Himself (that is, this phenomenon of laughter indicates that we, in some way, are like our Creator).

Admittedly, we humans tend to 'create God in our own image', but, because we are finite, we are in many ways compelled to think of God in 'physical images' and in 'physical characteristics'. Of course, Commandment Two warns us against 'making graven images' to represent God. We can break this commandment by making 'mental images' of God, or by (crudely) making actual physical images to represent God. Either is a form of idolatry, and, therefore, we must guard against such an activity.

However, when we notice (in the Gospel record) that Jesus, during His earthly ministry, both 'wept' (explicitly stated) and 'laughed' (implicitly communicated), we can (by extrapolation) declare that God Himself (in some way) both 'weeps' and 'laughs'! This assertion is based on the biblical statement that 'Jesus is the Incarnate One' who came from the Father, and that Jesus is the perfect expression and manifestation of the Father.

Amazingly, the Bible indicates that everything Jesus was on earth is what God has always been. In other words, the sinless character of Jesus is a perfect reflection of the character of the eternal Father. Like Father, like Son! Jesus is the perfect image and 'manifestation' of the Father.

Even though Jesus was confined (for 33 years) to a human body (with the limitations that were inherent in that physical body), yet what the invisible Father had always done eternally, the visible (incarnate) Son did on this planet. In other words, when Jesus wept, His Father wept. When Jesus laughed (with the children on His lap), His Father was laughing!

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Yes, it is true that the weeping and the laughing of the invisible God (Father) would likely be differently expressed by the invisible Father. But, simply because God is a Spirit (invisible and not 'fleshly'), does not mean that He is incapable of expressing strong emotions.

The Father (as a Spirit) is capable of expressing His various emotions (including weeping and laughing) far more vividly and far more strongly than mankind is capable of expressing these same emotions!

If it is true that the two emotions that humans most feel - sadness (weeping) and gladness (laughter) - this basic observation indicates that these emotions are an integral part of what defines persons as, 'unique creatures' (who are created in God's 'own image').

If it is 'natural' for humans to both be sad (weep) and to be glad (laughter), then this fact (logically) must mean that it is 'natural' for our Creator to both 'weep' and to 'laugh'.

If we (in our 'fallen state') have the capacity to engage ourselves in 'weeping' and in 'laughing' that is wholesome (edifying to ourselves and to others), then we must conclude that this capacity is a 'God-give' gift to mankind.

Of course, man (the 'fallen creature') sometimes expresses these God-given gifts in perverted ways (rather than in wholesome ways). The expression of weeping sometimes is not productive to the one who is weeping.

Weeping 'in and of itself' is not always helpful, but, instead, is sometimes unproductive and futile. The Bible says that there is 'worldly sorrow' (tears) which leads to death, for the tears of regret and remorse do not, by themselves, lead to repentance for sins and to faith in Christ.

In a fallen race of persons, there are too many tears of regret or tears of remorse or tears of anger or tears of revenge. These kinds of tears are the manifestation of a 'fallen human being' - a person who has tears that reflect spiritual illness and personal alienation from God and from the human race.

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Jesus' tears, which were the visible manifestation of the invisible tears of the Father - these tears were perfectly expressed - at the right time, for the right purpose, and with the right outcome!

Just as it is possible for a 'fallen creature' to express his God-given 'gift' of tears in ways that are unhealthy and unproductive and destructive, so it is possible for a 'fallen creature' to express his 'laughter' in unhealthy and unproductive and destructive ways.

This 'gift' of laughter is meant to be an enriching gift, a gift that builds up others, a gift that enhances relationships, a gift that gives relaxation and diversion to one's own self and to others who are in one's company.

When one uses laughter to belittle or to embarrass another person, this 'good gift' of God is used in a despicable way - in a way that defames another who is made in God's image. Laughter is misused when the reputation of God is defamed, or when the reputation of a fellow human is smeared!

God wants you and me to 'see the funny side of life', to smile at the oddities of life, to enjoy a good ('clean') joke, to laugh at our own (innocent) 'slip ups' and 'blunders' and 'harmless accidents of life'! Most of all, God wants us to enter into His own laughter, namely, that, through Christ's sacrifice, the 'victory has been won' - Christ's victory over sin, death, despair, and the devil!

BECOMING A 'LAUGHING' AND A 'LAUGHABLE' PERSON!

The following (short) accounts) - episodes that happened to me - all evoked 'laughter' within me. But, few of these happenings evoked 'laughter' at the time of the 'happening'. In fact, it was only in retrospect (looking back) that most of these experiences brought a 'smile' or an outright 'laugh' to me. What now brings me a 'laugh', at the time brought me embarrassment or even physical discomfort.

Many times the 'things' (events) that happen to us are rather 'strange' ('weird'), and we tend to 'shake our head' in disbelief that something like what we are experiencing, could ever happen to us!

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At least we can say (if we wish to) that the 'strange' or 'embarrassing' things that happen to us, keep life from becoming 'boring'.

These out-of-the-ordinary and unexpected events or happenings, make us realize that 'anything can happen to us'. When we look 'silly' or when we say 'silly things', the result is sometimes our humiliation. When we find ourselves in an embarrassing situation, we discover that we have a more realistic view of ourselves.

In other words, we realize that we are not always the dignified ('put together') person that we would like to think that we are! When we do things or when we say things that are not the 'mark of maturity', we probably will have to sacrifice some of our 'pride', and replace that 'pride' (sense of 'self-sufficiency') with greater humility.

If we ever were in any doubt that we were a member of the 'common lot' of humanity, when we 'mess up' and when we 'blunder' with our mouth, we are further convinced that we, indeed, are a fallible human being, similar to every other human being. As 'smart' as we are, and as 'experienced' as we are, we still can make embarrassing 'mistakes' and 'blunders' - mistakes and blunders which bring a 'smile' to the face of our friends, and should bring a 'laugh' to ourselves.

We learn, because of the embarrassing mistakes that we make (or because of the 'laughable' situations we get ourselves into), not to take ourselves so seriously. One of the most 'health-giving' things that we can do for ourselves is to 'stand back' (after our involvement in a 'funny' or an 'embarrassing' situation) and 'look at ourselves' and then open our mouth and 'laugh' and 'laugh' and 'laugh'!

It is a 'health-giving' action (based on a realistic and humble estimate of ourselves) to acknowledge our own foibles and faults and oddities and weaknesses and laughable actions!

It takes a mature and a humble and an objective person, if there is to be a realistic view of one's own self. There are few things that are more 'refreshing' than for a person to see his own 'oddities' from the viewpoint of his friends, who (without any spirit of

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sneering) have seen the 'funny things' about him, for a long time.

To laugh at yourself, and to allow (without over-sensitivity) others to laugh at the 'funny side' of your personality - this requires that you have a spirit of humility.

To laugh at yourself and to let others laugh with you about your foibles, this is possible only if you are delivered from the 'bondage of self-preoccupation' and the 'bondage of over-sensitivity'. To be 'dead' to your self-centeredness and to your selfish pride, is to be 'free' in Christ and is to be 'free' to love and to serve others without self-consciousness.

Also, it is to be 'free' to laugh at yourself (with no unhealthy feelings of self-depreciation)! You can stand tall with wholesome dignity, and, at the same time, not take yourself too seriously! Delivered from over-sensitivity and self-preoccupation, you are thereby 'free' to allow others to have a 'good laugh' regarding some of your own 'strange ways' (your personal oddities and your humorous foibles)!

You are, indeed, 'free' to laugh at yourself (to laugh at your own 'weaknesses' and your own 'strange ways'), and you are also 'free' to encourage others to laugh along with you! Such a lifestyle (a relaxed lifestyle regarding yourself) is part of what Jesus described as the 'abundant lifestyle'!

As humans, our greatest burden that we bear is the 'burden of self-centeredness' (over-sensitivity and a defensive reaction to other people)! When we are delivered from this burden (through our 'death' to our 'carnal self'), we are truly 'free' to be at our 'very best'!

Free to live at peace with our own self, free to live at peace with our God, and free to live at peace with other persons around us. We are, thus, not defensive but open to other persons, we are not overly sensitive to the intended (or unintended) 'less-than-charitable' remarks that people make to us or about us, we are not competitive with other persons because the humility of God has seized us (thus, we are learning humbly to 'esteem others better than we esteem our own self').

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When we are 'crucified' to our own 'carnal self' (self-centeredness), we experience the 'freedom' to 'forget' about our own self! Instead, we concentrate on the needs of other persons.

We become gloriously 'lost' in the 'wonder' of other persons (their 'stories', their needs, their 'hurts', their potential, their unique contributions that they are making to society, their unique abilities and talents and spiritual gifting, their God-given personality, their special 'call' from God, their accomplishments in life).

Of course, because every person is a member of a 'fallen race' (with all the involvement in sinning that this 'membership' entails), Christian's 'dealing' with people can be most frustrating and troublesome, as well as most rewarding and satisfying and enjoyable. Christians must embrace both kinds of persons (the saints and the sinners).

The abundant life of which Jesus spoke is the life in which a believer (as Jesus emphasized) 'gives himself away' to help meet the needs of other people. Jesus said that the one who 'loses his life' in serving others, is the one who truly finds himself (that is, he is the one who finds fulfillment in living). In contrast, the one who is a 'self-seeker' (that is, the one who 'uses' other persons to 'advance his own selfish agenda') loses his life - that is, his life has no purpose and no lasting duration. Such a self-seeking (selfish) person will become frustrated, and his life will become meaningless. Such a person fails to realize the purpose for which he is created - namely, to serve his fellow men and to bring honor to his Creator!

Such a humble (self-effacing) person knows that he is only a 'Christian-in-the-making', and that he is a long way from the 'final perfection' to which Christ has called him. In other words, such a humble (God-centered) person knows that, at best, he still has a lot of 'rough edges' in his life that he must work on to remove! He acknowledges that he has lot of oddities and mistakes and blunders and even 'laughable' things to eliminate from his life. He knows that, till the day of his death, he will still be only a 'Christian under construction'.

He humbly realizes that, unbeknown to him, he will (ignorantly) do

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things and he will say things that are innocently done and innocently said, but that, nevertheless, are faults for which he will need the forgiveness from his fellow men.

The sincere believer knows that, amidst the faults that he will commit (for which he will need forgiveness), there will probably be things said and there will probably be things done that will (to the objective observer) evoke a 'smile' or evoke even an outright 'laugh'.

Faults, innocently committed, will need, not only God's gracious forgiveness, but will need also the patience and the understanding of his fellow men (who will likely be annoyed by some of his actions). "Confess your faults (and sins) to one another, that you may be healed!" (James 5) Marriage provides a 'good platform' for couples to practice confession of their faults, one to another. Growth in marriage is always growth in humility – and good humor!

People (particularly your friends) who are evoked to 'laughter' (by your oddities and by your foibles) have no desire to show you derision. Therefore, if you are the person who evokes laughter in your friends, you should gladly learn to laugh at yourself (because of your own foibles and oddities and mistakes)!

You should allow (without over-sensitivity) your friends (good-heartedly and openly) to laugh along with you! Because you have learned (by God's grace) not to take yourself too seriously, you are able to combine your laughter with the laughter of your friends (even if you are the 'object of laughter').

Because of your own light-heartedness (and your own willingness to laugh at your own foibles, along with your friends), you have, thereby, given a much-needed 'gift' to your friends - the 'gift of laughter'!

Again, let it be noted: If you can laugh at yourself, and if you allow others (friends) to laugh regarding your own foibles and mistakes and oddities, then you are well on your way to becoming a happy and a healthy person - a person who is humble and a person who is free from self-consciousness and free from over-sensitivity.

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Laughter is a 'gift from heaven', a unique mark of being made in the 'image of God', a health-giving activity of the human race! There are some accounts of physically or mentally ill persons who have regained their health, through the 'instrumentality' of 'hearty laughter'.

A little laughter each day will keep the 'doldrums' away! 'Hearty laughter' is one of the manifestations of 'true freedom'. Learning to laugh at ourselves, and learning to laugh at the 'odd events' around us (i.e., the events where no one is harmed) helps us to 'keep our humanity', helps us to keep a sane, humble view of ourselves.

I have noticed that the somber, overly-sensitive, defensive-oriented, arrogant persons seldom laugh! If they do laugh, it is laughter that is centered on the 'gross' and the 'unclean' subjects of the 'fleshly' world.

It is the pure of heart (the persons who truly love God and who sincerely love their fellow men) who have the 'most fun' in life! They are the ones who know how to hold their head back and who know how to open their mouth wide and who know how to release hearty sounds of laughter from their lips! "God has given His children all things richly to enjoy" - and among those many things to enjoy is 'Laughter'!

THE BLOCKS CAME FLYING!

After more than a half century, I still can relive that rather dramatic moment, when, as a young teen in junior high (Fountain, Colorado), I sat with a dozen other young teens in a math class. I never was at that time very 'sharp' in math, and I have never been very 'sharp' since that time in math. I made passing grades, but I certainly was not recognized as a 'bright student' (in math or in any other subject). Probably because I did not quickly grasp my required material (in my text books), I customarily (rather boldly) held up my hand (probably more than I should have) to get the teacher's attention.

The math teacher - a man who was rather 'forward' in his personality - was well-liked in the school. He was a respected coach whose players performed to near their potential! I enjoyed

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this man as my track coach, in spite of the fact that he could be rather 'demanding', and he usually was in the 'face' of the players. He was the coach that 'pushed me to perform' - to 'go the extra mile' in running and in preparation for the 'tough track meets'. We runners worked hard 'for him' and for the entire team, and for the honor of our school.

I remember that one time - a few days before the State Track Meet - this coach got into his old jeep, and, on a country road the entire track team of junior high boys (including myself) was told by the coach to run on that country road - with the coach in his jeep behind us. If we boys started slowing our running pace, the coach would simply start honking his horn! In other words, keep running and don't slow down, for, he told us, we had to be prepared for the state meet (where the competition would be fierce).

The training 'paid off', for our team did very well, in a few days, at the State Track Meet! Looking back, after the elapse of more than five decades, I would guess that this beloved (hard-driving) coach probably enjoyed coaching, more than he enjoyed teaching academic subjects. Of course, typically, coaches are required to teach a few academic classes (like math or social studies), as well as coach some sports. Coach Campbell was no exception.

For some reason, in his math class, I could not understand the concept of 'cubes'. I understood the concept of 'squares', but not 'cubes'. As I recall, I put up my hand to get the teacher's (coach's) attention, and I kept asking the same basic question regarding 'cubes'. Finally, this rather impulsive and 'in your face' type coach, lost his patience with me. He was so frustrated that I did not understand a rather simple concept in math.

He had tried to illustrate the concept, by the use of some actual 'blocks' (cubes). The visual aid, obviously, was used to 'make clear' the mathematical concepts. I was sitting in the back of the small classroom, quite a distance from the teacher's desk.

The next thing I knew, the frustrated (angry) teacher - who could be quite 'impulsive' in his actions - threw some of the wooden objects (cubes) right at me! He said something like: "There, now do you understand?" To be honest, I did not yet understand the

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meaning of 'cubes' (and the formula to figure out 'cubes'), but I did know that I had 'pushed' this teacher/coach too far! I had offended him, I had agitated him, I had exhausted his patience with me!

I obviously was embarrassed that this happened! I was embarrassed, not only for myself, but for my fellow students, and for the teacher himself! He, too, probably was embarrassed for himself, but I don't recall that he ever apologized to me.

Through the passing years, when I have thought about this simple (isolated) event from my young teen years, I have not felt any resentment towards this coach. In fact, I have gotten a few 'laughs' for myself, and I have even (rarely) recalled this event to others, to allow them to get a chuckle from this rather strange event.

I was surprised, obviously, when the blocks were coming through the 'air', aimed right at me, but I knew (even then) that I must not be overly-sensitive regarding the embarrassment I felt. I had become a Christian a short time before this incident, and God gave me the 'grace' to maintain my respect and my love for this coach.

This coach did so much for me, during the few years that he was my track coach in junior high. He gave me a high goal to reach for - in running. A few years later, when I went to high school, I continued to do well in my 'running career'. I also did some competitive running in College! Throughout my adult life, I consistently ran for recreation, and I regularly competed in many races that were conducted in our community.

Several times I received first and second place trophies in my age category. I have about a dozen trophies, displayed in my own office. Coach Campbell was the one who got me 'started' in my 'running career' - a career that has lasted for several decades. I owe him a great debt of gratitude! I hope to give him a huge hug, in heaven! By God's grace!

Several years ago, when I was visiting my old home town (Fountain), I determined to 'look up' Coach Campbell. I wanted to go to his front door, and I wanted simply to tell him how much I appreciated him - his positive influence on my life, and his great

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contribution to me in my 'running career'.

I wanted to thank him for being a good leader in my life. (Of course, obviously, I would not mention the now 'laughable' incident in his math class). I discovered the house where he lived, and I anticipated seeing him, when he came to the front door. When some 'stranger' came to the front door, I asked to see Coach Campbell. My heart sank when she simply said: "He is not here. He is dead. He died of a heart attack!"

I greatly respected this great man - this outstanding coach! Yes, it is true that I frustrated him to such a degree, that he felt he needed to throw a few 'blocks' at me. Yes, it is true that he 'drove' me to the 'brink of my running endurance' as he honked and honked his horn at me (and other boys) on that country road.

In spite of his oddities (and he had several oddities), I loved him and I appreciated his desires to help me to grow up and to become a man! His disciplines, aimed at me (and at so many other students) simply proved that he was a caring human being.

I believe that he respected 'my faith' in Christ, although I don't think he had very accurate information regarding the religion of Christianity. As I recall, there was one occasion in which he and I were alone (maybe walking together). In the 'dim recesses of my mind', I verily recall a conversation that I had with him, in which he respectfully asked me about my personal faith in God.

His eternal destiny (as is true of everyone) is in the hands of a merciful God. In the end, I believe that God will judge the 'condition of the heart', not the 'accuracy of the head'. God knows and loves!

"I'D RATHER BE CALLED A 'COW' THAN 'MAAM'!"

It was the second day of my sophomore year. I had barely started, what would become my education at the Fountain High School for the next three years. I, of course, was in the underclass, and I felt all alone as I walked up and down the long hallways. I, frankly, had some apprehensions regarding my classes.

Of course, I did not know any of the teachers, and I wondered if I

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had what it would take to 'tackle' the various academic challenges (subjects). I tried to 'ward off the fear' that I felt, as I stared into the classrooms that seemed so 'foreboding', and as I stared into the faces of hundreds of students, all of whom seemed to be preoccupied with their own lives. I did not spot one student whom I felt would give me the 'time of day'.

They seemed either to be indifferent towards anyone but themselves, or they seemed to be proud of themselves (the upper class men) as they strolled the halls with their 'nose in the air'. As a Christian, I wondered if there was anyone who had any sympathy towards those values that were important to me! In short, I already felt 'out of place' in this 'spread-out structure' in what was labeled 'Fountain High School'. Do I really have to be here for a combined time of three years?

With these thoughts in my mind (at least subconsciously), I had 'butterflies in my stomach' as I entered the algebra I class, for the second day of school. The teacher had not yet entered the room, but all the enrolled students for the course, were already seated. While the teacher was still absent from the class, I decided to get up from my desk, and walk over to the pencil sharpener, to sharpen my pencil.

As I was walking back to my desk, the regular hall bell rang, and, with no warning, the teacher, who had just entered the room, looked at me and she yelled at me (with her shrill voice), "What are you doing?" I was trembling (inside) and I (the only one who was walking towards my desk) answered, "I was sharpening my pencil, maam!" And then she quickly, with anger in her voice, verbally pounced on me: "I'd rather be called a 'cow' than 'MAAM'!"

Shocked, belittled, downgraded, totally embarrassed! I was 'shaking in my boots'! I thought to myself, "What did I do that was so wrong? I simply got up to sharpen my pencil, before the class began!"

As a new (sophomore) student, in a brand new environment (new school), with no knowledge of this new teacher (except for this embarrassing outburst), and with no acquaintance with any fellow students - during that long hour in that Algebra class, I, frankly, felt

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inwardly crushed emotionally and mentally confused!

I wondered (in my mind, while I was supposed to keep my mind on Algebra) during that difficult hour of instruction, why this long-time teacher would treat me with such disrespect (on the second day of class). Why did she choose to bring great embarrassment to me, in front of all my classroom peers? How would she like it if she were in 'my shoes'?

I thought that the way she treated me was below the dignity of a teacher and a teacher who had taught in this high school for decades! Why did she pinpoint me (a brand new student, who already had many emotional traumas) to 'zero in on me' with such verbal abuse? And all of this in front of several other students? I, obviously, thought that if this is the kind of teacher that I have for Algebra, I am not sure that I want to be in her presence for many class sessions!

Most of these above-mentioned thoughts were probably on the subconscious level, but (even though this incident happened a long time ago), I feel sure that these thoughts properly describe my overall thought processes. Frankly, I was totally shaken and disturbed when this little ('old maid') teacher 'let me have it verbally'.

This little 'old maid' teacher was like a 'military officer', and her commanding voice (scream) could be heard, all the way from one end of the long hallway to the other end of that long hallway. When she spotted (from a distance) some student that she perceived was in some way 'unruly', she would let that student know, by her shrill and piercing voice (much louder than anyone would imagine, coming from the mouth of a little woman).

Without seeming disrespectful, I must say that her face matched her 'army-like demeanor'. Her countenance had some similarity to the countenance of a 'bull dog'! That seems unkind to make that comparison! There were definitely some differences between this precious lady's face and the face of a bulldog. However, probably most persons who had contact with her, would not be drawn to her because of her countenance.

A piercing and a harsh voice was quite compatible with a forbidding

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and forlorn face! Perhaps the two unusual features of this woman - voice and face - were developed into a militaristic voice and face, as a result of her long practice as a disciplinarian who often roamed the high school halls at Fountain High School, looking for students whom she perceived were 'breaking the rules'. However big the students were, the students - including football players - knew that they must 'bow and scrape' to this little ('old maid') teacher!

They knew that this shrill and commanding voice must be obeyed! If they got on the 'wrong side' of this woman, they were 'in for big trouble', they were 'in hot water'! After all, not only were all the students in submission to this 'little commanding military officer' (the one who knew just how to 'yell' at students, down the halls, and, certainly knew how to command perfect silence in her 'study halls'), but all her fellow teachers and the principal himself were in submission to her 'military-oriented ways'!

On that second day in that algebra class, I felt all alone, I felt defenseless, I felt abused by a teacher that I believed acted out of her emotions instead of out of her reason, a teacher who needlessly embarrassed me for no reason, in front of my peers. Perhaps my feelings were 'justified' (at least to some extent). But I soon found out that this teacher had her 'own reasons' for acting in the harsh way that she did.

I soon found out that this long-term teacher, whose demeanor seemed like the demeanor of harshness and rigid discipline, had a handful of students that she especially 'favored' as 'elite-type' students. You might call these few students her 'pets' - students that were her 'favorites'! One student in that algebra class (that I enrolled in) was one of her 'pets'. The teacher had a 'special liking' to that particular student. She was a junior student, and so this student had known the teacher the previous year.

Of course, I did not know this girl junior student in the same class), but I found out soon that this junior girl went to the teacher, at the end of this class session, and that she had a 'talk' with the teacher (regarding the incident of that very hour). She reminded the teacher (respectfully but openly) that she (the teacher) had failed to

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communicate the 'rules' for her class, on the first day of school (yesterday).

One of those rules, among others, was the rule regarding the quietness of the students, and the rule that every student is to be in his/her desk, at the ringing of the bell. This student reminded the teacher that she had assumed that all the students knew the rules, but that, in fact, she had never gone over the rules with her class, the very first day of school!

To the credit of this 'harsh teacher', she felt terrible that she had treated me in such an inappropriate manner, during that particular class session. To the further credit of this 'harsh teacher', she went downstairs (of the school) to have a visit with my mother.

My mother worked as a 'school cook' in the lower level of this school, and this teacher (as well as several other teachers who worked in the high school) really liked my mother. They had a 'good relationship' with my dear mother.

The teacher who was a friend to my mother, communicated to my mother, regarding the incident, in which there was a lack of understanding between her (teacher) and me. My mother was not the kind of person who easily was offended, and (even though I never knew the exact conversation that mother had with this well-known teacher), I am sure that my mother was (as usual) very conciliatory.

