

More Than a Good Laugh



13 Reasons God Gave Us Humor

Ron Ross

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Introduction

You'll never get anywhere in life being the class clown," snapped Miss Palladino, my 9th-grade Latin teacher. I'm not sure where my desire to make people laugh originated, but that mind-numbing afternoon Latin class might be the place.

I recall sitting in my seat without a clue as to what I could gain from the conjugation of Latin verbs. After all, I wasn't sure what a verb was, and I sure as heck didn't know what it meant to conjugate — it sounded to me like something 9th graders were supposed to avoid until they got married. And how could *amo*, *amas*, *amat* ever be relevant to my unremarkable life? It was like being incarcerated for 45 minutes every day for a whole semester.

So, what to do? Make 'em laugh. I noticed right away their laughter made me feel good. Then, I observed that others felt better too, even Miss Palladino, well, sometimes.

But this book isn't about Miss Palladino; it's about God, who many think has no sense of humor. But he does; after all, he made the vampire bat, the duck-billed platypus, and the African warthog. The same God infused His sense of humor into Adam and Eve when He created them in the Garden of Eden. Did you notice what Adam did after he rubbed the sleep out of his eyes to see for

the first time