To the further credit of this 'harsh teacher', this teacher arranged a time for her to walk with me, a few blocks, on my regular route from the school to my home. After a half century, I honestly don't remember the content of that unusual conversation, between that 'little-understood' teacher and me. But, whether or not she actually apologized to me (I don't remember), the fact that she wanted to walk with me, and to carry on a friendly conversation with me - this loving act on her part, meant a great deal to me!

At the time that I was yelled at, in front of my fellow students, I was startled and I was shaken and I was embarrassed, and, if I were honest, probably I was a little angry! As the years have come and gone since that time (1960), I have occasionally recalled this long-

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ago incident (when I was a mere teen). When I recall that algebra course (my second day in the class), and when I remember the strange statement from that eccentric teacher (I'd rather be called a cow than maam) - I have had to 'laugh' and 'laugh'!

There has been more than one person who has also 'laughed' with me, when I have recounted my experience with this 'military-type teacher' - the teacher whose voice quickly silenced everyone in her presence, and who, if you disobeyed her voice, she (with the full 'backing' of the principal) would 'put you in the dog house'.

I have to 'laugh' now when I think of the powerful (piercing, soul-shattering) voice of this little woman, but, at that long ago time, you would not dare to 'laugh' at her commanding and her demanding voice! Another example of 'implicit humor'.

I can smile now, even laugh, when I recall an experience in my life which, at the time, was certainly not 'laughable'. The 'distance' which the elapse of time brings gives a new perspective to my life! During one of my crisis times (facing me when I was a teenager), I had no reason to laugh! No reason at all!

After I got through this difficult 'emotionally-erupting' experience (caused by a woman whose face resembled a 'bull dog', but who probably wanted a face that resembled a kind shepherd dog) - I say, after I got through this 'algebra class' experience, and after I found some type of reconciliation with the 'harsh teacher', I found some peace! Now, years later, I can really laugh!

"OH, SAY CAN YOU SEE...SEE...SEE...SEE?"

It was an old, black-colored, upright piano. I probably was in my last year of grade school, or in my first year of junior high. Even though my hard-working parents were not 'plush' with money, they rounded up enough cash to purchase that monster piano.

For several years, I took lessons, and, even though I did not have a 'natural musical inclination', and even though I experienced several distractions during my teen years, I, nevertheless, did give limited concentration to practicing my assigned piano lessons.

Gradually, I became more proficient at making the various scales

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sound like piano scales should sound. I admitted to myself that I was rather slow in my advancement in learning to play more difficult 'pieces'. However, by the time I reached the higher grades in high school, I began to 'tackle' much more 'challenging pieces' on the piano.

I don't remember the precise date when I became a student under the supervision of my new teacher. My new teacher was named Ann Rogers. She was a fellow student in my high school, probably a few months older than myself. Ann was so beautiful, and she was so intelligent, and she was so talented, and she was so mature, and (beyond all these characteristics) she was a very good pianist. I sometimes felt 'intimidated' around her, but, nevertheless, I decided to take piano lessons from her.

Perhaps for 2 or 3 years, I went to her house (weekly) and I tried to learn from her. She was gracious and she was kind to me, but she had 'high standards' for musical performance. At times she seemed rather 'exacting' to me, and, even though she was my age, she sometimes took the stance of an adult in my presence. I enjoyed her presence, in some ways, but I wondered if I could 'conquer' some of the difficult musical movements on the piano that she assigned to me. I was amazed at Ann's musical skill with her long agile fingers.

Ann was beautiful, in more than one way (physically). She seemed to have all the right 'movements' socially and verbally. She did not appear to be a braggart, but, nevertheless, Ann Rogers knew that she was an exceptional person, in several ways. Always so courteous and so polite, she related gracefully to adults around her (including her high school teachers), and she also had several peers who were her friends.

I was not the only piano student that she had, but I definitely was the oldest student that she had. As I recall, at this time, she was giving music lessons to about 7 or 8 other students, beside me, and all of the other students were grade school children.

The above description gives a 'camera shot' of my early experience with the piano, and it gives a little insight into the kind of piano teacher that I worked with for a few years before I graduated from

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high school. Now, the following describes my particular situation - my 'tight quarters' - that made me wish I could 'fly away' from all people. Ann was 'proud' of all her students, with whom she had been diligently working.

As is true of all piano teachers, Ann Rogers scheduled a 'piano recital' during which time all of her students (including me) could 'show off' their respective musical talents. By this time in my 'piano career' (my 'career' that had proceeded for several years), I was playing rather difficult music.

My piano teacher gave me the assignment of playing a 'patriotic medley' (a combination of several patriotic songs), at the upcoming recital. Admittedly, this medley required a lot of concentration (for me), and it required a difficult movement of one's fingers (for me). Ann Rogers, my teacher, had long fingers, and she knew her music so well, and she made the playing of the piano appear to be so easy.

I suppose (subconsciously) I felt a certain 'envy' when I looked at Ann Rogers. How could one person 'have it all' - looks, talents, maturity, personality, social graces, etc.? I felt a little 'inferior' when I was around her. Grades did not come easy for me, I certainly did not have great 'social skills', I sometimes did not feel 'mature', I had lots of skin blotches on my adolescent face, I certainly was not a 'teacher's pet', and I struggled to play pieces on the piano (including the difficult patriotic piece of music that I was supposed to play at the upcoming recital).

I had practiced this 'challenging piece' of music for several weeks, and I felt rather confident that I could 'pull it off' (i.e., that I could perform this piece well) at the recital, in a couple of weeks. But, I would soon learn the painful lesson that the 'ground of over-confidence can give way from underneath you!' This recital was scheduled during a summer time month (probably in July). I attended (and enjoyed) the summer family camp (organized by my church).

This annual summer camp, held in Canon City, Colorado, engaged an inspirational speaker, and there were also many youth-oriented activities that I involved myself in. A busy and 'fun' time for the

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entire family, including teens (of which I was, of course, a part). Great was the camp activities, but what wasn't great was my neglect in practicing for the upcoming piano recital.

My piano teacher, organized as she was in most things, had arranged to host her piano recital, using the facilities of the old Fountain Baptist Church sanctuary. The sanctuary was not a large space, but the pews probably accommodated about 150 persons. When I and my mother entered the church building that evening, to prepare for the anticipated recital, it was obvious, true to her perfectionist ways, that Ann Rogers had invited a considerable number of her friends, and even some of her teachers.

Ann also invited the junior high principal of the school where she had attended a few years previously. This principal (Mr. Burns), in attendance that night, was also previously my principal. This man had been in education for many years. When I attended his school, I am sure that he was a 'fine man' and a 'fine educator', although, I must confess (for some reason), this principal did not have a particular 'attraction' to me when I was in his school. I think, however, the 'case' was different, in terms of Ann Rogers.

I think that Ann Rodgers was the 'pride and joy' to this particular principal, as well as to several educators (teachers) who were in attendance that night! This place (sanctuary) was packed, as I recall. Of course, all the parents of the younger children were present, to hear their offspring play their well-prepared pieces!

I felt a little 'strange' when I considered that I was the only 'teen performer'. Of course, all the participants (those who were scheduled to play on this particular night) sat together. I was surrounded by young piano students. My teacher was a peer (i.e., Ann and I had been in the same grade and classes for several years), but tonight my peer (Ann) was in the 'spotlight'.

All persons present, obviously, were so very proud of Ann Rogers - not just because Ann was a great pianist, but because Ann was an exemplary student in her school work, and because Ann was a leader among her peers. These teachers and principal knew Ann to be very mature (responsible) for her young age! It is no wonder that Ann's public school teachers (and a former principal) showed

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up for this important evening!

Ann, with her special 'grace and charm', welcomed the crowd of folks to the recital. Then, one by one the different students went forward and performed their particular well-practiced piece. Since there were several younger (grade school) children who played - and played well - obviously the pieces of these children were rather 'simple' and 'uncomplicated' in the level of music.

Then, my name was announced as the next participant. Remember that this piece was not 'simple', and remember that I had practiced this 'patriotic medley' for several weeks. I had diligently practiced playing the difficult 'musical movements'. This 'patriotic medley' (several combined songs with a patriotic theme) sounded so good to me, when I played it, on my old black upright piano, at my home!

I wanted everyone that night to enjoy the beauty of my well-practiced piece. I wanted the crowd (of teachers and of parents and of my own mother) to hear the medley, and, of course, I wanted my own piano instructor to be proud of my playing!

I started playing my piece. "O say can you see"! Why couldn't I get past those few words? I started again, and, as if there was a 'block' - a 'wall' - I couldn't get past those few beginning words! I again tried, but I again hit that 'wall' when I got to the word 'see'! At this point I began to 'panic'! Not only did I feel oncoming 'fear', but I imagined that my teacher was 'terrified' with my lack of performance. While I fumbled and fumbled - while I was in the process of experiencing a 'mental blackout' - you could 'hear a pin drop' in the audience.

A tense and embarrassed quietness descending upon the crowd of concerned onlookers. I am sure that they could hardly believe what was happening! I am sure that they were 'feeling' badly for me - and certainly they were embarrassed for the music teacher. They knew that I had the hardest piece to perform, and they probably wondered what happened to me.

Of course, each of the pieces were played without resort to looking at any music. I thought I had this challenging piece well memorized, but, at this crisis point (with all eyes focused on me), I decided that

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I needed to look at the music. My music (as a backup precaution) was laying on the top of the piano. I reached for the music, and I looked at the music, and I started to play the piece.

Admittedly, I had failed to practice my 'patriotic medley' during the 10 days that I was at the family camp at Canon City. I was so involved during those 10 exciting days at summer camp, and, after all, I was confident that I knew the patriotic piece well enough to play it at the recital. What a big mistake! I should have practiced that difficult piece, every day when I was at camp. There was a piano available, so I had no excuse to neglect my practicing.

When I thought I could now play the piece (since I was looking at the music), I again 'hit the wall'! I again got through a few words - "O say can you see". Even though I was looking straight at the music (with my open song book), I could not get past the word 'see'! I was totally befuddled and confused and embarrassed and humiliated! All I could do, at this point of major failure, was to get off the piano bench, and to get off the stage, and to walk down the platform steps to find my place in my assigned seat!

I was embarrassed (beyond words), my teacher was embarrassed, the entire audience was embarrassed! Maybe God Himself was embarrassed for me! I don't know! Probably not! Ha! When I took my seat, I felt 'terrible'! I felt like the spotlight of the entire audience was focused on me. My imagination began to 'run wild with me'! Was I the 'laughing stock' of the evening? I could never face any of these persons again!

All of these younger students performed their pieces 'perfectly', and I could not even get past the first few words! What good did all my practicing do for me, when, at the most important time, I failed miserably! If I could just have found a 'hole' in the floor of that church, before the evening's program was over, I would have dived into that hole, to hid myself from every face!

At the end of the program, Ann Rogers, true to her graceful and appropriate manner, simply stood up, and she thanked everyone for coming, and then she graciously said: "Some of our students do better during their practice times than they do during a recital!" Obviously, without drawing attention to me, she was referring to

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me! All of her younger students had done well, so who else could she be referring to, except me?

As soon as the program (recital) was over, I dashed out of the church as quickly as I could. My mother and I were given a ride to the recital, but I could not wait to get to the quietness (shelter) of my home. I walked (probably ran) in the darkness of the night, to my home, about a mile away. I did not want to face the person who drove mother and me to the recital!

True to her godly and loving character, when my mother arrived at our home, she never rebuked or chastened me regarding my 'grand failure'. She knew that I already was 'beating myself' inwardly, and, therefore, as a good mother would do, she tried to 'play down' my 'major goofs' and my embarrassing failures.

My dear mother could understand why I felt so embarrassed, but she continued to 'build up' my confidence. She knew that, although this admittedly was a major 'flop' and public embarrassment, every person, at one time or another, has had a time of 'feeling low' because of 'dropping the ball' in social company.

Mother was a very mature Christian, and, not only at this time regarding the piano recital, but on countless occasions (in the future) she would be a major supporter and encourager in my life! I have said previously, but I say again, that my mother was the kindest person that I ever knew during my lifetime!

REFLECTING ON THE PAST AND LAUGHING IN THE PRESENT!

This experience was anything but humorous or 'laughable' while I was 'suffering' through it. But with the passage of time, and with the clarity of judgment, I have been able to more objectively view this experience! When I was a teenager, to fail miserably, in the presence of a house full of adults (some of whom were professionals and probably 'perfectionists') was a very formidable and 'scary' experience.

The fact that I can recount the details of that evening at the Baptist Church where the recital was held - this demonstrates that the embarrassment of that evening (53 years ago) has been indelibly

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imprinted on my brain! I remember this frightening experience very well, almost as if it happened last week.

This piano recital happened (I think) the summer of 1961 (over 50 years ago, from the time I am presently writing this account). I think I was then 16 years old, and I am now nearly 69 years old! What does this tell you about the miracle of the human memory? Many events of the past would be hard for us to recall (at least in detail), but those events of the past that were filled with strong emotions - it's those memories that are relatively easy to recall (even after the passage of several decades)!

It is rather amazing that the human mind can look at an event, from more than 'one angle'. That is to say, as in the example of my fiasco with my piano recital (which evoked pain in me), a person can eventually look at a 'pain-giving' episode from a different angle (than the angle that one at first saw the event).

I certainly (legitimately) could not laugh at my embarrassing 'flop' (massive failure) on the night of the recital (and immediately thereafter). I certainly could not (would not) appear with my music teacher, the week after the recital, and then start 'laughing' regarding my failure.

Only after the elapse of some time, (perhaps a lot of time), I began to see the 'funny side' of my major failure with my piano playing. Now, years later, when I tell of this long-ago incident, I have grandchildren (four of them) who think it is so 'funny' that I could not play the patriotic piece. Over and over they like to say 'Oh, say can you see' - and then, to emphasize my major failure, they will say the same 'word' over and over. 'See', 'see', 'see', 'see'?

At this point in my life, I want my grandchildren (and friends) to tease me, to have fun with me, to emphasize my long-age piano recital fiasco! I am not sensitive to their 'teasing' of me, for, after all, I was the one who has learned to see the 'light side' of a one-time very heartbreaking event!

As long as we never make 'fun' (or hurt) anyone with our 'jesting', it is wise (as we get some 'distance' from an event that wasn't at the time 'laughable'), I say, it is wise for us to get a different 'angle' on

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the original event. We need, as we look at those distant events (which initially brought some embarrassment or discomfort) with a different 'angle' (with a different set of lens).

Most events (not the tragic events, caused by evil persons), I say, most events have a 'funny side' to them, if we are good-natured enough (humble enough) to allow ourselves to see the 'funny side'.

Even though the event that we were initially involved in brought us some distress (embarrassment, etc.), when the event has passed, there may be some humorous aspects from that event that can be retrieved - that is, there may be some laughable or humorous or strange aspects that can be retrieved from the past event that can give you a 'good laugh'!

It is a sign of maturity (objectivity) when you can recall some humorous aspects from your past 'event' - humor that can be used to allow you to share with your friends - to give them the small, but significant, gift of laughter!

The two episodes that I shared, previous to this episode regarding the piano recital - these two episodes are examples of finding humor in an event that, initially, was not laughable! When my math teacher (coach) became so frustrated with my lack of comprehension regarding a math concept, obviously, at the time of the event, I was not laughing.

I was embarrassed and rather shocked! But, often when I think about that beloved math teacher, and his impulsive action toward me, I do not feel anger or resentment. In fact, I am inclined to 'smile', and, at times, even to 'laugh'. I laugh because of his impulsive behavior (unbecoming of a school teacher who is supposed to be 'eternally patient' with students).

I also laugh when I think of my own struggle with a math concept, and I laugh as I see myself trying to catch the blocks that the teacher threw at me (because of his frustration). I can still see myself shocked, as I see the blocks flying through the air, aimed at me who was sitting in the back of that small math class.

He was not throwing those blocks at me (in a vindictive manner),

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because he did not like me, but because he did like me - and he could not understand how I could be so 'shallow' in my understanding! I can't help but laugh and laugh now - more than 50 years removed from that event which happened during my junior high period of life!

When I was 'put on the spot' and belittled and embarrassed by a teacher (this time in a high school algebra class) - by a 'military-type' teacher who used her piercing voice to tell me that she would rather be called a 'cow' than be called 'MAAM' - I certainly was not 'laughing'. If I would have laughed at that tense time, I, of course, would have been sent to the principal's office (maybe dismissed from her class permanently). No, I had no inclination to laugh (out loud) or to laugh (inwardly).

Far from laughing, I was nearly crying, and I was trembling inside. My emotions were erupting. On this second day of my education at Fountain High School, I was belittled and I was terribly embarrassed in front of my peers! I felt I was unfairly treated (which I, indeed, was). My mind was confused because I did not see that I had done anything wrong!

That experience (for a brand new sophomore) was traumatic, indeed. It took me a while to get over the trauma that came from that experience. My partial reconciliation with the teacher, based on much better information (regarding the teacher's legitimate classroom rules), this 'greater understanding of life' brought considerable healing to my emotions and better understanding to my mind. As the years have come and gone, with further maturity in my life, I have found a 'new angle' by which to interpret the over-all 'landscape' of this experience from my high school life.

Without any desire to 'make fun' of this little soldier-like teacher (strict disciplinarian), I have shared (on a few occasions) the drama of my classroom experience, when this little (old maid) teacher came into the classroom, to find me returning from a pencil sharpener, and then to 'blast' me with her shrill voice! When I answered her question (as to what I was doing), and when I addressed her with the courteous title 'ma'am', she said that she would rather be called a 'cow' than be called 'ma'am'! Now, from a

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distance, when I describe the kind of woman she was (without any derision towards her), and what she said to me, I find myself 'laughing' and 'laughing'. And a few others have gotten a good laugh!

'EXPLICIT LAUGHTER AND 'IMPLICIT 'LAUGHTER'!

Again, the following is a simple illustration of turning the 'angle' away from sadness (shock or embarrassment) involved in the initial event, and finding an 'angle' that allows you (and your friends) to see the 'funny side' in the details of the original event. Of course, some events are openly 'filled with humor' (laughter), and in that case, of course, you don't have to 'turn the angle' at all to receive (legitimate and wholesome) humor from your past (or present) emotion-filled event.

Some events in which you find yourself involved are obviously and clearly humorous (laughable) events, and you can quickly thank God for the gift of humor (laughter) inherent in these events. You don't have to extract some humor from these events, for humor is explicitly manifest in these special and delightful events!

In many other events (as I have illustrated above), the humor probably will be, not obvious, but, instead, be hidden. In these emotion-laden events, the humor is more subtle. Therefore, the humor in these kinds of events must be 'mined' (discovered and cherished).

There is 'explicit humor' (obvious humor that is easy to observe and to experience). The humor in some things is immediately in view, and the things that are openly and obviously humorous in those situations, causes you to laugh spontaneously. In fact, you can't help but laugh and laugh.

It would not be 'natural' to keep a 'straight face' (a gloomy countenance) in those obviously humorous situations. You might even find yourself experiencing a real 'belly laughter', because of what someone says or because of how someone acts. The Andy Griffith Show, and I Love Lucy Show cause viewers to quickly laugh, when viewers observe the 'funny characters' (what they say and what they do).

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There is little that is subtle about the humor that is displayed by the characters in these long-time popular shows! You naturally and quickly 'break out into a hearty laughter'. Laughter is a gift from God (that is, wholesome laughter - not laughter at someone's expense), and during these special times, God desires for you to 'split your sides' with laughter.

Our 'Laughing God' has made us, like Himself, with the capacity to laugh! As mentioned above, there are other events that, when they happen, are not laughable. God wants us to enjoy the 'explicit laughter', but God also wants us to learn to discover the treasures of 'implicit laughter'. This is a more 'rare type' of laughter - a laughter that has to be discovered, a laughter that is not obviously and openly experienced.

God wants us to do some 'mining' - that is, God wants us to see humor that is hidden in some events, that is hidden in the lives and in the events of some persons, and humor that is below the surface in the activities of some animals. For instance, humor may not be seen the first time one looks at an animal. God surely has a 'sense of humor', for just look at the 'ridiculously' funny faces of some of God's animal creation.

If you don't, at first, see the 'funny features' of some animals, just try looking again, and looking more carefully. When you observe some animals at your city zoo, you might find yourself laughing, or at least smiling!

When I look at the face of an 'ape', I inwardly start laughing. When an ape looks straight at me, I don't really believe that he is one of my evolutionary ancestors, but I must admit that some apes almost have a 'human face'! I laugh inside myself, and sometimes I shake my head!

How could God come up with so many designs in His creation of animals? I am awestruck when I observe the design of some animals, and I inwardly laugh when I look at the faces of some animal creatures! God must have had a 'great time' (lots of 'fun') when He decided to create this amazing world! Some animals are downright 'silly' or 'ugly' or 'funny-looking' (at least to me).

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Frankly, without my 'making fun' of any other human being, I occasionally meet someone (or observe someone) who is rather 'different' in appearance. For instance, I observe someone (an eccentric older man who has grown a very long beard, combined with his rather long, white hair), and I chuckle inside of me. I think of his unique facial features, combined with his very large abdomen (stomach), and I picture this eccentric older man as the 'perfect' Santa Clause!

I love to observe persons around me, and I note their unique shape and size and facial features! I am careful never to ridicule the persons around me, but I can't help but smile or chuckle or (away from their presence) to laugh out loud.

As stated previously, there is the 'explicit humor' (laughter), and there is also the 'implicit humor'. If you spontaneously 'laugh' when you listen to the 'I Love Lucy' show, this laughter is different than the laughter that you experience only after you have looked several times at an animal at a zoo, which, at first, did not appear as particularly 'funny'.

During the second or third time that you more carefully examine (observe) a certain animal, all of a sudden you burst out with a laughter. This is 'implicit laughter'. That is to say, the element of humor was all the time present, but you, as the observer, did not immediately see anything 'funny' the first time you made observation.

EXPERIENCING MORE THAN YOUR EYE BEHOLDS!

In some events (like my experiences in junior high math class and like my experience in my algebra class), there is more than the 'eye beholds'. My eye, initially, did not have 'fun' seeing the blocks thrown at me, and my ear did not have 'fun' hearing the algebra teacher verbally 'blasting' me.

As I have grown older (and as I have gained a better perspective on life in general), I have come to realize that there is more than one 'angle' by which I can look at life (and the events of life, even those events that, initially, brought me embarrassment or anger).

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Without sacrificing a profound reverence for God and a profound respect for my fellow men, I have learned (gradually) to look at life with, not only the 'angle' of 'seriousness', but also with the 'angle' of good-will and good humor and good laughter!

When I have recounted this long-ago (embarrassing) event (piano recital), there have been those (friends and family) who have had to 'burst out in laughter'. These friends and relatives have found it incredible that I could not get beyond 'O say can you see'. I told them that, for the life of me, I could not get beyond that 'mental wall' - I could not get beyond the word 'see'. 'See', 'see', 'see', 'see', 'see'!

Even when I looked at the music book, my fingers could not advance beyond a few words - could not get beyond 'see'. And I had an entire 'complex' musical piece to play, on that night, amidst some rather dignified persons (including my junior high principal)! Apparently, my mind was stuck on those few words.

I played those first few words beautifully, but the audience was robbed of all my other 'good playing'. Ha! They never witnessed my expertise in playing all the other parts of that wonderful 'patriotic medley'! My loss was their loss too! Ha!

Sometimes our own personal failures (not playing the musical piece) becomes the occasion for other persons to identify with our failures. This experience taught me about the danger of over-confidence. I should have been practicing during the time that I was enjoying summer camp.

This failure (as embarrassing as it was) was God's opportunity to deepen the spirit of humility in my life. When I failed so miserably that night, I was, of course, greatly humiliated! I wanted to see the face of no person, at the conclusion of the recital.

I learned, also, that my teacher (as young as she was) was a gracious person, in terms of what she said about some students performing better during practice than during recitals. She was (like me) only 16 or 17 years old, but she was so mature in her attitudes. She probably was saying these words, partly to 'cover for herself', but she definitely was trying to lessen my own feelings of

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embarrassment. No wonder so many adults admired this young lady.

I was not surprised, but my mother's attitude, following the recital when she returned to our home, just confirmed to me that God, indeed, had given me a most choice mother (a mother who always encouraged her children, especially during times of difficulty and embarrassment).

In coming years, there still may be a few persons (like my grandchildren) who laugh and laugh about this 'blunder' in my life- persons who may (at my 'expense') get a laugh or two from this night of 'major blunders'! "Oh say can you see"- 'see', 'see', 'see', 'see'?

IS THIS 'BLOODY SUNDAY'?

My wife and I, rather newly appointed to pastor a small local church in Ft. Collins, Colorado, were heavily involved in a variety of tasks and programs in our church. We were young and vivacious and enthusiastic, as we sought to do the tasks of outreach and nurture and hospitality. Because the church was so small, and because the number of volunteers was quite limited, Venita and I got our hands involved in a lot of work that might, in a larger church, be assigned to several laymen.

One involvement, among many involvements, Venita taught in the 'children's church' program. As an artist, Venita, of course, used objects as 'aids' to teach small children. On one Sunday morning, probably a couple hours before the children's church began, Venita asked me if I would cut a long dowel stick, into several short sticks (probably about six inches in length). I consented to do this simple job. The small dowel sticks were to be used by the children, to construct a small scroll. The scroll was to represent the scroll upon which The Ten Commandments were written on!

I went to my garage, and I wondered what kind of tool I would use to divide the long dowel stick, into several short dowel sticks, for use in constructing scrolls (in order to learn about Moses and the Commandments). I spotted a big shearer. The blades were tough and they were long. Just the ideal tool to 'snip' the long dowel stick into numerous short (6 inch) lengths!

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I was successful in using that large shearer to snip off a few of the 6 inch long sticks, but (how it happened I still don't know) I came down with those sharp blades, and caught the very end of my third finger, on my right hand! I not only felt severe pain (for there are a lot of nerves in the fingers), but, of course, the blood started to run down my hand! I was rather frightened, and I knew that I needed help! So much for the remaining dowel sticks that did not get cut!

Cutting the dowel sticks was productive, but cutting the end of my finger (nearly severing the end of my finger) - this activity was not productive! Seeing me that morning - using a larger shearer- no one would mistake me for a carpenter! Someone said (wisely) "Haste makes waste!" Another wise saying, "Using the wrong tool to do a job could be dangerous!" It was for me!

As my dear wife (much wiser than I am in practical matters of life) observed the 'blood' streaming down my hand, she (being the problem-solver that she is) called a kind-hearted gentleman, who lived a block from our house. Ernie (a long-time member of our church) rushed to our house. I held a rag around my finger, while he sped off to the hospital (emergency room).

He was so intent on getting help for me, that, while he was driving, he was not carefully watching other cars on the road. The traffic was 'light' on that particular quiet early Sunday morning, but, just as 'fate' would have it, Ernie side swiped another vehicle (just a few blocks from our house). But, just as providence would have it, the man whose car was side swiped, was a neighbor - a man whom Ernie knew! The man, seeing the nature of the emergency, minimized the accident, and he told Ernie that his car was not really damaged, and, therefore, Ernie should quickly get the pastor to the hospital!

If it was 'fate' (mere chance) that Ernie hit the neighbor's car, it was providence (God-controlled direction) that the neighbor man told Ernie not to worry about the minor accident, and to get on his way quickly to the hospital. (It could have been a situation where the neighbor would have been very possessive of his car, and where he could have made a 'mountain out of a mole hill').

Even though it appeared that the tip of the middle finger, on the

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right hand, seemed to have come very close to being severed altogether, in reality, the cut was not as severe as the pain indicated, and as the amount of blood flow indicated.

As I lay on a bed, in the emergency room, and as the wound was being cleansed and stitched, a nurse whom I knew came near the bed where I was lying. I knew that she had a rather 'dry' sense of humor, so I should not have been surprised by the frank words that came from her lips! Her words were in the form of a question: "What's going on? Is this 'bloody Sunday'?"

Believe it or not, I got back to my home in time to change my clothes so that I could get behind the pulpit, to preach my Sunday sermon! With a bandaged finger, but, after all, even preachers can use a 'little sympathy' from the members of his congregation!

It has been more than 40 years since that 'stupid act' in my garage- using a large shearer to cut dowel sticks! I still can see the slight mark on the middle finger of my right hand! The mark which is the result of a preacher who knew nothing about 'tools' - and especially knew nothing about the proper tool that should be used to cut a long dowel stick into many short dowel sticks - to make scrolls to teach children important lessons about the Ten Commandments!

Through the many years since that 'bloody Sunday', I have preached hundreds of sermons. I have made scores of hospital visits. I have shared the Gospel with many prison inmates. I have written dozens of books. I have had scores of Salvation By Appointment bible studies where many folks have prayed the 'sinner's prayer'. I have run thousands of miles, and have won a dozen trophies. I have mowed the church lawns numerous times.

I have laughed with others during the annual church potluck dinners. I have ridden hundreds of miles on my bike, side by side with scores of teenagers. I have taught lots of lessons to teenagers, and I have played dozens of games with persons of all ages. I have eaten hundreds of delicious meals, prepared and served by my wonderful and talented wife.

All of these experiences, experiences that have varied. Some

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experiences that required much: energy, motivation, skill and perseverance by me. Why have I not learned yet to do the simple 'carpenter' jobs? To be honest with you, I still don't know what tool I would use if I were asked to cut short dowel sticks out of one long dowel stick! Knowing that I am 'all thumbs' when it comes to carpentry, I am sure that my wife would find someone else (the next time) to cut dowel sticks! I can't blame her! It really hurts when you cut the end of your middle finger on your right hand!

LEARNING LIFE'S LESSONS IN HUMILITY!

'Implicit Laughter': a laughter that is not 'on the surface', nor obvious and not apparent when one observes an event. At the time of this long-ago fiasco (my 'bloody Sunday)', my cut finger was painful, my good friend side swiped his neighbor's car, my bleeding finger (what I thought, at the time, was near to being severed) had to be stitched (that meant I had to pay a bill to the hospital), I had to rush back to my church to preach a sermon (and I needed to act as if nothing had happened), and I had to bear the embarrassment because I was so 'stupid' as to use the wrong tool to do a simple job.

Isn't it interesting that, even though I was a young pastor when this happened, God was already (in my experience as a believer, and as a minister) teaching me some important lessons in 'humility'? Of course, it was not God who made me cut that dowel stick with the wrong tool, but, nevertheless, God is very able to redeem every experience of one's life, and God can use every event in one's life to teach lessons in humility, and to further mature believers in the 'faith'!

LEARNING TO DISCOVER 'LAUGHABLE' ELEMENTS IN LIFE'S EVENTS!

An experience that has 'in' it implicit laughter, is an experience that has in it ingredients that can bring a smile to the lips and even laughter from the mouth! It did not take me very long to see that 'Bloody Sunday' had in it some elements that could bring a certain lightness to my heart and a certain laughter to my emotions - a laughter because of the awkwardness of the elements in the overall event.

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The use of the wrong tool (how 'stupid' for a minister to use a larger shearer on a long, small dowel stick; the clumsiness of a driver who side swiped a neighbor's car, the openness of a neighbor to minimize the problem and to show concern that I be rushed to the hospital, the fact that the nurse - the head nurse of the hospital - would learn of my presence in the hospital and would use a term, in jest, that was quite vivid - 'Bloody Sunday'! To me, these are some of the 'strange elements' within the 'total experience' which cause me to smile, and, better yet, to laugh!

Some of the events in which I have been involved (like the previous experiences described thus far in this chapter of this book on Laughter), were experiences that, 'on the surface' were not experiences that could be labeled as humorous or laughable experiences.

It is only with the advantage of some 'distance' from the experience that some specific 'elements' within a particular event seem presently rather 'funny' and even 'laughable'. It is when the over-all (objective) view of the experience is examined that something about the event seems 'humorous'.

I have had several experiences (events) which, at the time I went through the different 'aspects' (elements) of the event, I was not 'happy', and the last response I desired to give was 'laughter'.

At the time that I was experiencing certain aspects of a certain event - an event that brought embarrassment or that brought physical discomfort (pain) - I never would have imagined that the time would come in my life (perhaps years later) when I would find a different 'angle' (perspective) in my life, an 'angle' that would allow me to stand back and to actually 'laugh' (at the context of the event and at the 'odd' and 'strange' aspects of the long-ago event).

DISCOVERING THE 'HIDDEN ELEMENTS OF LAUGHTER' IN LIFE'S VARIOUS EVENTS!

This is what is meant by 'implicit laughter' - laughter that comes when the humorous aspects of an event finally are 'mined' or discovered. One can only discover the 'hidden levels' of laughter if

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he has a spirit of humility, a spirit of teachableness, a spirit that is 'free' from the resentment that was experienced as a result of relational problems which were involved in the past event. If one is proud or over-sensitive or resentful, there is no ability to experience pleasure or happiness or laughter in any event of life.

He cannot experience (wholesome) laughter in even the most obvious humorous events, and he will have no motivation to discover the 'hidden elements of laughter' in any event. A proud or defensive or resentful attitude makes it impossible to see the 'fun' or the 'humorous' or the 'laughable' features in life (in general) or in a specific event (in particular).

It is the unselfconscious person, the humble person, the person of goodwill, the person who is at peace with his fellow men - only this kind of person has the capacity to embrace the love of God as it is displayed in its various dimensions. One of the dimensions of God's love is the dimension of 'laughter'.

LIVING THE LIFE OF 'RECEPTIVITY' TO THE GOD OF JOY!

Never forget that God gave us a world in which there are 'laughable' experiences. God wants us to see the 'comic' side of life, the 'laughable' features that are inherent in many of life's events, in many of life's relationships, in many of the movements and the facial features of the animals. But, it is only the simple-minded persons, the persons of 'faith', the persons of humility, the persons of gratitude who have the capacity to receive God's gift of good 'humor', the gift of outright 'laughter'!

There are some persons who are so proud, and so intent in 'making it to the top' (academically or materially), that they don't have sufficient time to stand back (in a spirit of humility and gratitude) and to gaze at God's amazing creation (of mankind and of the animals) and to give praise to their Creator. The person who is most given to praise of God, is the same person who is least self-conscious and who is most in love with humanity.

Such a person is most 'in tune' with the deeper meaning of life's events. When a person is most in communion with his Creator, he is most 'in tune' with the 'deeper levels' of God's creation. Of course,

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one's capacity to be sensitive to the deeper levels of meaning in God's creation - this capacity is subject to growth and to maturity.

The person who truly loves God is the person who gradually finds that he has a greater love for all of God's creation, and he also discovers that he has a greater sensitivity to the mysteries of creation and to the marvels and mysteries of the human species! Concerning the latter 'marvel', the one who is growing in his relationship with his Creator, is the same one who is growing in his appreciation of the human race generally, and he is the one who is increasingly fascinated with the uniqueness of each person that he meets or observes.

DO YOU ENJOY THE UNIQUE FEATURES OF YOUR FELLOW HUMANS?

Such a God-lover increasingly becomes a lover of each person who is in the 'circle of his own influence'. The 'closer' a person draws to fellow human beings, the greater does his love and his respect for his fellow human beings become. With respect, a believer accepts both the virtues and the flaws in the persons who surround him. With humor (and sometimes even with laughter), he observes the unique features in the lives of his friends (or relatives).

Far from 'making fun' of these friends and relatives, he, nevertheless, observes (with humor) the 'laughable' features of his friends and relatives. One laughs privately (perhaps out loud) when he thinks of the 'laughable' features of another person (certain body language, certain verbal pronunciations, certain habits that are 'funny', certain body build or body frame, certain ideas, certain kinds of cars, certain interior decorating 'tastes', certain exotic trips that involve 'rich foods', certain 'far out ideas' regarding future plans, certain 'health diets' that are extreme, certain doctrinal ideas that are radical in nature, etc. etc.). There are probably hundreds of 'strange' ideas and 'strange' clothes and 'strange' hobbies and 'strange' foods that raise your eye brows and that make you smile or even make you laugh (in private).

Your laughter, of course, must never be at the 'expense' of other persons. You have no desire to criticize or to belittle your friends or

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your relatives (whose outlook and practices are very different than your own)! However, the contrast between you and those friends and those relatives is so 'great' that you can do nothing other than laugh (usually in private, for you don't want to hurt anyone's feelings because of your laughter).

In response to the great contrasts between yourself and others (friends and relatives), you have a 'right' and you have an 'emotional necessity' to 'get alone' and to 'laugh' and 'laugh' and 'laugh'. While it is important to recognize that life (in general) is filled with sadness and tragedies and injustices and outright evil (and, therefore, we believers should 'weep with those who weep'), it is also important to recognize that God has designed a world which contains events that obviously and spontaneously evoke laughter.

Besides the 'explicit laughter', there is the 'not so obvious' laughter that must be 'mined' in order to discover it. We are talking about the 'implicit laughter' (the laughter that is hidden in the 'deeper layers' of some events that we personally experience). It is in these deeper, and more subtle levels of life that we can uncover 'rich deposits of laughter' and 'good humor'. But, it takes time and effort and careful observation to discover those deeper levels of laughter.

As stated earlier, we must be willing to change the 'angle' of our perspective, if we intend to discover 'implicit laughter'!

HOW GREAT IS YOUR CAPACITY FOR HEARTY LAUGHTER?

We should weep with those who weep but we should also 'rejoice with those who rejoice')! Not laugh AT people, but laugh WITH people! Find companions in your life who, with you, have the capacity to laugh and laugh and laugh! Good for the 'emotional system', and you will even be able to think more clearly after you enjoy 'belly laughter!'

When there is a growth in sensitivity to both God's creation in the animal world, and to the uniqueness of God's human creation, one dimension of that sensitivity (to nature and to humanity) is the dimension of 'humor' and 'laughter'. Of course, sensitivity to

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nature and to one's fellow humans always includes profound respect for God's creation (of the works of nature and of the creation of fellow humans).

HAVE YOU YET DISCOVERED THE 'HIDDEN LAYERS' OF HUMOR IN LIFE'S EVENTS?

Never would a believer intentionally 'make light' (outright scorn) in his attitude towards the works of God's creation (nature or mankind). But, while always maintaining an attitude of true respect for all things and for all persons, God intends for His followers to enjoy the obvious elements of 'laughter' in life and in nature (i.e., God intends for me, without scorn, to laugh at the characters in 'I Love Lucy', and God intends for me to stand back, while I visit a zoo, and to laugh at the facial features of some of the animals that God has created - such as the face of an ape).

These are examples, of course, of 'explicit laughter'. Further, as I grow in maturity and as I maintain a spirit of humility and gratitude (with no resentment or bitterness or pride), I am gradually able to discover the 'hidden elements of humor and laughter' in the events that I experience (or, more likely, that I have experienced in my past life).

There are elements of humor (even of laughter) that I can discover sometime after a particular event. At the time I experienced a certain event, I certainly did not experience humor or laughter. Only after I changed my 'angle', later in my life, did I discover 'hidden elements of humor and laughter' in a particular event.

At the time of the event - an event that, at the time, had the elements of either physical discomfort or of embarrassment - I did not see anything about the event (with its various 'elements') as 'funny' or as 'humorous' or as 'laughable'! With the passage of time, however, I found that there were, indeed, some humorous elements and even some very laughable moments, hidden in the event.

I, obviously, at the time of the event, took myself far 'too seriously', and I certainly did not see any humor in the event! Slowly, throughout the passing years of my life, I have had to learn not to

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take myself so 'seriously'! Now I can discern the 'hidden layers of humor' that were inherent in the event!

Most events have the potential of revealing (exposing) elements (details) that have the capability of giving the 'gift of laughter'! It is good to reap 'laughter' from the obviously 'funny' events (television programs and comedians) of your everyday life, but the 'implicit laughter' which requires greater awareness and sensitivity and effort, also can be discovered in many events (which, on the surface, do not appear to have any elements of humor or laughter).

Most of the events that I now consider to be 'laughable' ('funny'), were not events which, at the time, I considered at all 'funny' or 'humorous'.

After the passing of those events (and as I have gained further objectivity), I have been able to stand back and to see the 'funny' elements in the over-all event that I experienced. Of course, because some of the events (that I share in this book) were, at the time rather painful and embarrassing, I could choose (in the spirit of pride and privacy) never to share these experiences with anyone, and (at worst) I could have become rather bitter in spirit, because of pain or embarrassment that the event delivered to me.

Of course, the spirit of pride and the spirit of bitterness are both great 'enemies' to the spirit of 'good - will' and the spirit of 'lightness of spirit' and the spirit of uninhibited laughter! Of course, we (as humans and, specifically, as believers) likely will be involved in events that render many tears, and that will probably not have any elements (details) in the crushing event that has any ability to offer the 'gift of laughter'.

It is probable that most events that we are called to experience (some of which may have some pain or embarrassment involved), are events that have within them, some hidden deposits of joy and happiness and delight and even laughter!

After we have had some 'distance' and 'time' from an event that brought embarrassment or physical discomfort (like a hospital experience), we need to ask the Lord to help us to put forth the effort (with an objective mind) to discover the elements of

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'laughter' in that event.

Most experiences (events) have hidden in them some diamonds and some jewels of laughter. There are 'layers of laughter' in most events - events which, when looked at from one 'angle', appear to be 'joyless' and 'dull' and 'purposeless', but, when mined (by examination and prayer) contains delightful layers of deposits of joy and goodwill and pleasure and even laughter.

The layers of pleasure and laughter are not located 'on the surface' of most events (happenings). You will find them, however, if you search for them, if you pray for discernment, if you allow your mind to have a broader perspective of life.

When you discover the hidden and the strange (odd) and the laughable elements in an event (from your past), you will be surprised and you will be delighted with your discovery! You now see that long-ago event from a different perspective - a perspective with greater objectivity and with greater sensitivity and with greater spiritual maturity!

You now feel a sense of good humor, and now you even feel a sense of light heartedness. As you contemplate the event of your past life (an event that, at the time, seemed lacking of any pleasurable elements), you now wonder why you took yourself 'so seriously' back then!

You are now viewing your entire life (as a believer) from a different 'angle' than the way you viewed your life in the past. Of course, whatever sad elements were actually present in that past event, you dare not minimize (dismiss or ignore), but now you have a better perspective of the event of your past, and you are now (amazingly) able to see some 'layers of humor and pleasantness' in that long-ago event!

WHY SHOULD YOU 'STAND ON TIPTOE WITH JOY'?

Without belittling or humiliating others who were involved in the dynamics of the relationships of your past event (business transaction), now you can 'stand back' and you can objectively reflect upon your past event! With careful reflection, you can now

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see 'below the surface' of that past painful business situation (event)! You are totally amazed that now you can see the diamonds and the jewels of goodwill and pleasure and good intention, that you could not see or know when you were deeply involved in that 'event' of the past!

What once brought you pain (breakdown in human relationships) has been replaced by a spirit of kindness and forgiveness and pleasantness towards all your past associates! Forgiveness has been granted to all your past associates, and all your own misunderstandings with others have been resolved. Closed arms have now become open arms.

Now when you look at the entire event (of the past), you see everything differently. Love now prevails in your heart (as a believer). You wish nothing but the 'best' for everyone involved in the past difficult transactions.

The result of your conciliatory spirit are: joy, love, peace, reconciliation, and of all things, laughter! Yes, exuberant and uninhibited laughter! Laughter - a 'holy laughter' - a 'divinely-imparted laughter'. Laughter that comes from the inner fountain of joy in your life! Laughter because you know that your sins are forgiven! Laughter because you know (by God's grace) that your name is written in the 'Book of Life'. Laughter because heaven will someday be your eternal and happy home!

Laughter because you do not hold any grudges or any resentment toward your enemies, but, instead, you experience the divinely - imparted love that enables you to 'bless those who curse you, and to pray for those who spitefully use you'. Laughter, because you are learning to 'see the best in people', rather than to 'see the worst in people'. Laughter is always borne out of the heart and out of the lips of persons who are positive rather than negative in their viewpoint of life!

Constitutionally happy because 'you are living in harmony with the laws of the universe', rather than living against the 'grain of the universe'. Laughter because you are 'standing on tiptoe with joy', as you anticipate God's 'coming kingdom' to this world. Laughter because all the followers of Christ (including you) will be members

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of Christ's mighty army which shall eventually renders the total destruction of all evil in the universe.

Laughter because you will participate in the triumph of Christ in the hearts of men; issuing forth in widespread transformation of human souls. Laughter because you will forever (in time and in eternity) experience constant growth in the development of your godly character, gradually to become more and more like the character of the blessed Christ!

ALLOWING OTHERS TO 'LAUGH' AT MY 'BALD HEAD'!

'Baldness' obviously 'runs in my family'. 'Baldness' can be identified on the 'side of my mother', and also on the 'side of my father'. My father was very bald. My dad's brothers experienced 'baldness'. My brother, who enjoyed long black hair when he was young, has been 'bald' for many years. I have nephews who are 'bald'. My mother's brother was bald. On and on it goes. Strong genes, that resulted in the baldness of most of the men in my extended family. From both 'sides of my family', (mom and dad), I was destined to be 'bald', and 'bald' even in my 20's.

I had enough hair, when I was a teenager, to display various kinds of hair styles. For a few years I had a 'butch' haircut. The butch wax I used kept my hair standing tall! I was not to enjoy my longer hair for very long. By the time I reached my later 20's, I had lost a lot of my hair! When I early in my adulthood became 'bald', I tended to look older than I really was - and that perhaps made me (as a pastor) appear to be 'more mature' than I really was!

The 'closer' one draws to the Savior, the more he realizes that his 'identity' is not determined by the 'things' of this external world - not one's appearance, not one's wealth, not one's accomplishments professionally, not one's peers (friends), not one's intelligence, not one's physical prowess.

Even though I wish I had more hair on the top of my head, and even though I tend to 'envy' those men who have a 'full head of hair', I have (gradually) learned that I must be grateful for the amount of hair that I have. I must be grateful for my totally 'white' hair that I have!.

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I have learned that God does not have to take as much time, counting the number of hairs that I have, as the amount of time that He has to take in counting the number of hairs on the head of a man with a heavy 'stock' of hair! Ha! I have learned that God loves 'variety', and that is why He created every person uniquely (including His creation of 'bald-headed' men)!

As was mentioned previously, the spirit of pride and self-consciousness and bitterness, shuts the door to any possibility of enjoying God's gift of humor and laughter! I must confess that sometimes (in the past and even in the present) I have 'closed the door' to humor and to laughter in my life, because I have been too sensitive to my own 'feelings', I have been too defensive (because of my pride and self-protection), I have been resentful (because of someone's infliction of hurt to me).

All of the above-listed attitudes are definitely attitudes that 'come very short of the glory of God' (very short of honoring the name and the cause of the Lord). They are attitudes that not only 'close the door' to the possibility of enjoying wholesome humor and fun and laughter, but they are attitudes that bring offense to my Lord - attitudes that need the forgiveness and the deliverance that only God can give!

Unfortunately, the above-listed (carnal) attitudes have, at times, dominated my life. It is when these attitudes take the 'upper hand' in my mind, that I need the forgiving grace of God. It is when I have humility and gratitude and receptivity and a forgiving spirit that I sense that the 'channel of communication' between me and my God, is clear and unclogged and pure. When I sense that my heart is 'open' before God, I correspondingly sense that I am 'on good terms' with my fellow men.

The divine formula is simple (yet profound): When I love God supremely (with all my sins forgiven), then I am enabled to love myself wholesomely (with my 'identity' centered in God alone), and then, logically, I am able, without self-preoccupation, to care for others, to lovingly serve others.

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LEARNING TO LIVE A 'SELF-FORGETFUL' LIFE!

When I am walking closest to my dear Lord, I am then able to 'forget about myself', and I am able to reach out in love to others! When I know that my God thinks 'well' of me (that he loves me unconditionally, even with my many 'warts' and 'faults'), then I am able to accept my 'baldness' (and many other less-than-perfect features). Because I love myself in a wholesome (God-honoring) manner, I am able to 'forget about myself' and, instead, I am able to think of others.

As a 'self-forgetful person', I will spend little time thinking about myself, and I will not allow myself to become introspective (thinking a lot about my faults and failures and blemishes and oddities like baldness, etc.). Rather than spending a lot of time thinking about myself, I will concentrate my mind (and activities) on worshiping my Lord, and on serving my fellow men.

However, even though I am to love God supremely, and even though I am (rightly) to practically love my fellow men, there is a time and there is a place to love myself (not in a selfish manner, but in a nurturing manner). Not only do I legitimately think about myself, in terms of my using the 'means of grace', but in terms of allowing God to evoke laughter within myself. I may be the only one who sees the 'funny side' of a particular daily event or in a particular person that I meet, but that is alright with God.

God wants me to enjoy laughter (if it can be with others, that is the best, but, if the laughter is enjoyed in the privacy of my own soul, that, too, is good). Also, I must have my 'identity' pinned down (in God) so well, that I can enjoy 'laughing at myself'!

Because my identity is solidly grounded in Christ, I can gladly allow others (friends and family) to 'laugh about my particular oddities or about my particular unique features'!

I will gladly allow my friends to laugh with me about my own 'strange features' or 'unique activities' (like my bald head). Many times, through the past years, I have encouraged my friends to laugh with me, as I have had 'fun with my bald head'. Many times I have cracked a joke about my own bald head, like 'It is not

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everyone who is coming out on top in life!

Without drawing undue attention to myself, I have learned to allow myself to be the 'brunt of the joke' in social settings. When my friends have 'fun' referring to my bald head, I am glad, and I find it easy to laugh. I am not sensitive to a person's comments regarding my bald head!

People love to laugh, and people are greatly in need of a good laugh. So, with this in mind, I will make a joke about myself, and then invite my friends to 'laugh at me' (not in scorn or derision, but in loving laughter).

Only the truly confident person can point to something about himself that is 'laughable' (like my bald head), and then 'laugh at himself' and invite his friends to laugh at the 'oddities' or 'flaws' or 'blunders' that he finds in himself. Laughing at yourself and laughing with your friends - what a gift to any social setting!

Don't draw undue attention to yourself (even through laughter), but when it is appropriate (God-led), make yourself vulnerable enough to tell something about yourself (your weakness, etc.) that is humorous or 'laughable', and then open the door for everyone to laugh and to laugh and to laugh.

Everyone who laughs will immediately feel better, and those persons who leave the social setting will go home with a 'gift from God' - a gift delivered by you. You were, on that particular day, God's messenger of a 'choice gift' - a 'gift from heaven'!

Another illustration in which I have invited my family to laugh, because of a certain 'flaw' in my physical appearance: It seems like it has taken 'forever' for me to get my 'final teeth', based on my numerous 'implants'. As of this date, I still am waiting for my final dental product (teeth). The temporary (front) teeth (for specific reasons, determined by the dentist) are shorter than the final teeth that eventually I will receive. As a result of these shorter (front) teeth, my mouth tends to be somewhat 'sunk' inwardly. Somewhat like the appearance of a cave!

Perhaps you can 'guess' how I appear in photographs! Not good and

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not normal. I never was 'photogenic' throughout my entire adult life (my two daughters are very photogenic). Well, I know that a lot of persons are not terribly pleased with the photograph they receive, at the driver's license center. When I got my driver's license (and the picture thereon), I about 'fell over'! Men who are 90 years old are more handsome than I am! Because of my dental challenge, my mouth looked distorted. I could hardly stand to look at this picture. But, I decided, nevertheless, to have a lot of 'fun' with my picture.

I jokingly said that not even highway patrolmen would want to look at that picture on my license. A patrolman would probably be shocked, and maybe he would think that I was lying about my age. Are you sure that you are not 90 years old? I told my daughters (who were with me and my wife, a couple days before Halloween) that I did not need a costume for Halloween. If I showed this picture to the children at my door, the children would probably 'back off' and would leave my house! I would save a lot of the candy!

Before my daughters (in their 40's) left my house a couple days ago, they and their mother and I were laughing and laughing (almost splitting our sides!). As they left, the four of us mentioned how therapeutic laughter is! We all agreed that we need to laugh more!

OFFERING THE GIFT OF 'LAUGHTER' TO YOUR FRIENDS AND TO YOUR FAMILY!

It is a gift to persons when you allow them to 'laugh at you' (in a wholesome manner, of course). Forget your 'over-sensitivities', and then think of something about yourself (or about events that you have been involved in), that have some genuine elements of humor or of outright laughter. Be God's instrument to bring laughter and joy and pleasantness to others who desperately need to see the 'lighter side of life' for at least a little while!

Don't be afraid to laugh at yourself! Develop confidence in yourself (based on your identity in Christ) to the degree that you can allow others to laugh regarding your own 'oddities' or your own past 'blunders' (like my experience of using a long shearer to cut a long dowel stick).

To add to the humor, as I tell this story, I must be willing openly to

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expose my own 'ignorance' of carpentry, and my own 'stupidity' in using a shearer to cut dowel sticks! As is true of most events, there are several elements of humor, inherent in this event.

Openness, transparency, humility, and willingness to laugh at your own blunders - ingredients that are necessary, if you are to give the gift of laughter to another human being. If you are a natural 'comedian', you have a very special gift to give to the world. Very few of us are natural comedians, but, nevertheless, we all have some experience of humor that we can share - an experience that brought some delight, pleasure, fun, and laughter.

In the midst of our 'torn up world', one of the most cherished gifts that we can offer is wholesome laughter. God is very pleased when we do so! God knows a lot about laughter, and God also knows a lot about weeping! Weeping and laughing are two experiences, unique to God's special creation, but, unfortunately, our world is very deplete of laughter. Has God called you to be an 'apostle of laughter'?

FIVE INCHES OF RAIN ON OUR WEDDING DAY!

Have you ever had one of those days when everything seemed to go wrong? On the day of my wedding (August 12, 1966), it seemed that things went 'haywire'! My 'best man' from Illinois arrived very late the night before we were to be married, in the middle of a heavy Nebraska rain.

My to-be-wife, Venita White, was expecting an August sun for the day of her wedding, but, instead, she got up on the morning of August 12th to an angry grey sky that dumped out so much rain that several of the country roads were washed out, making it impossible for many of the guests to attend the ceremony that evening. The rain continued all day on August 12th and throughout the night, and, of course, during the time of the wedding.

My wife's aunt and uncle from Denver, who had planned to fly by small aircraft to Northern Nebraska, had to cancel their trip because of the storm. Lightning flashed and thunder clapped all day, a tree close to Venita's folks' house was struck by lightning, my relatives from Colorado, who verily made it to Nebraska a day

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before the worst part of the storm, thought they had come to the 'end of the world'. Venita's dad ran over Venita's young nieces' dog with his pickup an hour before the start of the wedding, my teenage nephew from Colorado almost made several persons late to the wedding because of the length of time he took to take his shower in the only bathroom in the country home.

At the wedding ceremony, one of my young (teenage) nieces who was a candle lighter, just as she was preparing to walk down the church aisle of that little country church, caught her veil on fire because of the hair spray she had used to keep her hair in place.

After the wedding ceremony was over, my older sister who was to cut the wedding cake, panicked at the last minute because she felt she lacked the proper skills to properly cut the beautifully - decorated wedding cake. Therefore, she turned over the job of cutting the cake to my beloved cousin who (as a mechanic) had been assigned (of all things!) to make and to decorate cakes in the Navy!

My cousin, George, came (providentially) to the rescue for my sister, and he cut the cake! After the wedding reception was over, I and my new bride dashed out the church door in the midst of a downpour of rain and we started my old Ford Falcon car, only to hear what sounded like a bomb going off! A startling, loud noise! My heroic cousin (cake cutter) - to have a little 'fun' - had placed a huge firecracker in the engine of the car!

After I regained my composure (in the presence of my new bride), I finally got started on the country road, with our destination, a small town (O'Neill) about 30 miles from the little country church where the wedding ceremony was held. More than once, I thought my old Ford Falcon was going to end up in a ditch. The country roads were almost unsurpassable. Of course, at this time, there were no paved roads, only dirt and sand roads. When there were 'gully washers' in that part of the country, it was not too uncommon for the country roads to be washed out.

Well, I breathed a sigh of relief when Venita and I finally reached the town of O'Neill, but my 'sigh of relief' turned to a 'groan of despair' when I went to the hotel office where I had made a

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reservation, only to find out that the hotel was closed for the night! We had arrived there too late! I thought hotels were open twenty-four hours a day! I had made a reservation, only to find out that the hotel was closed for the night! No place to stay on our first night as husband and wife! (Fortunately, I found another near-by hotel which was still open in that small town).

By this time, I was exhausted, and I began to wonder what else could go 'wrong'. Amidst all the mishaps and blunders and uncontrollable circumstances, I was most happy because I could declare that God had led me to the 'right' lady, to be my lifetime companion! And the happiness of that wedding night has been confirmed during the last 47 years of my life! (At the time of this writing)

I have often told my wife that God gave me the 'very best woman' when He gave me the 'wife of my dreams'. No marriage is perfect, but I know that, in spite of the obvious human flaws in our lives, God gave me the 'choicest lady' possible - for me!

As previously noted, there are two kinds of 'laughter' - explicit (obvious) laughter, and implicit (hidden) laughter. Because there were multiple 'flaws' before and during the wedding ceremony, I am sure that no one, at that particular time, was laughing.

In fact, my bride-to-be was shedding some tears, while the rain was pounding the country fields on August 12th. Venita's dad (a man of faith and optimism) tried to comfort and console his daughter, but, being a practical-minded man, he commented regarding the five inches of rain: "It is a million dollar rain, and the rain is so wonderful for the land!"

When I consider the number and the combination of 'odd' (strange) events that happened during that historic day, I have to chuckle to myself, and I have to even 'laugh'. There were several 'levels of laughter' - comic happenings - that, now, long after the wedding, are delightful to think about.

My normally diplomatic mother-in-law was so frustrated with the mishaps of the day (including the uncontrollable rain storm) that, as she was coming up the stairs of the little church, to enter the

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sanctuary for the ceremony, she was heard to say, "I feel like running to the hills!" Not humorous then, but this is another layer in the many layers of humor that made my wedding very unique!

In retrospect, as I think of my wedding event, it is quite easy (now) to identify many rather humorous (laughable) events and happenings. Most things that happened, nearly a half century ago, (August 12, 1966) had some unexpected elements, even humorous and laughable elements, in them. But the all-important ingredient in that marriage event was definitely not "laughable"!

The most serious commitment of my life was the taking of my marriage vows - vows which resulted in my living with my lifetime companion - living with a most precious and loving and loveable lady! I could not have married a more loyal and loving and creative and hard-working woman! "When she speaks, her words are wise, and kindness is the rule for everything she says. There are many fine women in the world, but you are the best of them all!" (Proverbs 31: 26, 29 Living Bible)

SOLID WEDDING CEREMONY AMIDST TANGLED CIRCUMSTANCES!

I have done a lot of "laughing" in my lifetime - laughter about a thousand different events and happenings! Laughter because of some strange and odd things that persons have done or have said! I have shared some of my laughter with my wife, but one thing she and I have never laughed about - the sacred vows that we took in that little country church, on August 12, 1966! I have had a few 'laughs' regarding the strange and the odd happenings, surrounding the actual wedding ceremony, but we have never had any 'laughs' regarding the most serious words of our marriage vow!

There were so many 'layers of laughter' (hidden layers) during that historic day - the day when the country side received five inches of rain! But, amidst the confusing details and circumstances of that important event, Venita and I recall, with greater memory, the heart-felt (God-directed) vows that we exchanged during that brief wedding service. God used a retired missionary (Venita's godly uncle) to lead us through the words of that ceremony.

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Frank Adamson, long-time missionary to Central Africa, was our easy choice to perform the wedding ceremony! What a wonderful (kind and tender-hearted) man he was. He jokingly said that this was the first 'double white ceremony' that he had performed.

All the Africans, of course, had 'black skin', and he had never performed a wedding ceremony for a 'white skinned' person, while he worked in Africa. Venita, of course, was 'white skinned', and, in addition, Venita's maiden name was 'White'! So, in a 'double sense', the ceremony was a 'double white' ceremony (totally unique ceremony, in that unimportant sense of the term)!

Just one more unusual (strange) element (feature) to add to the other strange or unexpected features that transpired during my wedding event! Odd and strange things that happen, sometimes (with the passing of time) turn out to be rather humorous or even laughable happenings!

"KINDNESS IS THE RULE FOR EVERYTHING SHE SAYS AND DOES!"

I look back to my wedding event, and I respond in different ways. First, the vows I took several decades ago have always remained in my mind as the most sacred words that I ever spoke. The vows I took on that historic night, obviously, changed my entire life. I have never regretted that I took those vows! I have grown to love and to cherish my wife, more each day, since that wedding night!

I admit that I have been unworthy of her love, and I acknowledge that she has contributed far more to our marriage than I have contributed to our marriage. She is a far better woman than I am a man. She is more godly than I am, and she is definitely more intelligent and more talented than I am.

I admit that my failures as a man and as a husband are too many to recall to my mind. I am grateful that she has had the 'grace' to forgive me when I have failed her, in many ways. I am thankful that she is not a wife who has held 'grudges' against me. She quickly forgives and she readily restores me to a 'level playing field' with her. She has, at times, legitimately been very angry with me, because of my immaturity and my irresponsibility in my role as

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husband.

I have made some decisions (business decisions) that turned out to be 'financial disasters'; and, understandably, she has been very upset with me. In the 'name of wifely submission', she consented to some of my decisions - decisions that turned out to be very unprofitable, financially. Of course, I failed to listen to the wise advice of my wife, and I 'paid a big price for the poor business decision!'

Unfortunately, I have sometimes failed in my role as a worker and provider. She has occasionally given compliments to me, for a job well done, but I generally receive her affirmations, through her positive (serving) actions toward me. I have never doubted her love for me.

She is rather independent-minded, and she actively pursues her own projects with great zeal and with great creativity. But even though she is her 'own person', she is properly submissive to my authority as her husband. Concerning the topic of 'submission', she believes that the Bible teaches that a husband is to be submissive to his wife, just as a wife is to be submissive to her husband.

She points to the verses in Ephesians 5 that states that there is to be 'mutual submission'. She agrees that the husband is appointed to be the leader of a marriage, but she believes that many Christians have used these verses as the justification for a man to lord over his wife (a total perversion)!

She is a natural leader and administrator (her own 'self-starter' and motivator), so it is natural for her to make a lot of her decisions 'on her own' (without consulting me). But, even though she is a natural leader, she is careful not to 'override' my position as husband. There are many decisions (usually the major decisions) that are made, only after she and I have taken time together for dialogue and prayer.

She is free to think and to act, without my imposed restrictions on her. She is frugal in spending money, and she is hard-working in all she does (in her domestic jobs and in her professional jobs - of which there have been several).

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I love to hear her read devotional books, and to pray (a wonderful prayer warrior). She loves to debate many issues with me. I usually lose the debates with her! She has a tender, compassionate heart, and she combines these wonderful qualities with her objective thinking and her sound judgment.

God has given her the gift of wisdom, and this gift enables her to offer much wise advice (to me and to our daughters, and to anyone else who asks her for counsel). She is generous in the many financial gifts that she has given to needy persons.

She has a dry sense of humor, but she is not subtle with me when she usually finds something each day that becomes her reason to 'tease' me about. In fact, she and I exchange a lot of teasing, and this part of our communication seems to add some humor and some 'flavor' to our day.

She manages life in general very well (as a gifted administrator), and I am glad that, many times, she helps manage me! Not all the time, but most of the time, I listen to her many wise suggestions!

Her input is invaluable when she and I are in the process of making small and larger decisions. I am amazed with the insights and the discernment that she demonstrates when business matters are the topic of our discussions. She has, during all of our married life, been a competent and successful 'business woman'.

She is a great artist! Her drawings and her paintings are truly remarkable. She is a sensitive and creative home decorator. She has cooked thousands of meals, not only for me and for my daughters, but for many others.

She knows how to save money, whether it was when she did daycare as a business, or when she was a pastor's wife, or whether it was when she was a school administrator, or whether it was when she cared for the elderly in our home for the last nearly 20 years! She was a loving and caring mother, and she continues to have open and understanding communication with her daughters.

She is industrious, hard-working, and creative! During all of her life, since her childhood, she has enjoyed creating projects, of all kinds.

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She is most satisfied when she is working on a project - particularly, a project that involves 'problem solving'.

Of course, she does not always agree with my ideas or my plans, but I have never questioned her faithfulness and her commitment to me, and to our marriage. She has a tender heart, and she has experienced great sorrow and heart-wrenching grief, as a result of serious losses to her personally and to her and to me, as a couple.

Ever since she was a child, living on her parent's ranch in northern Nebraska (in the sand hill country), Venita has loved cats. At one time, when Venita was probably in grade school, she cared for 20 cats (and kittens) - at one time! Venita sometimes treated her kittens as if they were 'little humans', when she took them on rides in her child-sized 'baby carriage'!

At one time this young 'cat lover' noticed that she did not have as many cats (and kittens) as she previously had. The 20 outdoor cats were strangely disappearing! At the time the young Venita was rather ignorant of the source of the diminishing 'cat herd', but, as an adult Venita decided that her beloved dad felt that 'too many cats were too many cats'! Venita's dad found that the horse tank (full of water) was a convenient way to 'mysteriously' thin down Venita's 'cat herd'!

Venita, as an adult, figured that her dad decided that the large 'herd of cats' was taking too much milk (one good reason for disposing-drowning - some of the cats)! Venita never, at that time, inquired of her dad, and her dad certainly was not going to reveal that he was the one who was the 'murderer' of Venita's many cats!

During Venita's adulthood, she has greatly enjoyed the owning (and the nurturing) of several cats (including her present, very loyal cat named 'Gracy')! I have two 'females' (Venita and Gracy) who sleep in the same bed that I sleep in, and Gracy usually sleeps right at Venita's feet all night long! Talk about a loyal 'sleeping companion'!

Enough about cats! I will now move on in my attempt to 'paint a simple profile' of my beloved wife! She and I are both committed to marital fidelity! We have never doubted each other's loyalty. She has enjoyed the friendship of several men (in our church). Several

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men have been attracted to her, as a believer, because she is very likeable. She enjoys, administratively, to work with men (the work of the church and of the Christian School), because she thinks that the men she works with understand her goals. She likes their ability to be objective, in problem solving (rather than being emotionally-oriented, as so many women are).

During the time I was ill (with depression, for nearly 3 years), my wife was strongly committed to my recovery. As difficult as this time was (and it was a horrible time), she was by my side, and she sought diligently to find the proper aid for me. 'For better or for worse' - words from the wedding vows!

During the greatest trial of my life, she stayed with me, and she prayed for me and with me, and she patiently waited until I found the healing that I desperately needed. One of the greatest tests of her life (and of her marriage), she passed this test (with great difficulty, but, nevertheless, she passed). I shall be eternally indebted to my wife, because she showed her 'true colors' when she and I together traveled the rough and long road called 'depression'!

'For better' - we have had so many wonderful, exciting, humor-filled days also! We together have known the extremes in the outpouring of our emotions - both joy and sadness ('for better or for worse'). My depression and our daughters' respective divorce would, of course, be on our list of 'worse' times.

The love that Venita and I share, the love that we have for our daughters and their families, the salvation and the growth of many persons during our long-time ministry in the local church - these are a few of the 'better' times that we (as a couple) have experienced, during the last (so far) 47 years of our marriage!

Many years ago my wise and perceptive brother (Jerry) told me that he believed that Venita was the 'most unselfish person that I knew!' An unusual compliment, but one that probably could be embraced by other persons - by her daughters and certainly by me!

Venita is so sensitive that she does not do or say anything that appears 'braggart' or 'boastful'. She is careful to give God the

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praise and the glory and the credit that is 'due unto her Lord', for she knows that without God she could do nothing! She is very confident (in her work), but her confidence is placed in the Lord whom she deeply loves and whom she serves.

DISCOVERING THE 'HIDDEN LAYERS' OF HUMOR AND LAUGHTER!

Amidst all the sorrows and losses and grief that Venita and I have experienced (in our personal relationship, and in other contexts like the local church), we have experienced a lot of joy and pleasure and happiness and, yes, laughter! All because of our faith in Jesus. Most of the episodes that are shared in this book on 'Laughter', are episodes that, at the time, were certainly not 'funny' or 'laughable'.

In most of the episodes (in which I was involved), there were a variety of emotions felt and expressed, and they were not, at the time of the happening, emotions that were rejoicing in the elements of the event.

Usually, I felt embarrassment or I felt humiliation or I felt physical discomfort (or even pain), or I felt frustration (as was true of my wedding event). Sometimes I felt confused and disorganized and astonished (all reactions that I sensed as a result of the strange and odd things that happened before and after my wedding ceremony).

The concept of 'implicit laughter', has been mentioned several times, previously. Almost all the 'comic' events that are shared in this book on 'Laughter', were not 'comic' at the time that the elements (details) were unfolding in the various described events!

At the time of the various events, I saw no humor in the specific elements (details) in the unfolding event. Instead of humor in the unfolding of the event, I saw an unraveling of something that was supposed to 'come off without any missteps or blunders or human error'. What happened, for instance, at my wedding event, shows that if something can go wrong, oftentimes it will go wrong ('Murphy's Law').

When I experienced some of the episodes (recorded in this book), I

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learned that I am very fallible (as if I didn't know that before the particular event!), and, of course, I learned that all my fellow humans are also fallible.

Lest I get too confident in my life, I was reminded that, wedding or no wedding, the Almighty Controller of the Weather, was intent in sending 5 inches of rain to a Nebraska ranch on August 12, 1966! We humans are not able always to order our own actions (for we are capable of human error), and we certainly have no control over the weather (that is in the hands of our Creator)!

WHOLESOME LAUGHTER AND UNWHOLESOME LAUGHTER!

I believe that it is true to say that 'forgiveness is the oil in the machinery of any good relationship', and this stated assertion regarding 'forgiveness' is certainly true of the relationship of marriage. Also, I believe that it is true to say that a 'good sense of humor' (laughter) is like the flavoring of salt in a plate of delicious food. The food (as well prepared as it might be) requires the light sprinkling of salt on it, if it is to be 'tasty' and 'appetizing' and 'appealing'.

Of course, my wife and I have regularly had our serious talks (where laughter usually is not appropriate), but we have also found that 'laughing' and 'joking' and 'teasing' give 'emotional release', and oftentimes help us to gain some perspective regarding the small and the big issues of our life. Of course, we dare not minimize serious issues, or ignore those issues that require our serious attention, and simply 'cover those serious issues' by merely 'laughing'.

Laughing must never be a 'cover-up', an attempt to ignore the things which must be faced and which must be confronted in relationships. That is a wrong use of 'laughter', and is an unhealthy practice in any marriage relationship. As the book of Ecclesiastes teaches, there is a time for all good things.

There is a time to talk with your spouse seriously (with no humor), and there is a time, on the other hand, for laughter (without the intrusion of serious talk). There is wholesome laughter, and there is laughter that is not wholesome! And we need always to know the

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difference.

There are some persons who are too light-hearted and too giddy, and these persons have not yet learned to face life with a proper perspective, with true maturity. They need to be more serious-minded, with no intrusion of laughter and giddiness.

On the other hand, however, there are other persons, unfortunately, who are too serious-minded, persons who are very colorless and very humorless, persons who don't wish to laugh at the most obviously 'funny things' of daily life! Obviously, these persons certainly have no desire to 'dig' into the deeper layers of humor and laughter that are present in most events!

It is wholesome laughter that we all should desire to experience. Food without salt is tasteless and unappealing and possibly even repulsive. Life, like food, is tasteless and unappealing without the proper amount of the 'salt of humor' for the 'food of life'!

Jesus laughed (at the right times and with the right degree), so why should we not 'laugh'? Wholesome laughter is a sign that one is rejoicing because his relationships with life, though not perfect, are authentic and they are real.

'Constitutional happiness' comes because you are in right relationship with everyone - with your own self, with your own God, with your own fellow men.

FLAVORING YOUR MARRIAGE WITH THE 'SALT' OF JOYFUL LAUGHTER!

Venita's 'dry humor' and her 'jesting' and her 'teasing' - during the decades I have lived with her have built up our marriage and our special communication. Of course, the teasing goes both ways.

She delivers the 'teasing' tastefully and delightfully, but what she gives to me, she gracefully (with 'fun') takes from me. There have been several elements in our marriage which have spelled success, but I think Venita's 'dry sense of humor' - her daily delivered dose of wit and jesting and teasing - has been like 'salt' which has seasoned the 'food of our marriage' very well!

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Venita and I seek to take God 'very seriously', but both of us try not to take ourselves 'too seriously'. We both have learned to laugh at ourselves, and we have allowed (with no scorn whatever) for the other partner to laugh at the occasional 'ridiculous thing' that each of us does.

We can't take ourselves too seriously, for we both know that life is full of foibles and mistakes and missteps and oddities! It is easy, in the marriage relationship, to 'trip over your own feet' - or to 'trip over the feet of your partner'.

After all, I live with her and she lives with me in 'close quarters' (and we are with each other in every 'imaginable circumstance!'). We better 'keep laughing' when we realize that we have committed an innocent misstep.

We must be tolerant when we observe each other's foibles and oddities and sometimes even 'strange' behavior. We, after all, are very different in tastes and hobbies and talents and personality and background.

My actions and my preferences and my projects may, at times, seem 'crazy' to my wife, and vice versa. For instance, my wife likes 'soft lights' throughout our house, and I enjoy 'bright lights' (a subject for debate, at times). She likes soft (classical) music playing in the background most of the time, and I enjoy quietness most of the time in our house (again, a subject for occasional debate).

We, as husband and wife, must learn (continue to learn) to 'give and take'. Even though I prefer quietness in our house, I often 'give in' to her and I allow her to play classical (or religious) music. I have the bright lights turned on in our kitchen, and, humorously, she soon comes into the kitchen and quickly turns down the lights (or turns them off altogether).

I am sure that we will never be in agreement on the subject of 'lights' and 'music', but, as a decent husband, I should be the one who 'gives in' most of the time to my wife!

We usually have a few laughs regarding these two areas of conflict.

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She tells me (in jest) that she does not understand why I like bright lights (which, she says, drains all the energy out of her), and she tells me that she does not like 'silence', that she has to have beautiful, calming, background music playing in our house.

She gives me a 'hard time' about my lack of 'sensitivity' to music and to 'proper lighting', but we continue to tease each other about our 'obvious differences' - and we sometimes even get a 'good laugh' as we 'debate in good humor'. As I earlier stated, I, as husband, almost always 'give in' to my wife's preferences, but when I am home alone, I enjoy my bright lights and I enjoy my quiet house!

ARE YOU EXALTING OR ARE YOU DEGRADING YOU'RE MARRIAGE PARTNER?

A good marriage partner will pick up the other partner when he or she falls or fails. Good marriage partners never shame or belittle their partner. Neither partner focuses on the 'weakness' or the 'faults' or the 'physical disadvantages' of his or her partner. I make 'fun' of my own 'bald head', but my wife never makes 'fun' of this so-called disadvantage that I have, as a result of my particular 'genes'.

My wife has told me (through the years of our marriage) that she likes my bald head. Most of our marriage life, I was self-conscious regarding the fact that one of my front teeth was slightly crooked. But my wife, gracious as she is, has told me (time and time again) that she did not even 'notice' that slight imperfection. And, visa versa, I have not made an 'issue' regarding my wife's 'hearing problem' (which was wonderfully dealt with, through her hearing aids).

WHAT IS THE 'SECRET' TO DEVELOPING A GREAT MARRIAGE?

Marriage partners must always build up each other, never degrade or belittle or criticize each other. If marriage partners are intended to be each other's 'best friend', then marriage partners should treat each other as 'best friends'! Humor or jesting or teasing or laughing should never be used as 'cruel tools' to destroy marriage partners!

Partners in marriage are not to be in competition with each other. "In

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honor preferring each other" - this is to be the attitude that is manifested in a good marriage relationship! Only when the love of God is 'shed abroad' in the heart of each marriage partner, can each partner put the other partner before himself or before herself!

When each partner in the marriage is focused on pleasing Christ, then each marriage partner has the strong motivation and the deep desire to serve his or her marriage partner.

Loving God supremely enables the marriage partners to take delight in serving each other in the spirit of genuine love! Each partner becomes a 'beautiful channel' through which the divine-type love (agape) flows to the other partner. This is the 'secret' to developing a truly 'great marriage'.

Without the 'flow' of that divine-type love, from each partner to the other partner, the marriage partners will be in selfish competition with one another, and, at worst, the marriage partners will become very self-centered (and often these selfish-driven individuals will divorce).

IS IT TIME FOR YOU AND YOUR MARRIAGE PARTNER TO START LAUGHING?

We must always see the 'funny side of life', in general society, but particularly in our marriage. I have done some things right, but Venita has done a whole lot of things right - as evidenced by the fact that we still live together and we still love each other truly, even though we have been together many thousands of days (in fact, almost a half century)!

Why cry, when we should be laughing together? We have borne the burden of the day - we have worked hard, we have shed many tears because of our heart-breaking trials, we have experienced many losses in relationships and in ministries that were once dear to us, because we are advancing in age we now have added limitations, we sometimes experience a sense of loneliness because some of our friends and our loved ones are dead, we ourselves are quickly

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approaching the end of our physical life - yes, these are realities which could make us weep and weep!

Even though (scripturally-speaking) there is a time for weeping, there is also (scripturally-speaking) a time for wiping away our tears, a time for looking anew to the God of all hope and healing and joy and restoration!

There is a time for rejoicing and for praising and even for 'laughing'! The Bible says that, after the weeping of the night, there is 'joy in the morning'! Remember: the couple who prays together, stays together! Is it going too far to say that the couple who regularly laughs together, stays together? If God laughs (and I think He does), why shouldn't a marriage couple laugh together?

"I THINK I AM GOING TO MAKE IT!"

As is true of many pastors, I was accustomed to working 'hard and long hours'. I was, at the time of this particular incident, rather young, and I was full of enthusiasm and zeal to 'advance the work of the Lord'. Up until the time of the following incident, I had spent many nights in the home of many couples, presenting to them the 'plan of salvation'.

I did many other 'things' in my pastorate, but the winning of souls (through the presentation of the 'plan' on a one-to-one basis)- this activity, though it required lots of time and energy (and boldness) - was the 'meat and potatoes' of my ministry.

I loved to see sinners converted (in their home, right before my very eyes). Seldom did I spend time with my wife and my growing daughters in the evenings. I was out in the neighborhoods, evangelizing the lost ones, with the homes of sinners as the context for evangelism, and with my handy 'flip chart' as my helpful 'visual aid' as I presented God's wonderful salvation 'plan'!

It was not unusual for me to be in some sinner's home, for a 'salvation by appointment' Bible study. I personally led

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approximately 300 adults (sinners) to Christ, in the context of people's homes! What was unusual on the particular night that is the present 'focus' for this account, is the fact that I was presenting the 'plan' to a couple, using my own church office as the context for the 'salvation by appointment' Bible study. I finished my presentation of the 'Salvation plan' about 10:00 p.m.

Admittedly, I was a 'little' tired, after a long day of work, but, nevertheless, I was thankful that God gave me another opportunity to share the plan of salvation with another couple. I found great joy in soul – winning.

It was rather late (probably near 10 p.m.) when the couple finally left my office. I called my wife and I told her that soon I would be home.

For some reason, I used my old Schwinn bike as my means of transportation for that evening. Occasionally, I enjoyed riding my old (one gear) bike, rather than using my car for transportation. I lived about two miles from the Free Methodist Church (and my church office).

From a conscientious viewpoint (and possibly from a legal viewpoint), I had 'no business' riding my bike during night time hours. I had no idea, when I started out on my bike, from my office, that I would soon be involved in what could have been a fatal accident. In spite of my own failure (in riding my bike at night, with no lights), I believe that God (perhaps His protecting angel) was watching over me on that particular night.

Even though I was relatively young in age, I was rather tired in body, and I was anxious to get to my home in the shortest time possible. When I came to a main highway (about one mile from my home), I violated one of the most 'basic rules' of biking! Instead of crossing the highway, and riding on a large sidewalk that paralleled the highway - on the right side of the highway - I decided that I would take, what to me, was a shortcut. I rode on the left side of the highway (where there was no wide sidewalk). This mistake (this breaking the law) gave me a 'serious consequence' (and it gave some other human being also a 'serious consequence')!

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It was a 'dark night', and I (foolishly) rode my old (solid) bike, on the wrong side of the highway. The traffic (of cars) was 'heavy' that particular night. All I could see as I continued to ride on that opposite side of the road (opposite from where I should have been riding), I say, all that I could see were the blinding and bright car headlights.

After riding my bike about 50 yards (on the wrong side of the highway), I collided, head on, with another biker. This biker, traveling quite fast on a multi-speed bike, properly had lights on his bike. Because he was riding on the proper side of the highway, he had full 'right-of-way'.

He was totally 'right' in everything he did (how he rode), and I was totally 'wrong' in everything I did (no lights on my bike, and riding on the wrong side of the highway). (When I considered the fact that I was so 'wrong'- breaking the 'law' - I am grateful that I serve a 'God of mercy', not simply a 'God of justice').

As a result of this 'head-on collision', I was knocked out, and the man whom I hit was also knocked out! Strangely, and providentially, an off-duty police officer came upon the scene of the accident. Both I and the man I hit were lying, unconscious, at the side of the road.

I could have been dead, for when I hit the other bike, I could have been thrown into the heavy traffic, buzzing back and forth just a few feet from where I hit the other bike. Instead, God allowed for my body and for the body of the other man to land away from the ongoing traffic!

This off-duty police officer 'happened' to be live just a few doors from my home! I knew him, as a neighbor. He was a believer. He, of course, arranged for an ambulance to come to the scene of the accident. He knew that this might be a serious accident.

The first thing that I remember hearing, when I began to gain consciousness, was the interchange conversation between the ambulance attendants. One attendant said to another (regarding me):

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"Be careful not to move his neck. It may be broken!"

The off-duty police officer, after he called for an ambulance, made his way to the front door of my home, to inform my wife (and daughters) of the accident. I must say (at this point) that I believe there may be times (perhaps many times) when God (Holy Spirit) moves and directs and protects and communicates - 'below the visible surface' of a particular event.

What I next report, 'sends a chill down my spine'. Venita said that, when she heard the loud siren of the ambulance, a short time before, she knew that I had been involved in an accident!

Of course, I did not know at the scene of the accident, but I learned later that (logically) both myself and the other man whom I injured, were brought to the same hospital (obviously), in the same ambulance! I learned that both he and I sustained the same type of injury - namely, a cracked jaw!

It was clear (after knowing all the details regarding the accident) that I was totally 'at fault' for the accident. I felt sorry because of the discomfort (injury) that the other man sustained. I never met him, but I understood that he worked at King's Soopers Grocery Store (not too far from my home).

I often wondered if I saw this man at the store, without knowing of his unique identity. My Home Owner's Policy took care of the needed financial settlements. I am thankful that I was not personally sued, because of my 'stupid' (impulsive) actions!

When my wife and teenage daughters got to the emergency room, I was a little 'unsteady' in my speech and mannerisms. The first question that my wife asked me was: "How are you doing?" Then, in a deep voice, tinged with a little 'humor', I replied: 'I THINK I AM GOING TO MAKE IT!'

Thank God, I did make it through that harrowing experience! The doctor wanted to, 'wire shut my mouth', to allow the cracked jaw

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bone more quickly to heal. I responded, 'Nothing doing. I want to eat food, and I need my mouth to enable me to preach!' The doctor did not insist, and before long I was healed totally! God, again, was very merciful to me!

God enabled me to express a little 'humor', even during the time when I had verily arrived at the hospital emergency room. "I think I am going to make it" was a response to my wife, salted with a tinge of humor!

Many times since that long-ago event, when I have been asked by my wife, during a difficulty I am facing (physical illness or a different kind of challenge that is not morally charged or physically endangering), I say, when I have been asked by my wife about my welfare, I will respond 'I think I am going to make it!'

'I think I am going to make it!' - that has been my 'standard reply', and my wife and I have enjoyed the 'humor' that is inherent in the statement (all because of my time in the emergency room).

"WHO IS IN THE WHEELCHAIR?"

It was a beautiful night, but a dark night with only the faint light from the overhead street light. For some reason, I was standing on my front sidewalk. I happened to glance down the street, towards the west. I could hardly see the object that was coming towards me, but I finally recognized that the object was a wheelchair!

I wondered why an older person, in a wheelchair, would be taking a stroll at this time of night! I could hardly see the wheelchair that was approaching me, but I continued to gaze at this rather strange sight! Whoever was in the wheelchair must be rather courageous to be out alone, at night! Maybe I soon would be able to see and to greet this rather unusual person! And then 'surprise of surprises'! I could hardly 'believe my own eyes'! The wheelchair that had been steadily approaching me, down the middle of the street, had no one in it! And, strangely enough, not only was the wheelchair 'empty', but the

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wheelchair was in a folded position!

I was 'surprised', and I felt 'foolish' when the 'folded wheelchair' rolled right up to my feet, as I was standing at my curb side! What I thought was an older person taking an evening stroll in a wheelchair - taking an evening stroll down my street - turned out to be a folded wheelchair!

One of the strangest sights that you can imagine - the folded wheelchair was rolling on its own, right towards me! I had anticipated a 'chat' with an older person, and all I ended up seeing was an empty wheelchair! I had a 'creepy feeling' come over me!

How could a wheelchair 'travel' such a 'straight' course? How could a folded wheelchair be so 'deliberate' in its movement down my street? How could this folded wheelchair maintain its balance and have a steadfast direction that imitated the presence of a human being in it? I shook my head in disbelief!

When have I ever seen an inanimate object appear to be 'so human' in its movement? The wheelchair slowly moved down the street, and then came towards me, as if the wheelchair contained a person - contained a person who got a glimpse of me, and who intended, in the 'name of neighborliness', to stop near me to visit a little with me! When I saw an empty wheelchair (a folded wheelchair), I gasped with surprise and with great astonishment!

When I saw the folded wheelchair, it did not take long for me to recognize that this wheelchair belonged to us (to my wife and to me). During the last nearly 20 years, we have cared for a few elderly ones, in our home. Strangely, I realized what had happened was odd and unusual. Of course, if we have an extra wheelchair stored in our garage, it is, obviously, stored with the wheelchair in a folded position.

It is hard to imagine, but the folded wheelchair rolled out of our garage, down the driveway, over the curb, on to the front street, and then the folded wheelchair made a sharp turn, and it continued to roll

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down the center of the street for about 15 yards!

Amazingly, the folded wheelchair then made a U-turn at that point in the middle of the street! Then the folded wheelchair proceeded to roll back to where I was standing! It is hard to believe, but the folded wheelchair never fell over, during its remarkable 'journey'! That fact itself is phenomenal! Traveling down the driveway and over the curb and turning on to the street and then, after traveling several yards, turning around and traveling back!

This 'well-trained' folded wheelchair reminds me of a well-trained dog. Except the movements of this inanimate object (with no soul and with no determining 'will '), is more remarkable than the movements of a dog (which has the capability of being trained).

The movement of this folded wheelchair was so 'startling' and so 'amazing' for more than one reason. I found the movement of the folded wheelchair to be (as I mentioned) somewhat like the movement of a dog that is well-trained by its 'master'. If I didn't know better, I would think that the folded wheelchair, which took a 'little journey' down my street, knew that it was to 'come back home', so it 'decided' simply to make a U-turn in the middle of the street, so it could come back 'home' (where it belonged)!

With my personal reflection, and with the passage of a few years, my reaction to this 'strange' event is amazement and astonishment. And, of course, I have also expressed some 'laughter' – laughter that something so 'weird' and so 'odd' could happen to me!

I took the folded wheelchair back into our garage, after it came to a 'stop', right at my feet. But before I deposited the 'trickster wheelchair' to the place where it belonged, I stood at the curb side, contemplating this 'weird' event!

Can you imagine how very 'foolish' I felt when I saw an empty wheelchair, rolling up to my feet! I felt 'foolish' when I realized that an inanimate object could 'pull a trick' on me, an intelligent human being (a creature that is made 'in God's own image')! Wonder of

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wonders, to realize that this folded wheelchair could 'pull' a 'deceptive trick' on me!

Shame on you, folded wheelchair! I thought I was going to have a 'chat' with a fine older person, and all you presented to me was an 'empty wheelchair'! At least your 'trick' startled me, it totally surprised me, it made me gasp in amazement! At least you broke the routine of my day! At least you gave me the 'gift of laughter' - and, in that way, you served not only my needs, but I think you brought a 'smile' to God Himself!

I must say, folded wheelchair, with your kind of skill, you ought to sign up for the circus!

But, remember, you must ask my permission before you leave your home! You need to stay home, when it is dark!

"DON'T LOOK....DON'T LOOK!"

Many years ago, when my wife and I were in our middle 30's, after some contemplation and consideration, we decided to make an investment in real estate. Through the last three (and more) decades we have had many pleasant relationships with a lot of tenants. Of course, our experiences with tenants have not always 'worked out', but, for the most part, our experiences have been pleasant with tenants.

As is true of all landlords, there have been times when it was not very easy to find good tenants. Vacancy is, obviously, not what a landlord desires, but, worse yet, a landlord finds it difficult to deal with an irresponsible tenant (one who does not pay his rent on time, or one who is reckless in the use of the property).

On one of many other similar occasions, I was having a difficult time finding a good tenant for a certain property (duplex property). Venita and I believed that the property we were attempting to rent, was a 'good' property. Not a new property, but, nevertheless, a 'clean' and comfortable unit - a unit that we believed would 'suit' the need of some good tenant.

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But, try as I did, I was not yet successful in 'landing' a good tenant! I think I had 'shown' the property to a few potential tenants, but no one yet was interested.

Then I got a call on the phone from a woman - a middle-age, single woman - and I arranged to meet her at the particular property. I showed her the inside of the property, and she seemed to be impressed with what she saw. She asked a certain question, the answer to which I gave with a spirit of confidence. She asked me if the neighborhood was a 'safe' neighborhood. Of course, I answered in the affirmative!

We walked outside, and she and I had a pleasant conversation. I was confident that, finally, I would have a person who would 'sign up' to rent the duplex apartment. I was so hopeful that I would no longer have to 'search' for a good tenant. I thought that this woman was going to be, not only our new tenant, but, possibly, a new friend (for we enjoyed it when some of the tenants became our casual friends).

We stood together on the sidewalk, in front of the duplex. We were standing, at a slight angle. My head was facing the duplex. Her head was facing the street. As I recall, this woman needed reassurance that this neighborhood was, indeed, a 'safe' neighborhood! Of course, I reassured her that this neighborhood was a 'safe' neighborhood!

The longer I live, the more I have noticed that our personal life experiences, from time to time, have some 'sharp curves', even some unexpected 'pit falls'! As this woman and I were carrying on a pleasant visit (a specific visit about the virtues of this duplex, in which she showed some interest in renting), I say, while this woman and I were carrying on a pleasant visit, a 'shock of shocks' happened!

Suddenly, and 'out of the blue', this woman shouted to me, 'Don't Look! Don't Look!' I had no idea why this woman, with great emotional exclamation, was telling me 'not to look'!

Obviously, from where she was standing, she was seeing something

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that I was not seeing! I couldn't understand why she was so excited and so troubled! Of course, the very thing that she told me not to do, I did. I looked in her direction! I wanted to see whatever it was that she was seeing! What in the world was giving her such discomfort, such distress, such alarm?

When she cried out with such alarm and with such distress, I quickly turned in her direction! I then realized why she was deeply distressed, why her pleasant conversation with me had suddenly turned to words of total distress.

Along with her, I viewed a sight that, indeed, was distressing and very troubling! Across the street (and two houses down) there this 'proper lady' and I had our eyes fixed on the figure of a man who was exposing his totally nude body, in front of a large picture window!

This person, from a distance, of perhaps 30 yards from our position, appeared to be a large man, very muscular in build, very 'hairy' (like an ape, in my opinion). He was defiantly looking at this woman, and he was swaying back and forth with his entire body, with no shame at all in his demeanor. He, obviously, wanted to shock this woman, and, of course, he succeeded in his devious plot. He smiled at us, as he continued his shameful behavior!

Everything I confidently enunciated to my potential tenant, regarding a 'safe' neighborhood, 'went out the window'. The sight of this evil man - this licentious man - destroyed every 'case' that I made, regarding this being a 'good' neighborhood!

I could say nothing to this woman, to persuade her that, obviously, the antics of this 'hairy' man - this man who 'got his kicks' from swaying in front of a window 'in his birthday suit' - was a 'strange rarity'! It would do me no good to tell this prospective tenant that nothing like this had ever happened before, during all the previous years since I purchased this 'fine duplex'!

After she saw this 'trickster' - this nude man who swayed in front of a picture window - I had no chance to convince this woman that (in

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spite of this shocking sight), the neighborhood was, indeed, 'safe'! No chance for any further conversation. Our talk was over! I might as well 'save my breath'!

As soon as she and I laid our eyes upon this 'gross man' for a few seconds, she quickly got in her car, and off she went! I lost a potentially 'good tenant', all because the 'timing in life was lousy'! Why did that 'ape-looking' man have to appear, just when I was ready to 'make a deal' - to finally find a good tenant?

Because of a set of 'unbelievable' circumstances (the intrusion of a 'licentious act'), I lost another possible tenant! All my efforts with this woman (showing the duplex, talking with her) were 'down the drain'. As a believer, I knew that I had to 'forgive' this 'evil dude' from across the street, and I knew that, in spite of this shocking event, I had to 'pick myself up' as a landlord, and I knew that I must continue to seek the right tenant!

Is it possible to 'laugh' when our earnest efforts (on a legitimate project) 'go south' (when they fail)? We, of course, never condone acts of evil (like the appearance of a nude man), but, nevertheless, I think it is possible to discover a 'layer of humor' even when events (like this strange one) are not 'righteous', in and of themselves.

Even though, obviously, the potential tenant (the woman) saw nothing but 'horror' in the sight of the nude man, I (as a man) saw beyond the obvious ingredients of evil in the event, and I could not help but be amused with the sight of this swaying, nude man.

Amusement sometimes comes when one views sights and sounds that are beyond the 'pale of decency' (events that are odd and strange and 'unexpected' and 'out of place' and 'out of order' and 'unnatural' and 'foolish looking' and 'childish' and 'uncomely' and 'unappealing').

Without, the least approving his behavior, I do think that his tragic behavior, matches most (perhaps all) of the above descriptions. And, in that sense, even though he is a pathetic man (who needs our prayers), he is, in some ways, a 'laughable person'!

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With needed reflection on this strange scene, I found myself 'humored' (with even some laughter) because of the horror that the woman suddenly demonstrated when she saw this totally unexpected sight! She, doubtless, had never seen such a stark sight of a brazen and bold and shameless (naked) man!

The way she communicated to me ('don't look!') was her way of shielding me from a sight that was repulsive and unbelievable and most embarrassing! As if I would not look! She probably knew (as a 'proper lady') that she would be further embarrassed if I (standing beside her) would look at this nude man!

'Implicit laughter' is laughter that comes as a result of discovering the deeper layers of laughter that are hidden in one of the elements (details) in any particular 'event'. No, we believers should never find humor (laughter) in the 'evil' in any event, but, nevertheless, there may be hidden layers of laughter, even within an event which is basically evil in nature. Sometimes, there is to be found some elements of humor (even laughter) in what would be considered an 'evil event'.

I find myself enjoying a little 'laughter' (in some elements) of the event that probably will never be repeated during my lifetime - the distress of a potential tenant, the shocking appearance of an 'ape-like' naked man, swaying back and forth in front of a picture window, smiling all the time while he is doing this, shamelessly exposing himself for the pleasure he is receiving from his antics, doing everything he can to embarrass and to shock a strange (respectable) woman who happens to be standing beside me!

Of course, the above description is the description of a man who, obviously, does not have a strong drive in his life to please his Creator! But, when one combines the 'shock reaction of the woman' with the antics of the ape-like man, with the 'blowing away' of my chance to rent the duplex, with the quick 'shattering' of my argument that the neighborhood was 'safe', with the immediate departure of the woman in her car - these are 'unexpected reversals'

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that make this 'strange event' pregnant with 'humor' and 'laughter'!

HILARIOUS MISTAKE IN THE 'DARK OF NIGHT'!

The sun had long ago 'gone down', and there was no 'full moon' to reflect some light on the street. I was in another city, in an unfamiliar place in this large city. I was a 'stranger', and I felt like a 'stranger' on that particular night!

I had never been on this particular street before. I was there on a 'small mission' - to get my teenage daughter to her hotel, where she would spend the night, just before she would meet several other teens, all of whom would travel together to their destination to another city.

In that other city, there would be gathered together hundreds of teenagers, from across the nation, to enjoy a great 'youth convention'. The over-all mission was good - spiritual and social growth among hundreds of teenagers, and my 'small mission' - getting my daughter to her Denver hotel - was worthy of my time and my efforts and my driving in a 'not-familiar' location in a large city.

On that long-ago night, I remember sensing my confusion as to my specific location. As I drove on a better known street, I decided to take a 'side street' which I thought would bring me closer to my daughter's hotel. As I mentioned earlier, the night was dark, with not even a glimmer of light from a heart-warming moon!

After I turned on to the rather broad side street, in my mind I figured that I needed to make a turn off of this broad street - that is, I felt strongly, because this street was only one long block, I needed to get into the right hand turn lane in order to turn back west (where I thought the hotel was located).

I was very intent in making that right hand turn. Even though it was dark, and, therefore, it was hard to distinguish many details regarding the nature of the 'right hand turn lane', I was thankful that the 'right hand turn lane' was 'wide and smooth' and easy to 'navigate'.

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Strangely enough, I noticed when I turned my steering wheel of my car to the right, to get onto the 'right hand turn lane', that there was a rather 'rough jolt'! At this time, I thought that it was a rather strange phenomenon! Why would there be a 'jolt' - a raised place - that divided the regular side road and the right hand turn lane? At all times before when I approached a right hand turn lane, I never remember experiencing a 'jolt'! What is going on?

It was not long until I found out - from my wife who was sitting beside me, and from my two teenage daughters and from their teenage friend - I was not driving on a right hand turn lane! Instead, I was driving on a long, wide sidewalk!

There was a deadening silence - a type of fright by everyone in my car! After they all informed me regarding my 'crazy' action- my 'stupid mistake' - my hands on the steering wheel seemed to 'freeze'! This broad sidewalk had the appearance to me of a driving lane - it had the appearance of a broad right hand turn lane!

I couldn't believe what was happening! Not only was the sidewalk very broad, but the length of the sidewalk seemed never to come to an end! When, I thought, will I ever get off this sidewalk? For some reason, it seemed that my car was 'attached' (fixed) on that sidewalk.

When I once got on that long sidewalk, I somehow (strangely) felt that I had to continue to drive on that long sidewalk until I came to the end of the street and to the end of the sidewalk.

In the darkness of the night, with a carload of people startled until they became speechless, I was embarrassed that I could 'pull such a stunt' - that I could do something so 'stupid' in front of my wife and in front of three teenagers! During the darkness of that night it seemed that the sidewalk was a mile long! I wondered when I would ever get to the end of the sidewalk, in order that I might make a 'proper right hand turn' on to a 'regular street'.

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Fortunately, I and everyone in my car on that dark night had a 'good sense of humor'. After I got out of my predicament - after I finally got off of that long and broad sidewalk - we all 'laughed' and 'laughed'. And, on a more 'serious note', we all breathed a 'sigh of relief' that no one was walking on that sidewalk, in the darkness of that night!

God's protecting angels might have been 'on guard' - to 'guard' over a man who was rather 'crazy' that night, to 'guide' a man whose perception on a dark night was far from perfect!

Lesson to be learned from that 'strange night', so long ago:" If you don't like my driving, stay off the sidewalk!" (Ha! Ha!)

"OH GOD, HAVE MERCY!"

I have been a consistent 'jogger' throughout most of my long life. I participated in track in my junior high and in my high school and during my college years. During the many years (nearly 50 years) that I have lived in Fort Collins, 'jogging' has been my 'constant companion'.

I have jogged literally thousands of miles, during my teen years and my young adult life and during the last several decades of my senior adulthood. I did competitive running for many years, but since my last competitive race when I was 56 years old, I have merely jogged for the enjoyment of it (and, of course, for health reasons). Jogging makes me feel better, I believe I think better, and I maintain continuing fellowship with my Creator when I am running.

While I am jogging, I often breathe a few prayers to the Lord of Life. I spend some time, of course, simply meditating upon life and upon life's plans. Jogging provides a time for me to lift my heart in praise to the One who made all good things. Jogging time has also been, for me, a time to allow the Spirit to communicate to me - plans to follow, people to pray for, corrections that I need to make in my life (attitudes), and confessions of sins that I need to make to the Savior.

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I have been told that, while jogging, the heart muscle is expanded and the lungs are purified, and the general tone of the body is increased. A chemical that is released from the brain (what is its name?) tends to give the jogger a general sense of 'well-being'! Well, I am a human being that needs all the 'help' (mentally and physically and psychologically) I can get.

I love to jog through the magnificent park which is located near to our home. I spent countless mornings in that park, jogging on the winding trail, surrounded by large overhanging trees and small bushes. Jogging that particular trail is like going through a 'wonderland' of various kinds of trees, lush under growths, and scampering creatures, with the chirping and colorful birds flying above, to provide the morning music!

There is nothing so refreshing as being in God's great out-of-doors in the early morning! The air is so clean and crisp, the moving shadows cast by the tall trees reflect the sunlight in ever changing moods - these changing shadows add to the mystical feeling of the early morning!

As is true of most joggers (runners), I occasionally have to 'clear my throat' of any extra saliva (mucous) that tends to 'build up' as a result of 'pushing my body' to run faster and faster. 'Clearing the throat' is nature's way of making sure that the air passage to the lungs is open, in order to continue to breathe correctly. Jogging (running) involves the proper movement of the muscles and the joints. Of course, jogging involves the proper functioning of all the 'breathing apparatus' of the human body.

I say all of the above (obvious facts about the human body) to say that it has never been unusual for me to 'clear my throat' when I am running. And, while I am concentrating on intense running, I sometimes 'clear my throat' rather loudly. I need to, for I must clear my air passage. Otherwise, I could not continue to run!

On the trail, I often come up behind a jogger, and, obviously, I pass some joggers who are enjoying a slower pace. Of course, the opposite

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is also true: there are many joggers who are more 'fit' or who are considerably younger than I am. In those 'cases', I am the one who is often 'left in the dust', as I watch these faster joggers 'take off ahead of me'!

On one particular morning - what I considered to be a normal morning - I was jogging at a regular pace. While I was jogging, I was greatly enjoying the sights and the smells of the early morning atmosphere. I noticed a jogger - a young lady whose jogging pace was rather slow - and, of course, because I had a much faster pace, I came up behind her rather quickly. As I mentioned previously, when I am running rather fast, I often need to 'clear my throat' and to 'remove extra saliva' from my mouth!

The timing for this young lady was not very good! Just as I approached her (from her back side), I very loudly 'cleared my throat'! My noise - very loud noise - which she heard, but from a 'source' she did not know - this 'frightened' her - actually 'terrified' her!

Without looking over her shoulder to discern the source of the 'angry sound', this lady jogger left her course on the trail altogether. She left the trail, and she went into the brush beside the trail. And as she quickly moved off the trail, she stopped everything, and she cried out: "O GOD, HAVE MERCY!"

If it is possible to experience two opposite emotions, at the same time, then I must admit that I had two different emotions that were co-existing in me, when this lady made her exclamation on that morning. On one hand, of course, I felt bad that I had unintentionally frightened this woman so badly (with the sound I made by clearing my throat) that she left her course on the trail. When I passed this lady, I expressed my sadness to her, and I simply said (as I passed her on the trail) - 'I am sorry!'

As I proceeded with my jogging, I chuckled. How could my 'clearing of the throat' cause this precious lady that amount of surprise and distress? As I reflected back on that 'strange incident', I began to wonder why the noise that I made, caused her such distress. Did she

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think I was a 'kidnapper'? Another 'theory' popped into my head!

Maybe she thought that a 'bear' was chasing her! Why do I think that this might be a possible 'reason'? Sighting bears is a rarity, anywhere, but, a smaller bear was actually spotted in the top of a tree, not far from where this incident took place! Maybe she thought I and the 'gross sounds' I uttered was the presence of a bear!

"YOU BLEW ALL OF OUR PROFIT!"

Even though the church I came to pastor, when I was only 22 years of age, was a small church, with limited financial resources, I will gladly declare that the members of that church, saw to it that I received my weekly salary. Even when the 'church dollars' were hard to 'stretch', to meet all the obligations, the church board made the paying of the pastor's salary a priority.

With my words of gratitude to this small church, for all this church did for me and for my wife (and two young daughters), I must be honest to state that my family budget was small and it was squeezed at times to a great degree. That is to say, my wife (amazing in budgeting) knew how to 'cut corners' to save our money.

Admittedly, there were times that she 'splurged'- for instance, she often purchased new Easter dresses for our two daughters. Also, usually, our family enjoyed an occasional 'root beer' at a 'root beer stand' or a 'dairy queen' at a 'dairy queen stand'. We sometimes enjoyed a cafeteria meal together.

Venita became a skilled gardener. Her home cooked meals were 'out of this world'. She developed great skills in cooking, which served her well when she often hosted in our home. When I look back at those early years in the pastorate, I am amazed that Venita could be 'all things to all people'! She worked hard in the local church, and she was involved in a variety of tasks and projects and programs. But, with all this work, she found time to do gardening and canning!

She mentioned recently that, one year, she canned 400 quarts of food. Her canning skills, is what supplemented our food budget! When

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anyone would give us any type of fruit or vegetables, we were thrilled. Even though canning and freezing of fruits and vegetables involved a lot of time and effort, Venita thought it was worthwhile! After all, free fruit (like apples) or vegetables (like sweet corn) saved on our regular food budget!

There was one particular couple - rather eccentric and very special folks - who were not members of my church, but who were my personal friends. I don't think that they had ever attended my church services during the (perhaps) 15 years that I knew them.

They were related to some folks (members) of my church, and through these members, I became acquainted with this special older couple. I know it is hard to believe, but it is true: This older couple expected me to come to their simple home, once a month, to collect their 'tithe'! Yes, I said 'tithe'! Consistently, without fail, they had their 'tithe' ready for me, when I knocked on their door.

Their house was a rather 'humble' and 'modest' and 'old-fashioned' dwelling, but I always felt 'at home' in their 'cozy dwelling'. They liked me a lot, and they were always so friendly to me. They were 'old-fashioned', but, on the other hand, they were 'up-to-date' in many things. They had five grown children, and I had acquaintance with three of those children - very bright children!

This outgoing (conversant) older couple was very generous in their lifestyle. They not only were faithful in tithing, but they were glad when they could give other things to their friends and their relatives.

Their modest house - old-fashioned house - was located in an older part of the city, and the lot their house was set upon included about an acre of land. In back of their house was a small forest of apple trees - old trees but trees nevertheless that produced abundance of apples. Most of the apple trees were very tall, and, to pick those lush apples at the top of these trees, involved climbing with the use of a tall ladder.

This couple, more than one year, in the beauty of their Fall backyard,

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told me to 'help myself' to as many apples as I could use. Of course, I would have to 'work' for the apples, for most of the apples (still unpicked) were at the top of those trees!

I accepted the 'challenge' of picking these beautiful apples, and I thanked them for their generosity in allowing me to have the apples at no cost to me. Of course, it took a considerable amount of time to complete this 'worthy task'. I felt so free when I was at the top of the apple trees, and I was so excited that my dear wife would have additional fruit - boxes of free apples - to can or to freeze and to use to make her delicious apple pies!

But the 'balloon of my excitement' was soon to be busted! My excitement in getting 'free apples' was soon to turn to disappointment and even to 'anger'! And it would all be my 'fault'!

As I was traveling along on that main road that is just north of the house where this couple lived, I soon came to the 'school district zone' (close to a public school), and soon I found a car behind me that, when I looked at my 'rear view mirror', was not a welcome sight. The policeman had a 'right' to stop me, for I was going beyond the speed limit, in that particular school zone! I was given a 'ticket' (for speeding), and I think it was (for that long-ago time) a rather 'steep fine'!

When I arrived at my home, and when I displayed the abundance of freshly-picked apples - apples and more apples - beautiful apples and more beautiful apples - my wife was so delighted! Such generosity on the part of my older friends! And I worked so hard to retrieve those lush apples at the top of those tall trees! How excited my wife was that, now, she had many apples which would fill many quart jars!

Everyone knows (or should know) that the 'canning process' takes lots of time, and is lots of work! But it is all worthwhile, especially when it is 'free apples' that are going into the jars! These apples would be the 'pride and joy' of my wife, when she would soon view these apples after they had been canned in beautiful quart jars - for use during a long winter!

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How can excitement be turned to disappointment 'at the drop of a hat', or, should I say, at the heaviness of a gas pedal in a car! I dreaded to tell my wife that, because of my thoughtless driving, just a short distance from the home of my older friends, I took away all the profit that would have come from enjoying (canning) these free apples! I (and my wife) had to face the harsh reality - what we 'gained' in having the 'free apples', we suddenly 'lost' in the cost of the traffic ticket!

As my wife was canning those 'beautiful apples', she was realizing that she was not 'gaining' anything - even though the apples were given to us! Also, I had to realize that the excitement I experienced while I was working hard to retrieve the apples at the top of the trees, that that excitement was suddenly turned to disappointment! So much for free apples, when I was (justly) stopped by a patrolman - a patrolman who was carefully watching for thoughtless drivers just like me!

Is this episode - free apples, a traffic ticket, canning the apples with both gratitude and with disappointment - I say, is this episode worthy of disappointment or of laughter, 'Or of both? Can 'implicit laughter' be found within the 'elements' (details) of this event?

A GRAND SURPRISE FOR A NEWCOMER!

I suppose it is 'common knowledge' that the numerical growth in a small local church is slow and painstaking. Occasionally there is a person (believer or non-believer) who actually 'seeks out' a small local church to attend. Some persons like the atmosphere and the 'closeness' and the familiarity which a small church has to offer.

There are some persons who don't want to 'be lost in the crowd' in a large church. They want to be seen and to be recognized by the 'handful of parishioners' in a small church. They want to be greeted by several persons in a smaller church, right from the time they first enter the church's front door. They want to be seen by the pastor (not just by the greeters), and they want to be known and appreciated by the pastor in a more personable manner; in other words, they don't want to be a mere 'statistic' (a person to be 'counted').

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In a small church, it is 'easy' for the pastor to 'spot' the newcomer, and it is usually quite 'easy' for the pastor to 'seek out' the newcomer to have a meaningful visit with him/her. Pastors of small churches tend to 'value' a newcomer very much, for there are not many newcomers who choose to attend a small church. Growth usually comes slowly in a small church, because most newcomers to a community tend to be drawn to a large church, where there are many established programs.

In smaller churches, when a newcomer enters the front door, there is a tendency for several members of the small church to 'gang up' on the newcomer! The members of the small church are so desirous to 'find new persons' to become a 'part' of their church, that they express their excitement in seeing a newcomer, in exuberant ways. Members quickly 'gravitate' towards the newcomer, and the newcomer sometimes finds himself 'overwhelmed' by the expressions of 'welcome'!

When I was a young pastor of a small local church, many years ago, I oftentimes would stand near the church front door (along with the head greeter), to 'reach out in love and friendliness' to the church members, as they entered the church foyer. I enjoyed having a short 'chat' with several persons, and sometimes I would even exchange a gentle hug with a few folks ('the hugging types').

It did not happen often, but occasionally I would 'spot' a newcomer, and, of course, when that happened, I immediately experienced some inner excitement! Perhaps our church would soon be encouraged to welcome a newcomer as a 'regular' new member of our congregation! The Lord knows, we need some new parishioners - parishioners who are committed and talented and spiritual and loving. Parishioners who would bring 'fresh ideas' and 'fresh zeal and enthusiasm' to our church 'family'! And, even though I did not like to admit it, I wanted new parishioners who would put money in the offering plate! Parishioners who would love 'our people', and who would quickly become incorporated into the 'body of Christ'!

I am quite sure that it was not only I, but also several of our church

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leaders, who entertained these above-mentioned 'sentiments' - regarding the 'value' of meeting newcomers and of (hopefully) incorporating them into our small and struggling local church.

On one particular Sunday morning (so long ago, when I was a young 'eager, beaver pastor'), a single young man entered the front door of our small church. I was standing in the foyer, and I had already greeted several of our 'regular members'. One young man (a leader in our church) was standing beside me. Of course, I immediately recognized this well-dressed young man (a man probably in his middle 30's) as a 'newcomer' (that is, a man who had never attended our church services).

As usual, I was exuberant when I saw a 'new face' - a newcomer that had found his way to our church to attend a service! I approached him with all the 'warmth of friendliness' that I possibly possessed. I told him how glad we were to have him attend our service this Sunday morning! As it was my 'custom', I reached out my hand, to shake his hand! Shock of all shocks, when I clasped his hand, I also 'got a hold of his necktie' - and, as I shook his hand, I pulled his 'clip on necktie' off of him! When my handshake was completed, I had his necktie in my hand! I could not believe it! Of course, he was embarrassed, and I was embarrassed, and my friend (who loves to tease) was also embarrassed!

How could I pull such a 'stunt'? A newcomer, of all things! I knew then, after this embarrassing fiasco, that this newcomer would not have a favorable impression of me (a pastor) or of the small church where he chose to attend for one service!

I would not have been surprised if the newcomer would have turned around, after that 'stunt', and would have made his way out of the church, and never returned! It is true that he never returned to visit our church again, after that memorable Sunday.

To his credit, this newcomer did 'recover from his embarrassment', sufficiently, to enable him to go into the sanctuary to 'worship' that particular morning. He probably was so 'shook up' from this incident, that he had a challenge to keep his mind on the sermon, on that

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particular unusual Sunday morning.

When I got my hand tangled with his tie, at least it was a 'clip-on tie'. When I was unaware I pulled down on his tie, at least the tie 'came off'. If it had been a 'regular tie', my jerking on the tie might have left a 'red spot' on his neck! I might have been 'sued' for 'tie damage'! What a morning! Shall I 'laugh' or shall I 'weep', when I recall that 'odd' happening, of so many years ago! I think I shall 'laugh' when I think about my contact with that stranger!

***"I'LL TAKE ANOTHER SERVING, AND ANOTHER SERVING,
AND ONE MORE DISH!"***

Are there certain 'foods' (dishes) that you like - that you crave - that you can't get enough of? There may be several such dishes that would make the 'top of your list' that you cannot resist!

There are several such 'dishes' that are on the 'top' my list - dishes that have a special appeal, dishes that greatly satisfy my 'taste buds' and that bring delight to my personal palate! Whether this is because of one's particular DNA (inheritance), or because of acquiring a 'taste' when one is an infant or a child, or because of one's discovering a taste through exposure to certain foods as an adult!

Who really knows why there are certain foods that have a strong appeal to certain persons! Of course, the food (dish) that appeals to me, may be the very food that repulses you! Why are some persons 'in love' with certain foods, and other persons 'couldn't care less' for those foods, or even despise those very foods that you love to eat? We humans, of course, are all different, not only in the taste for food, but different in every other way (interests, hobbies, attractions, designs, colors, etc.).

My mother was always a great cook, and she prepared delicious and varied dishes (common food) when I was growing up in her home. It would take too much time (and too much recall of my brain) to list many of the tasty dishes that my mother prepared during my childhood and teen years. Not 'fancy dishes', but very tasty dishes!

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Occasionally my mother would prepare a large kettle of 'battered beans'! What a treat to sit down at her simple table, and consume a large plate full of battered beans! Perhaps corn bread would accompany those 'battered beans'! As I think back to my teen years, I probably would have to admit that I was close to becoming 'addicted' to 'battered beans'!

Mother, who worked as a school cook for 15 years (during my growing-up years) was an excellent cook, and she knew how to season those 'battered beans' (flavored with a little ham and salt and pepper and butter)!

After I was married, my wife (who became a great cook) occasionally presented to me, to my delight, a big bowl of 'battered beans'. She honored my mother, and she honored her husband, by prepared some of the same 'dishes' that I enjoyed when I lived in Fountain, Colorado (when I was a kid).

I don't remember the specific year when the following event took place, but I think I was still a rather young pastor. It was on a late Saturday afternoon. My dear wife, so very involved in multiple ministries in our church, nevertheless, took the time and made the effort to cook a large pot of 'battered beans'! This dish was not a 'regular dish' in our home, but Venita desired (at times) to prepare dishes that I particularly enjoyed (relished)!

I ate battered beans and I ate more battered beans. I could not get enough of those battered beans. They tasted so good. I relished every bite of the battered beans! What a delightful meal! The problem is: I lost all 'common sense', all sense of a mature perspective, all admittance that the human stomach has its limits! I gorged myself on battered beans! I lost track of how many battered beans I had eaten! One bowl of battered beans called for another bowl of battered beans!

If a little is good, then a lot is better! I went 'crazy' that afternoon on battered beans! I acted like a man who was 'high' on some drug, like

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a man who had lost all control of his will power! That afternoon I ate like a man who was starving! Indeed, I had lost all self-control (which is a 'fruit of the Spirit'). While consuming those buttered beans, I apparently rejected my inner sense of 'moral guiltiness' ("Ron, you are guilty of overeating! Stop now!")

What I already knew (having been a preacher for several years), I now realized personally. There are consequences for 'wrong choices'! I chose to overeat, so I would have to bear the hurtful consequences. My stomach became terribly bloated, until I almost felt sick! As is typical of the property of 'beans', my stomach was filled, not only with 'tons' of beans, but also with the emission of a lot of 'gases'! I felt like my stomach was going to explode!

With the misery I was feeling, I asked myself how I could be so 'stupid'- so 'stupid' to allow myself to be guided by my physical appetite instead of by my 'objective reason'! Any reasonable person would realize that, in spite of his abounding appetite for a particular 'dish', the 'brakes must be put on' - the will must be activated to say 'no' to any further bowls of 'buttered beans'. I realized that I played the part of a 'foolish, stomach-driven' man, a man who let his appetite "run away with him!"

The consequence of my 'hoggish appetite' was being magnified by the time the sun went down and Saturday night was approaching! I realized that, with Sunday responsibilities soon facing me, I had a big problem on my hands! I knew that I would not dare to see my small congregation, in the shape that I was in!

A bloated stomach, with 'gas' being discharged from more than one part of my body, I dare not 'go to church' and make a 'fool' of myself! What am I going to do? I am in a pathetic condition - all because of my lack of discipline in eating my buttered beans! Why did I allow the buttered beans (which I 'love' so much) to 'get the best of me', to 'pin me in a corner!'

As usual, I had prepared a 'good sermon' to deliver to my people. But I was unable to stand behind my pulpit to 'share the Good News'!

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What should I do? Who could fill in for me, at the last minute? After all, this is Saturday night, just a few hours before Sunday morning!

In my heart, I believed that I had only one person that I could call on, to help me in my predicament. He was like a 'right hand man' to me. He is so amiable and flexible and responsible. He has taught a lot of Sunday school classes. Surely, Bill Hoffman (a loyal friend) will help me, and get me 'out of my scrape'! Late on Saturday, I called Bill, and (true to his character and availability), he consented to take the Sunday morning service!

This was not the first 'stupid' mistake that I made, and (unfortunately) it was not the last 'stupid' mistake that I made!

The apostle Paul, in writing to one of his churches, warns these believers to beware of a certain heretical group! Among the heresies of this group is their unusual appetite for food - gluttony! He writes, "whose god is their stomach".

That is a stunning indictment to me, for sadly (on that particular Saturday afternoon) I allowed my 'stomach' to be in control of my better reason! All that I could think about on that long-ago occasion was my buttered beans, and my stomach became the servant of those beans.

This gluttonous experience (stuffing myself with buttered beans) made me realize how easy it is to rationalize and to invite sin into my life! The activity of eating a certain food seemed to be so 'innocent' and 'acceptable' and 'agreeable'. It is well said that 'sin is simply a perversion of a legitimate desire'. Obviously it is good to eat buttered beans, but it is wrong (it becomes a sin) when one 'crosses the line' and he eats too many buttered beans!

Abstinence in some things like: consuming no alcoholic drinks, and modesty in many things (like eating some buttered beans, but not 'tons' of buttered beans).

What Jesus (in the Gospel accounts) was accused of namely, of

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gluttony, He was not guilty of. Jesus loved parties, but He never indulged Himself during those joyful occasions. He definitely was not a glutton, like His enemies accused Him of being! In contrast (as one of Jesus' very fallible servants), I was not accused by anyone of being a glutton, but I, indeed, was in actuality a 'glutton', as a result of getting myself 'sick' by eating 'tons' of buttered beans!

Destroying our body through alcoholic consumption, and by overeating (gluttony) are only two manifestations of 'sin against the human body' (called the 'temple' of the Holy Spirit).

Gluttony (overeating) is classified as a sin that is grouped with the sin of drunkenness. "O my son, be wise and stay in God's paths, don't carouse with drunkards and gluttons, for they are on their way to poverty." (Proverbs 23:21, Living Bible)

When I reflect back (a few decades ago) upon that Saturday afternoon, I wonder now why I would let my appetite 'get away from me'. Why didn't I use a little 'common sense', and why didn't I simply suggest to myself that 'enough of a good thing is enough!' The buttered beans are so delicious, but I can wait until tomorrow and I can wait until the day after tomorrow, to enjoy this delicious dish (moderation- 'a little at a time').

Moderation in eating has seldom been easy for me - at that particular time (so long ago), and since that time! When I am relishing a good 'dish', it is hard for me to say 'no' to a 'second helping of food'! Moderation in many areas of daily activities is required! I know that, only through the indwelling Holy Spirit, will I be able to 'conquer my appetite 'for delicious food'!

God created all things for the enjoyment of His creatures, but that which is intended for legitimate enjoyment (pleasure) can be misused (abused)! When that happens, sin enters the picture! Always remember: 'sin is a perversion of a legitimate desire'! Eating is good, but eating too much becomes gluttony (a serious sin which is listed in the Bible).

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In spite of my failure (my gluttony) on that long-ago Saturday afternoon, I can't help react to that 'event' with a smile, with a chuckle, and even with a little laughter! In my 'mind's eye', I can see my 'bloated belly' (the result of my unearthly consumption of buttered beans)!

I can see myself (in my 'mind's eye') as appearing as 'fat as a balloon' - a 'balloon' that needed to release a lot of 'gas', but a 'balloon' that knows that it's 'gas' has to be released privately! Also, 'in my mind's eye', I can see myself 'crowded into a corner in a predicament', feeling a certain amount of 'panic' regarding the upcoming Sunday morning service! The mere 'stupidity' of my actions brings a smile to my face! An illustration of 'implicit laughter', once again!

PRANKS, PRANKS, AND MORE PRANKS!

Rev. Edgar Holmes Humphreys was the pastor of the Free Methodist Church at Fountain, Colorado, during my teen years, and it was this man who 'took me under his wings', to disciple me in the truths of Christianity. I spent much time with his son, Art, whom I considered to be my 'best friend' during my difficult adolescent years.

Art was a rather impulsive, high strung teen, but he was a 'real companion' to me. In fact, he was the only 'close friend' that I enjoyed during those years of my life - years in which my own emotional life was sometimes far from 'stable'.

Art seemed to really enjoy me, and I really enjoyed him. He was a 'real pal' to me. He was 'fun-loving', spiritually-minded, talented, and a loyal friend to me. He was a 'leader type' person, so I tended to listen to his many suggestions and his creative ideas.

He, like most teens, could demonstrate, at times, unstable behavior, but, nevertheless, Art had a commitment to Christ, and a commitment to a life of integrity. Art admired his minister father, and he, along with myself, often 'sat at the feet' of his father, to listen and to learn from the lips of a mature man (a man who was scholarly, yet practical, in his approach to the 'way of holiness'). I loved to

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spend a lot of time in Art's home, and I cherished Art's dear parents.

It is true that Art was a serious-minded Christian teenager. He and I talked, at times, about the things of the 'Christian Faith'. We prayed together, and he and I and a few other teens prepared 'creative programs', to 'present' to the small Sunday evening congregation at our small local church. Art (along with his two sisters) was very musical. He had a great voice, and he sang heart-moving solos, occasionally. I loved to hear him sing.

Even though I did not consider myself to be a 'singer', Art encouraged me (persuaded me) to sing duets with him! I didn't really 'know music', but finally I consented to sing (in public) a certain song with him. I only knew how to sing the 'lead' part, but (believe it or not) we two sounded 'quite professional' together! (Ha!) "I Heard an Old, Old Story" was the song that we found enjoyment in singing together!

When today I hear someone sing that particular (old) song, my mind goes back a half century to the little white church on the corner, near downtown Fountain, Colorado, where Art and I blended our teenage voices, to tell of the wonders of God's grace (highlighted in that song)!

So many years have come and have gone, since those heart-warming days - days when I found great pleasure in the home of a godly minister and his family! A period of time - approximately six years - when I spent much time with my loving, though impulsive, friend! "Precious memories, how they linger, how they ever flood my soul." Years of great spiritual growth, years of intellectual stimulation, years of friendship!

I really loved my 'close friend' (Art), and I know that he, more than any other teen, influenced me during my growing up years (as a teenager). Art was warm and personable and friendly and affectionate (he was the 'touchy type' person).

He expressed a lot of affection towards me. He naturally 'touched'

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persons (on their shoulders) when he talked to them. It was easy for him to 'hug' persons, as an expression of his love and affection and admiration for others. He was popular with some persons, for he was overwhelming in the affirming words that he verbalized to his friends and to his relatives.

He was an outgoing, extroverted type of person. He sometimes was both the 'laughing' and the 'laughable' person in a group setting. He felt comfortable in social settings, and sometimes he liked to take 'center stage' in social gatherings. It was natural for him to laugh at his own jokes, or to laugh at the jokes of others.

Along with all the positive qualities in him (and there were many), Art could, at times, be mischievous and a little 'too playful'! He tended to be so spontaneous in his approach to life, that he found it difficult to be disciplined in the pursuit of worthy goals. He was very 'smart', but he tended to leave things to the 'last minute', rather than properly to plan for the future. He loved to have a 'good time', and he loved to be a 'jokester'.

He was compassionate towards people, but he tended 'to ride on the wave of pleasure and joviality'. He loved a good joke, and he loved to laugh and laugh. He sometimes had a hard time finding a 'balance' between the serious pursuits of life (like studying) and the lighter moments of life (like fun and entertainment).

I, who was a serious-minded person, enjoyed being around him (for the most part), for he brought a certain 'lightness to my spirit' and a well-needed laughter to my lips. However, there were times when I felt he went 'overboard' on the 'light side' of life, to the exclusion of the more 'serious side' of life!

Art was one year behind me, in schooling. When I graduated from high school in 1962, I enrolled as a freshman at Central College, McPherson, Kansas. When Art graduated from high school the next year (1963), he expressed a desire to attend Central College, and he requested that he become my college roommate. That sounded 'fine' to me, so I consented.

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Little did I know what I was 'getting into' when Art became my roommate! Art had the intellectual ability to excel academically at Central College. But, it seemed that often, during his first year at college, Art's 'playful side' overtook his 'serious side'.

Of course, even though I had been his friend during our junior high and senior high years, I knew that I could not 'probe' into his personal academic life. But, from my limited perspective as his roommate, it was quite obvious that Art lacked the kind of discipline that he needed, if he were to succeed academically. I think he nearly 'flunked' some of his courses!

I knew that Art enjoyed playing 'pranks' on his friends, so I was not very surprised when I (his roommate) became, on occasion, the 'brunt of his jokes'. Some jokes that were played on me may have been originated by other students. Even though I was only 18 years old at the time, I was assigned the responsibility, as third floor dorm assistant, to 'check in' all the fellow students on my third floor.

This included, not only the several college students who were approximately my age, but also the handful of high school students who also were members of the student body enrollment. (For several years, there was a small high school on campus that coexisted with the college student body).

Several of those high school boys happened to live on my dorm floor. I think some of these students were 'troubled students' whose frustrated parents decided to send them away from their home, to a place where their teens might be reformed.

The very nature of my somewhat disciplinarian role as a 'watchdog' of all the students (making sure that all the students on my entire floor were in their room by 10:00 p.m. every week-day night) - I say, my 'role' as an overseer and disciplinarian, obviously, 'drew some fire' from my fellow students on my third floor! A few students (especially a few rebellious high school students) gave me some 'hassles' (resistance), but, most of the students cooperated with me,

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and I enjoyed a good relationship with almost everyone!

However, since I was the dorm floor assistant, I was a 'ready-made target' for a few 'creative pranks'! Because I was his long-time friend (and presently his college roommate), Art had to 'join in on the fun' - 'at my expense'! Art (the fun-loving person that he was) could not 'resist the temptation' to 'deliver a few pranks' to me! I never knew who the 'culprit' was when I surprisingly became the recipient of some of the pranks.

I won't accuse my roommate as the 'culprit' for all my pranks, for I am sure that other students on my floor were in on some of the 'tricks'. However, Art liked to be identified as the 'trickster', when it came to the pranks he 'played' on me. At least a couple of the pranks were readily identified as the 'work of my roommate'. Art loved to laugh when I was 'caught' in the midst of a prank - a prank that he had skillfully 'pulled off. Art's creative brain worked to my disadvantage! Ha!

I knew that Art liked me (actually, I think he loved me), so I 'went along with his fun' (at my expense). Thank God, I never got angry or distressed when I became the object of some person's pranks! I took the pranks 'in graceful style', and I joined the laughter of the prankster! Yes, I took the pranks gracefully, although some of the pranks brought some discomfort to me!

One evening, Art and I were relaxing in our dorm room, carrying on a casual conversation. Posing as the very 'innocent' and hospitable and generous person, Art offered me a sandwich. I thought that gesture on his part was a gesture of kindness, so I gladly accepted his 'gift of a sandwich'.

My first bite into the sandwich soon revealed that he was playing a prank on me! Instead of the sandwich containing salad dressing (a delicious spread), the sandwich was layered with soap! The taste was horrible! Immediately, as I spit out the bite, Art laughed and laughed! Of course, I soon entered into his 'jovial spirit'. He thought it was so 'cool' that he had 'tricked me'! I did have to admit that he was rather

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'creative' in his design of a sandwich to 'fool' (trick) me!

On another occasion, his creativity in designing an instrument of trickery was manifest, when I entered my dorm room, rather late on a week-end night (probably Friday night). During my sophomore year at college (which was Art's first year), I was spending more and more time with a young lady - a young lady who eventually 'won my heart' altogether (the lady who eventually became my wife). I did not 'date' heavily, but occasionally I enjoyed spending time with Venita.

I will admit that the contraption (mechanism) that Art constructed (as a prank) was amazing! To this very day (after more than 50 years), I don't yet know the dynamics of this contraption (unique devise). The devise was attached to the top of the door (not visible, of course, from the side of the door that I would see when I approached my room). Attached to the top of the inside of the door, there was an upright can, full of water. This can of water then flipped over to release all the water on the head of the person who entered the room! When I opened the door, the can automatically flipped over, and I got an unwanted shower of cold water! A surprise of surprises when I opened my door, late that Friday night!

Can you imagine the 'hilarious laughter' that erupted from the mouth and lips of Art Humphreys, when I was dashed with water, as soon as I entered my room! Art had waited for some time, in our dorm room, just to see the surprised expression on my face, when I (rather listless) opened the dorm room door!

I remembered this 'prank', after more than 50 years since it happened during my sophomore year of college! How long do you suppose Art remembered this prank? (It is too long of a story to recount in this book, but, sadly, Art was not able to remember that 'prank' as long as I, good-heartedly, remembered it, for Art died from cancer when he was probably in his 40's).

Who were the 'culprits', I never knew, but there are a couple other 'incidences' that brought me the opposite responses - both distress and laughter.

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Unlike my dear mother who definitely was a 'perfectionist' in her over-all lifestyle, but, particularly, in her homemaking habits, I tend to be, not unclean, but, nevertheless, rather 'random' in my lifestyle. When I say that I am 'not unclean', that statement is not totally accurate. As a student - intent on getting 'good grades' - I sometimes did not concentrate on washing my clothes as often as I should have! There was a special (odd) feature in the old-fashioned dorm room where I lived for several months.

The closets in these rooms were rather unique. The closets were both wide and very deep (probably 6 feet deep). Like a 'large hole' (a large rectangle, maybe 3 feet by 6 feet in dimension), with no door to confine the closet. Of course, it was like an ideal (large) 'store room' where I could deposit all my 'dirty clothes'!

This storage area had a large capacity, so I could deposit lots of 'dirty clothes' in that convenient space. Admittedly (and I have no excuse), I piled my 'dirty clothes' into that large area, and many days (weeks?) passed by before I bundled up the 'dirty clothes' to take them some place to get them washed.

One day I began to admit to myself that I was 'overdue' in giving adequate attention to my 'dirty clothes'. I admitted that I had become too preoccupied with other (important) matters, and that it was definitely time for me to pull out the dirty clothes, and to do what any responsible student does - wash his clothes!

With a certain degree of shame, to myself, I admitted that my 'dirty clothes' were getting so 'smelly' that the smell was actually permeating my entire dorm room! My irresponsible negligence was becoming very inexcusable! What would my mother think - a mother that was particular in everything she did, and who was committed to utmost cleanliness? I would not want her, presently, to scrutinize my dorm room! She would (kindly) suggest that I regularly 'wash my clothes'!

The time had finally arrived for me to pull out all those 'dirty clothes'

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(not a 'pleasant task'), and get those 'stinky clothes' washed! Why have I waited so long to do this 'basic task', and why did I have to endure the increasingly 'foul smell' that had been permeating my room for several weeks? I delighted myself that I finally was doing a 'task' that I hated - pulling out my many clothes that I had 'stuffed' into this 'hole' (called my closet)!

I came to the end of the 'hole', and I had removed all my 'stinky clothes', and, to my great surprise, I discovered at the very end of my 'hole' (closet) a 'plastic container' - a container with a lid that sealed the plastic container! I thought to myself, "What in the world is this plastic container? It does not belong to me?" I was baffled by this container! I knew that the container contained something! But what?

As any other person would do, I did! I took off the lid to the container. But what a mistake I made, when I removed the lid to the container! Inside the container was 'rotten fish'! As soon as I removed the lid of the container, the foul smell of the rotten fish, permeated the surrounding atmosphere! The odor of the rotten fish was the very odor that I had been smelling for quite some time, and, all along, I had imagined that the foul smell in my room was the foul smell of my dirty clothes!

*With considerable shock, I took the container (that was the source of the 'sickening odor'), and I dashed down the steps, from the third floor to the first floor, and I exited the old dorm building, and I quickly found a 'dumping place' where I ridded myself of the 'rotten fish'! Just *One* 'small problem', however. While I was dashing down the steps of the three-story dormitory, I was leaving behind the permeating odor of the 'rotten fish'. My gift of a new fragrance to all my fellow students in my dormitory!*

A 'prank in the same category' happened to me, at a different time. Again, I noticed a strange 'odor' in my dorm room. Again, I thought that the 'washing of my clothes' was overdue. I would be ashamed if anyone came into my room, and would be nearly overpowered by the 'terrible odor' in my room.

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I was raised by a mother who was committed to utmost cleanliness, so why am I, her son, so sloppy when it comes to keeping a 'clean room'? I knew that uncleanness is inexcusable! I need to be more 'conscientious' regarding my 'home keeping' responsibilities!

I knew that the 'atmosphere' of my dorm room needed a 'transformation' (a change), and I knew that my clothes needed to be washed 'on a regular schedule'. Oh, to be more disciplined!

One day, while I stretched out on my simple bed (to relax and to rest), I happened to be staring at the ceiling of my room. I noticed a rather strange shadow made by some object - an object that was lying in the light shades, at the center position of the ceiling! What a strange shadow in the shade, caused by some object that was lying in the shade! Of course, I removed the shade to discover the identity of the strange object!

I could hardly 'believe what I was seeing'. There were two eggs lying inside the shade! On more careful observation, I realized that they were not fresh eggs. The two eggs were 'rotten eggs!'

Eggs, when they were placed there - by some prankster - were, of course, fresh eggs. How long had these eggs been in that ceiling shade, undetected? I had not detected them! Of course, the pranksters intended for the two eggs to go undetected for a long time - at least undetected long enough to allow the unrefrigerated eggs to become 'rotten'! As in the 'case' of the 'rotten fish', I disposed of the 'rotten eggs' as quickly as I could!

As 'lazy' as I sometimes can be, I could have excused myself from washing my clothes, since I could have reasoned that it was the 'rotten fish' or the 'rotten eggs' that were to 'blame' for the 'stinky odors' in my room. My mother, of course, would not have 'bought that excuse', and I know (in my more reasonable moments), that I could not blame the 'rotten fish' and the 'rotten eggs' for my stale atmosphere!

As the third floor dorm assistant, I early learned (when I was 18 years old) that I dare not take myself too 'seriously'. I learned that, even

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though I was the 'brunt of a joke' (recipient of an innocent 'prank'), I must allow others to 'laugh' because of their prank that they 'pulled on me', and that I must allow myself to 'laugh along with the prankster'!

Even though I was the 'object' of the prank, why not have some 'fun' along with those who were 'using' me to produce laughter within themselves! As long as the laughter is not at the expense of hurting another person (a mean joke), then laughter is 'beneficial and life-giving'!

There are likely a few persons in our world who laugh 'too much', but most of the other persons in our world (perhaps you and me) who don't laugh enough!

When I was a student at Central College (as a dorm assistant), I learned as a teenager not to be overly sensitive to the responses of fellow students who liked to play pranks on me. Previously (as a teenager who grew up in a rather 'serious environment'), I probably would have been upset (mad?) if any fellow teen would have played pranks on me (to my face or in secret).

I learned, when I was surrounded by teens on a dorm floor, that it was good to laugh at their pranks, it was good to 'go with the flow', it was good to humble myself and to be a part of a teen crowd who wanted to 'have fun' through pranks!

Even though I was 'assigned to be a type of watchdog' on the third floor of the college dorm, at times I needed to 'let my hair down' and to relax, and to laugh at a few pranks! Take God very seriously, but don't take yourself so 'seriously'! Laugh at yourself, and allow others to laugh when they 'pull off' a good prank (at your expense). Be a part of the fun and laughter that God intended you to enjoy!

Laughter is spontaneous for some (few) people, but most of us have to learn to be 'light-hearted' and 'good-natured' when we are the 'brunt of a joke or of a prank'! I had to learn to 'loosen up', to be willing to let others laugh when I fall into their (innocent) 'traps'

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(their 'contraptions').

Don't be self-conscious! Don't be defensive! Don't be overly-sensitive! Don't be angry when others target you with their (innocent) pranks! God is a 'laughing God', so God wants you to be a 'laughing servant'! God has 'designed' you to laugh (unlike the beasts of the field) - so be glad to laugh and laugh! Laughing will do 'wonders for you'!

Life is too short for you to be so serious-minded! If you are not a prankster, allow the prankster to laugh at you when they 'catch you in their pranks'. Don't be offended by their pranks! Frankly, God was teaching me a lot about laughter (about the value of pranks) when I was quite young (at Central College). I was a very serious-minded (and sometimes emotionally-disturbed) teenager before I left my home to attend college, at age 17.

Because of the several 'pranks' that I experienced (when I was the 'watchdog' on the third floor of the old dormitory at Central College), I learned how to 'loosen up', to laugh at myself, and to laugh with fellow students who got their 'kicks' out of engineering 'pranks' for me! I found that life goes much smoother when I can open my mouth wide, hold my head back, and release some hearty and hilarious laughter from my God-created lips!

A little laughter can be compared to a little salt on food. Without salt, the food is not flavored tastefully. Without a little laughter, life can become too serious; life can become dull and tasteless. Too much salt, or too much laughter also does not produce the proper 'flavor', either in food or in general life. There must be 'balance' at all times. The book of Ecclesiastes notes that there is a time to laugh and a time not to laugh. The wise person (the God-directed person) knows the difference!

"I MUST IMPRESS MY FUTURE FATHER-IN-LAW!"

One summer, probably a year before I was to be married to my wife, I visited my future father-in-law's ranch (the place where my future wife grew up). Of course, I did not know this rancher well, but I did know that he spent his entire life involved in all the tasks of ranching

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- raising cattle, putting up hay, and the other daily tasks of ranching. He was not a wealthy rancher, but, nevertheless, through careful budgeting and skillful management, this 'rugged man' had become successful in many ways in his 'profession'.

More than his success in ranching, was his success in becoming a great man, in terms of the development of his godly character. He had a reputation, far and wide, in that part of ranch country, for his outstanding integrity and his trustworthiness. He was a 'man of his word'. He treated his fellow ranchers with respect and with kindness.

He had an unusual love for his Lord! One of the greatest 'loves' of his life, was his love of his little Free Methodist Church, located a half mile from his home, located at the end of the tree-shadowed lane that connected his house to his church.

He seldom missed a church service, although in all honesty I must declare that, because of the weariness from his work, sometimes he found himself sleeping while a good sermon was being preached. This future father-in-law was kind and he was very generous (in his giving to his church and to needy persons).

He was unusually 'extroverted' in his personality. He never met a stranger. He loved to talk to anyone who would give him 'the time of day'! He was very engaging and interesting and informative, when he visited with his fellow ranchers (at his home, or at his church, or at the small town coffee shop).

He had his own strong opinions about certain matters, but, on the other hand, he avoided arguments and debates with persons whom he cherished. He was always 'conciliatory' in his responses to people, not 'adversarial'! He was practically-minded and quite pragmatic in his approach to life and to life's problems. He was man of the Word (of God), and he daily practiced prayer. He was always kind to his livestock!

There was no man whom I esteemed and admired, as much as I did this unusual man. He was not interested in high-sounding theories,

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but he was committed to 'workable solutions' (especially when he was contemplating 'ranch issues'). He was very supportive, in many ways, of the various pastors who came to fill the pulpit of his little church - the little church which was filled to overflowing for his funeral service (which happened many years after I became a 'member of the family').

Some of the 'facts' and 'insights' (shared above) I became aware of, after I became married to his daughter and after I spent quality time with my father-in-law (and with my choice mother-in-law who was a very godly and wise and intelligent woman). I was the son-in-law of these choice persons, for more than 30 years, before they respectively passed away.

I must return to the time when I was yet unmarried - a few months before I was married. I had full intention to marry the daughter of this rancher. I was aware that my future father-in-law knew that I was not raised on a ranch, that, indeed, I had no experience in the 'ways of ranching'. But, nevertheless, on one occasion, when I was visiting on his ranch, I wanted him to know that I was interested in (though not knowledgeable of) the 'lifestyle of the rancher!'

One particular morning (during my short vacation on the ranch), I decided that I wanted to ride along with my future father-in-law, in his pickup truck, to 'check on the cattle'. He was a kind and companionable and conversational man, and he never tried to 'put me on the spot' regarding my lack of 'ranch knowledge'. He knew that I was a 'small town boy', and he tried to engage me in conversation that would be edifying to both of us.

As he drove over the rough pasture land, we conversed some together. There were in the pastures, what were called 'blow outs' - large holes that had been formed as a result of the strong winds that blew away a lot of sand, scattered randomly in the pasture. Much of the pasture land was rough, and the pickup had to maneuver this rough pasture land. Obviously, the pickup steered clear of the few blow outs in the pasture.

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My future father-in-law was not a large land owner, but, through careful management and budgeting, during his lifetime, he gradually purchased more and more acreage. I think, at this time that he owned about 2,000 acres. This land was divided into several smaller portions of land, to be used for specific purposes. Obviously, the smaller, divided portions of land were fenced off, with each smaller pasture having 'access' by way of a gate that, of course, could be opened and closed.

The morning that I rode with my future father-in-law, I saw the pickup approaching a closed gate - a gate that needed, of course, to be opened, so that we could proceed into the next pasture. There were cattle that needed to be check on, in the pasture, in the next pasture, on the other side of the upcoming gate.

I thought to myself that I wanted to make myself 'useful' - 'useful' to my future father-in-law. I will, therefore, offer to get out of the pickup, and I will open the gate to allow the pickup to proceed into the next pasture. And, of course, my future father-in-law can relax a few minutes, while I do the work of opening and closing the gate.

I was young (verily 20 years old at the time), so I jumped out of the pickup, and I hurriedly jogged towards the closed gate. I did not know what I was getting myself into! It was a wire gate (certainly not a modern -type gate), and the strange mechanism that was used to squeeze the post to release the circular wire around the pole - the ancient mechanism was most difficult to handle! I finally, with the exercise of all the strength I could muster, released the strong circular wire that held the gate to the supporting pole.

My future father-in-law (much older than I, and much stronger in his arms than I was) - he watched me (probably with more sympathy than with criticism), as I struggled to release the wire gate from the supporting pole. I wondered how ranchers daily accomplished the task that I verily accomplished just now (that is, opening gates to go from one pasture to another pasture)!

After I finally (with great effort) accomplished my task of opening the gate, I knew that my volunteer job was only half done. After the

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pickup proceeded through the now-open gate, I would have to close (shut) the gate. I knew that it would be just as hard (maybe harder) to close (shut) the gate than it was to open the gate! I knew that it would require the exertion of all the 'arm and shoulder muscle' that I had! One thing this 'humiliating experience' taught me was that I was marrying into a rancher family - a ranger family whose 'head' of the family was a man who (after having spent many decades with cattle on pasture lands) was 'very strong and rugged'!

I was young, a competitive runner, but this rancher (who probably never ran a race) was much stronger than I was (and he had lived much longer). Opening and shutting gates that separated smaller pastures - this was a simple and a routine task to him. Why did this task require all the strength that I could possibly muster?

After the pick-up was driven through the now-open gate, I knew that I had the second-half of my task immediately ahead of me. I knew I had to give my 'soul and body and mind' to the difficult task of stretching that circular wire over the supporting post - with the use (aid) of the squeezing mechanism. It was so difficult for me to bring the end of the wire fence close enough to the supporting post, so that I could slid the circular wire over the top of the supporting post.

I was proud and I was satisfied with myself when, through my straining and grunting, I finally got the gate closed! I was excited that I could do something (as a future son-in-law) for my future father-in-law.

After I finished my sweat-producing task (opening and shutting the wire gate that divides the pastures from each other), I inwardly congratulated myself on a 'job well done'! I was glad that I had demonstrated to my future father-in-law that I will be an involved and interested and companionable son-in-law! Even though I knew very little about the 'lifestyle of ranching', I nevertheless, will be a son-in-law that will be available (when I visit the ranch) to 'carry on practical tasks' for him! One of life's abiding lessons: "Good intentions do not always produce good results!"

When I finished my grueling task of finally getting the wire gate

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closed (shut), I looked up, and I planned, of course, to take a few steps away from the closed gate, to get back inside of the pick-up (where my father-in-law was waiting for me).

I accomplished my task alright - I got the gate closed. But I ended up on the 'Wrong Side Of The Fence'! Talk about embarrassment! With the great exertion of muscles, I finally got the gate closed, but, in my preoccupation with my formidable task, I was not aware that I was shutting the gate in a way that would leave me on the original side of the fence. I was still on the side of the original pasture, instead of being on the side of the pasture where we were 'headed' to feed some cattle! Of course, to get back to the pick-up, I had to climb over that rather high fence!

My father-in-law (to-be) did not humiliate me. He made no 'ado' regarding this incident. He loved to 'have a little fun', but he 'played down my stupid mistake'! Of course, if he ever doubted that I might someday be a good 'ranch hand', I think 'all doubts' were (that morning) removed! Ha!

During the many years that I enjoyed being his son-in-law, I loved and I admired him and his dear wife (whom I highly admired as a wise and godly woman). It is hard for me to believe, but there was a time when he had me do some haying for him. How he could place so much confidence in me, I will never know!

There was at least one time he had me drive his large tractor, and this tractor pulled two large mowers. I know that when I turned the corners in the hay field (with a double blade attached to the mower), I left quite a lot of uncut hay on the corners. My dear father-in-law (the kind man that he was) saved my 'dignity', and he never criticized me for my 'far-from-perfect' job of mowing in his beautiful hay fields.

He knew that I was not a 'country boy'; he knew that I had no experience of working on the 'ranch' (in Nebraska). He was a good-humored man, and (as a dedicated Christian) he knew how to 'take things in stride' (to see the 'funny side' of life). He never once made fun of me because of my lack of knowledge or of my lack of

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experience on the ranch.

He was most respectful of my 'call' to the ministry, and he supported me (and Venita) totally and enthusiastically regarding the 'call'! In fact, if it had not been for the generous financial gifts that he (and his wife) gave to us, we would have had a hard time 'making it financially' in the pastoral work.

He and his wife regularly gave us financial gifts (usually at the end of the year), and when Venita and I visited the ranch twice a year, we went back to our home with a box full of meat (choice cuts of beef)!

Once during our trip to the ranch, Venita's dad took us to the largest (nearby) city, and (surprise of surprises) Venita's dad presented to us a brand new car! Venita's dad believed that we needed a better (more reliable and more presentable) car. I think this was the only new car that we ever owned! Of course, we drove that car for many years!

Venita's folks (though they were ranchers) were definitely not wealthy, but they were generous to Venita and to me. They knew that, materially-speaking, we were living on a meager pastor's salary, and, therefore, we needed a regular supplement to our salary!

Venita (with the example of frugality from her beloved parents) knew how to 'stretch the dollars' in our marriage! Part of Venita's act of frugality was demonstrated by her canning of vegetables and through her freezing of fruit and meats. I think that in one year alone Venita put up about 400 quarts of garden stuff.

It takes a lot of skill to manipulate (drive) a large tractor, in a hay field. Venita's dad used to 'brag' on Venita, because she (an experienced ranch girl) could be so 'neat' in the way she mowed the hay fields. She virtually left no hay on the corners! Venita's dad was always respectful of me, but (rightly so) I never once heard my father-in-law tell me what a 'great job' I did while I was mowing the hay in his hay fields! Ha!

In spite of my humiliating experience (the 'gate fiasco'), at a time before I became a part of a rancher's family, the man who was my

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beloved father-in-law for several decades, never belittled me, never focused on my faults, never rejected me. In fact, he and his wife (and Venita's siblings) could not have been kinder to me and more thoughtful to me. Of course, there were times (in Venita's family) when laughter resounded - wholesome and life-giving laughter! Laughter sometimes regarding innocent mistakes that were made, during the work-a-day life on the ranch!

I must admit that I never became adept (skilled) at opening and on shutting wire gates on the Glenn White Ranch, near Amelia, Nebraska! I will let my strong-armed father-in-law attend to that important job! I don't need to embarrass myself again, with my futile attempts to 'impress' my father-in-law!

THE WEDDING DAY WITH MANY CACKLING CHICKENS!

It was on one of those hot summer afternoons - a scorching summer afternoon. It was a very sparsely attended wedding, held in the small sanctuary where I had preached every Sunday for several years. I hardly knew the couple who were scheduled on this day to exchange their wedding vows. It was a couple, probably in their early 20's. It might have been through mutual friends that I was contacted to conduct the simple ceremony.

The day of the wedding had finally arrived. As brides usually are, this young bride was very beautiful, with her traditional long gown highlighting the afternoon wedding. Only a handful of friends were in attendance, to be witnesses to this important, life-changing event. Hopefully, it would be a once-only event. After the wedding, unfortunately, I never had further contact with this couple.

As I stood before this young couple, ready to give my blessing to them (through the repetition of a few familiar historic words and a few quotations from the Scriptures), I personally noticed that the atmosphere of the sanctuary seemed rather 'stuffy' and rather 'hot'! I soon learned that I was not the only one who sensed that the scorching heat from the out-of-doors. The intense heat was, apparently, making its way into the atmosphere of the church room where the ceremony was being conducted.

When I was fervently conducting the ceremony - carefully and

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thoughtfully reading the beautiful words regarding the sanctity of marriage - I glanced at the couple who was standing before me in such a dignified manner. The next thing I saw was most disturbing! The bride began to slightly move her body from one side to the other side - back and forth!

It was not her father, but it was the man (like a father to this bride) - the man who 'gave her away' earlier in the ceremony - who was keenly aware of the 'critical situation'! He rushed from the second pew to the front of the sanctuary where the bride was tottering, and he caught her just before her head hit the hard church floor. He rescued her from a serious injury, just in time!

During the few previous minutes, when the bride was becoming so weak that she finally fainted, the groom did not realize what was transpiring. As he was carefully listening to the words of the ceremony, he was oblivious to the condition of his bride.

When the bride fell backwards in a 'dead faint', and when the man (who gave her away) caught her, this startled and stunned groom finally 'gathered his senses' to the point of going to his bride (as she lay on the floor, in the center isle of the sanctuary)! He frantically carried her to the front pew of the church, and he laid her out on the pew. (I was trying to keep my composure, in my established position, and I said a few words, salting those words with a little humor).

After he (and a few others) stretched the bride out on the front pew, the groom frantically dashed down the center isle of the church, and he quickly found some paper towels which he soaked with water, and then he dashed back to where his bride was beginning to 'come to'. He applied the wet towels to her beautiful face.

This entire fiasco took place within only a few minutes (maybe 5 minutes), and, fortunately, the bride again took her place beside her groom. In spite of this happening (her fainting), the bride looked as beautiful now as before the 'crisis'!

The wedding reception was held in a semi-country setting, located in

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the out-of-doors. Informality would be the word to describe both the wedding ceremony and the wedding reception. As I mentioned earlier, there were only a few friends and relatives in attendance at both the wedding and the reception.

The location for the reception was very close to a large shed - a shed that 'housed' hundreds and hundreds of chickens! Possibly, the man who acted as the 'giving father' at the wedding owned this huge 'chicken farm'.

On my way to the out-door reception (which was, close in location to where the chicken farm was established), I say, on my way to the reception area, I was given an enthusiastic invitation to view (that is, to walk through) the large building that 'housed' the myriad of chickens! I had never walked through such a building, so I graciously consented to have a 'tour' through this amazing place!

Dressed in my best suit (for the wedding ceremony), I sensed a strange contrast (a dissonance) between the neatness and the dignity of my wedding attire, and the wildness and dirtiness of hundreds of chickens chirping and cackling loudly, as I passed hundreds of towering racks- racks from which the hundreds of chickens were making their needed 'deposits' (good fertilizer!).

To the guide, I expressed my 'awe and wonderment' that there could be such an amazing place - a remarkable business! I told the guide (who was a part of the wedding company) that he was gracious to take his time to show me this unique place! (I was secretly hoping that my beautiful wedding suit would not be the recipient of some 'deposits!').

After what seemed like a rather long tour through the chicken 'house' (even though, in reality, it did not consume that much time), I proceeded (like a gentleman) to the lawn area where the reception was already in progress.

Even though I noticed that it was a rather 'strange' thing - that is, that there were two lines that led to two different punch bowls, I got

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into one of the short lines, to take my turn to get a 'drink' of punch. After I drank a cup of punch, I decided that I would like to have another drink of that particular (delicious) punch. I still could not figure out why there were two lines and two bowls of punch.

At that point (as I had made a decision to get some more punch from the same bowl from which I had just had a drink), someone came quickly to me (the minister), and this person suggested that I was drinking from the wrong punch bowl. This person urged me to take punch from the other punch bowl. I responded that I really liked the taste of punch from the bowl from which I had just been served, and that I would like another drink of that 'delicious punch'!

I sometimes, admittedly, am a 'little slow in comprehension and in communication'! It finally 'dawned on me' why this person was urging me to go to the other bowl, why she told me that I did not want the punch from that particular bowl from which I had just been served. That punch, from that particular bowl, was spiked with alcohol!

Can you imagine how I felt - the minister who had just performed a wedding ceremony, a minister who had never tasted alcohol, a minister who had taught the young persons never to indulge in alcohol - I say, can you imagine a minister (namely, me) being very pleased with the taste of a spiked punch, and that he wanted another drink of that particular 'punch'!

Considering all the wedding ceremonies and all the receptions that I have been a part of, this simple and unpredictable wedding ceremony, followed by a reception that had the marks of 'uniqueness' - a tour through a huge chicken shed, followed by the surprise that the minister was partaking of 'exciting' spiked punch - I say, considering all my previous experiences, it is easy to classify this over-all wedding 'event' as very 'odd', even very 'laughable'!

One of the most unusual episodes in the 'life of the pastorate'! I can't help but 'laugh' when I think back of all the 'twists and turns', of all the unanticipated 'happenings' of that particular hot summer day!

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Thank God, the bride was not hurt, and no one else was hurt during those strange afternoon happenings, so I believe I have the liberty to have a 'good laugh' - a 'good laugh' when I allow my mind to take me on a little trip back to a happy (but odd) event, all dramatized on one hot summer afternoon.

I can't get into the 'small heads of chickens', but I am going to think that the loud noises of the myriads of cackling chickens were the loud noises of chickens that were celebrating the happiness of that wedding day! I know that is a 'crazy' idea, but why not be 'crazy' sometimes? Hal There surely must be some reason why God placed that chicken shed so close to the wedding reception!

Why would I, who believe in total abstinence (abstinence from all alcoholic beverages) be so 'satisfied' with spiked punch - and liked that spiked punch so much that I wanted a second glass? How odd! How very odd! How could I not even discern the taste of alcohol? What was wrong with my taste buds on that day? How could I be so naive? Was I still upset that the bride fainted, and nearly hit her head against the hard floor?

Was I continuing to think of those hundreds of chickens which I just viewed? Was the cackling sound from those hundreds of chickens still resounding (echoing) in my head? Was I still stunned with the series of 'odd' experiences of this day? Was I still contemplating what the injuries would have been if that man had not seen the fainting bride, and if she would have hit her head on that hard church floor? How could I, a minister of the Gospel, who has always been repulsed by the very smell of alcohol, be so attracted (on that summer afternoon) to the taste of 'spiked punch'? I, who think that some persons around me are 'odd', have to admit, in my honest thoughts, that I too sometimes think I am 'odd'! I, too, am also (at times) a rather 'strange' human being, definitely 'unique' and 'one of a kind' person! Are you, too?

ALL THIS 'TROUBLE' JUST TO LOCATE SOME MOUSETRAPS!

There are some 'basic correlations' that we humans take 'for

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granted'. If there is a 'head', then there (logically) is a 'hat'. If there are hands, then there are 'gloves'. If there is a 'plate', then there is food. If there is a 'running uniform', then there is a track running trail. If there is a 'violin', then there must be a violinist. If there is a Toyota car, then there must be a driver.

These most basic correlations are obvious to any thinking person! Many objects or persons are involved in the dynamics of 'correlations'. One 'thing' calls for the involvement of another thing, and the two things together are in a complementary relationship.

What is the basic complement to a 'pesky scampering mouse'? Of course, a mouse trap! In our house (a few years ago), we had one side of the equation - we had the presence of 'pesky mice' - but we did not have the presence of the other side of the equation. We did not have, on hand, any mouse trap!

One night, with the recognition that we did not have one side of the equation (namely, mouse traps), my dear wife sent me on a 'mission'. I was to go to some store to find and to purchase some mouse traps! An important mission, for, you see, my (courageous) wife is 'deathly afraid' of those elusive mice. Years before this time (when she and I were quite young), my wife and a lady friend of hers, were terrified with the presence of a little mouse which was running around in our kitchen.

My wife called a neighbor man, and he and his wife came to our house to do 'battle with the little mouse'! My wife and the wife of this neighbor man (a long-time friend) - these women were 'frightened in an unexplainably manner' (beyond reason) - and the wife of the neighbor ended up on top of my dining room table! The neighbor man chased the mouse with a broom, and the human finally 'conquered' God's miniature creature!

What is there about mice that send panic to the heart of so many people? To look at the motions of fear, you would think that these panic-stricken persons were being attacked by angry lions, rather than by harmless mice!

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There is a hardware store, located about one mile from my home - a good place to fulfill my 'personal and important mission' - to purchase some mouse traps!

It was about 7:00p.m., later than a store would normally be open, but I noticed that there were some bright lights, emitting a warm glow within this inviting store. I was rather delighted that the store was still open. Surely, it would be an easy task for me to quickly purchase a few 'mouse killers' (mouse traps).

I would go into the store - a store that I enjoyed often to go into - and I would quickly exit, and I would be on my way home to present these 'mouse contraptions' to my wife! I could hear my wife say to me, as I entered the 'front door' of my house, that she was so grateful to me for going out into the night air, to show my concern for her (to save her from those pesky little creatures)!

As I opened the front door of this familiar hardware store, I was glad that it had not yet closed, that business hours were later than I realized! I was not aware of the opening and the closing time for this fine store, but, since I entered the front door of the hardware store at about 7 p.m., I assumed that the store closing time must be later in the evening, maybe 8 p.m. or even 9 p.m.!

When I entered the front door, and I walked over to the front counter (close to the front door), something struck me as rather 'odd' (even strange). Some of the bright lights in the store were turned on, but other lights in the store were not turned on. The front lights (where I was standing) were turned on. But, strangely, the entire center of the store was dark (with no lights turned on). Then, I noticed that the lights in the back of the store (far from where I was standing) were turned on. In other words, the front and the back of the store was brightly lite, but the entire center of the store was very dark, with no lights shining!

I thought to myself, since there was no one to wait on me at the 'checkout counter', in the front of the store, that possibly there were one or two store employees working in the back of the store. I

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thought it was strange that no one (from the back of the store) would come to the front of the store to 'wait on me', to help me find some mouse traps!

These 'various perplexing questions' (conjectures of my mind) lasted for only a few seconds (maybe one minute). Then 'shock of all shocks', an 'emotional-shattering', 'ear-ringing' alarm sounded off in the store! I immediately realized that I was alone in this store! This store was closed for business! I had no employees in the store to 'wait on me'. I was all by my lonesome in this mainly darkened store. The shrill sound of the alarm, combined with the eerie feelings that crept over me, at that time, made me feel that I was in the middle of an 'angry nightmare'!

The sound of the alarm made me feel like I was a robber, a thief who needed to run and to hide - but where could I run to, and how could I hide? I couldn't get out of the store! I was, indeed, trapped in a store! Would the police consider me to be an abandoned robber? And this entire hair-raising event because I was trying to be 'good' to my wife, simply trying to find her some mouse traps! The door I came into the store, that same door (which I 'tried' to open) would not allow me to exit the store! I was trapped!

How did I ever get myself into such a predicament? I went time after time to the front door (the door I entered), and the door would not swing outward to release me from my panic and my 'bondage'! I felt so lonely, so defenseless, so detected, so guilty, so confused, so exposed! I was 'at the mercy' of the police! Would they accept my alibi?

I thought that I probably was pinpointed for an arrest! Surely the police would understand that I found the front door of the hardware store open, and that I assumed that the store was open for business!

After all, some of the lights (particularly the front end store lights) were shining brightly, and those lights naturally 'invited' me into the store.

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After I got into the store, I was 'trapped', for the door through which I entered the store, swings in only one direction. It is an entrance door, but not an exit door! I thought that if they arrested me for being in this privately-owned store, I would present to them these logical arguments! Surely, with these facts in mind, any fair-minded police officer would 'buy my story'!

It was a frightening thought to me to quickly conclude that I came into this store, thinking that the store was open for business!

As just noted, during my moments in which I felt considerable 'panic', I repeatedly went to the same door through which I had entered a few minutes before this time. When I pushed on the door, hoping to quickly exit the store, I found that the door did not permit me to exit. It was a door to be used for entrance into the store - entrance only!

I was trapped inside this store! The shrill-sounding alarm continued to sound off! That shrill sound, blasting my ear drums, sent 'chills down my spine'. I tried to use that same door again and again, but to no avail! Yes, there was no way for me to exit this hardware store - the very store to which I had often given my business!

Because the store was located, amidst several other stores, in a small 'shopping center', I now hoped that I could 'get the attention' of some persons who were outside of the store, just walking by. I waved my hands, hoping that at least one of the few walking persons would notice my desperate situation. But, to my dismay and to my frustration, not a single soul noticed my waving hands!

Different thoughts were racing through my mind, but I knew that I was penned (trapped) in this hardware store! I knew that I needed to get word to my wife, but how could that be done? Then, I happened to look at the 'check out' counter, and (fortunately/providentially) I noticed the presence of a telephone.

I wondered if I could get through to my wife, to let her know about this strange set of circumstances. No, I couldn't tell her that my

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mission (to find mouse traps) was accomplished, but I could ask her to fulfill another mission - the mission of helping to get me out of my present terrible 'mess'!

I called her, and she, of course, could hardly believe my 'story'. No, it is not a 'prank' - this is the 'real thing'. Venita quickly phoned the 'police department', and she told them about the details of my 'predicament'. The policeman who talked to Venita was understanding and he was glad that she quickly called the police department. At that very time (as Venita was talking to the police officer), there were several police officers who were 'on their way' to the store!

If Venita would have waited much longer to call, there would have been a small group of police officers who would have shown up at the store - to talk to me! Venita 'saved the day' (night), and she also saved me from further 'challenges'! I was nervous enough! Can you imagine how fast my heart would have 'beat', if a group of police officers would have surrounded me - in the premises of that store!

Would they have believed me, if I would have told them that I (innocently) had been on a 'mission' to purchase mouse traps? I only wanted to be a 'good husband' and to fulfill my assignment (mission) - to find some armament to battle a 'pesky creature' that brought 'fright' to my lovely wife, every time she saw one of those creatures run across her kitchen floor!

I did not know about the oncoming 'small force' of police officers who were 'on their way' to evaluate the situation at the hardware store. I don't know, of course, but I suppose that my arrest could have been one of the options, when the police arrived at the store!

It was not too long until one police officer kindly came to the front door of the hardware store. He quickly opened the door to release me! How grateful I was to see him. He brought words of comfort and encouragement and understanding to me. A very kind man, as well as a responsible police officer, I was grateful for his 'human touch' and his kind words!

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It was sweeter than my words can describe to be released from my 'temporary prison'! It seemed like a long time, but, in reality, it might have been only a half hour that I was in the hardware store. Time, in those circumstances goes so slowly! After I left the confines of that store, to breath the 'fresh night air' was 'heavenly'! I resumed my 'mission', I forthrightly went to another store in the area (a store that stays open all night), and I purchased those coveted 'mouse traps'!

My wife's sister (who was Venita's companion for the entire evening), was determined, as soon as I made the phone call to my wife in the middle of the crisis, to go to the store, and to attempt to give me some 'comfort' while she stood outside of the store window (where she could view my inside predicament). It was while she was in the process of showing actions of compassion towards me, that Venita had made the call to the police department.

By the time that my sister-in-law got to the hardware store, I had already been 'released' by the police officer. The police officer was still at the front door of the store (probably to block any other person from entering the store), when my sister-in-law arrived at the store. My sister-in-law could not find me (for I had gone to another store to fulfill my 'important mission')! The police officer quickly assured my kind sister-in-law that I had been successfully rescued!

I returned to my home (with a sack full of mouse traps), and my sister-in-law came back to our home. Of course, my wife (who was attending to some elderly persons) never left our home. (As usual, however, my wife- a great problem-solver - helped solve the problem of that night, by calling the police department)! The three of us (adults) recounted the episode (inch by inch), and we had lots of laughs that night. We greatly enjoyed drinking hot chocolate together!

We have occasionally laughed since that historic night! When I often enter the front door to enjoy that hardware store, I chuckle inside myself. Was I the only naive soul that night who thought the store was open?

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I never 'dreamed' that carrying out the mission of purchasing some mouse traps could involve so many complications (i.e. so many 'twists' and 'turns') in one night - a night that was supposed to be uneventful!

In the 'battle with the mice', the mice almost got the 'upper hand!' Do you suppose those 'pesky, miniature, elusive, beasts' are gathered together in their dark corner, and do you think that they are making music with their special 'squeals' - glad that some human 'had fits' trying to find those 'mouse killers'? The battle between humans and the mice is a perpetual and a continuous battle! How 'nerve-wracking' it was to fulfill that important 'mission' - to find some 'mouse killers'!

*Have you ever wondered why God - the Creator God - decided to make these little 'pesky' creatures? Well, I will never know, but I also know that God makes no mistakes. There is a 'reason' for all things, in God's own 'season'! Maybe these little creatures teach a panic-stricken woman (who wants to climb on top of a dining room table when she sees a mouse heading for her) - I say, maybe these mice teach a woman who is panic-stricken, to 'calm down and to trust the Creator'! After all, maybe there are some persons who want to laugh while they watch the 'little creatures' running and scampering - to and fro - in their garage! "Everyone to his own taste!" Ecclesiastes (Bible): ***"There is a time and a place for everything!"****

Is there a 'time' and a 'place' for God's little furry creatures (mice)? Probably so, but it seems, however, for most of us (sensible) human beings, there is no place for mice, either in our garage, or in our kitchen, or in our living room, or in our bathroom, or in our office, or in our attic, or in our basement, or on our table, or underneath our couch!

I am willing for the little fuzzy, elusive creatures to live - but I think that they should live where I think God intended for them to live - in the fields of the countryside! Not in our houses!

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If there were no little, quick-moving creatures that we call mice, I would never have to go on a mission to purchase 'mouse traps' - and I would never mistakenly go into a hardware store, when it is closed! I would never have to have a near 'nervous breakdown' when a shrilling alarm blasts my ear drums inside a store that I have no 'business' being in! O, the trials of life - all for the purpose of ridding my home of that furry little, fast running creature!

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LET MY PRAISES BE HEARD!

LET MY TEARS FLOW!

LET MY LAUGHTER RESOUND!

DOES GOD LOVE ALL OR ONLY SOME?

BATTLE AGAINST HUMANISM!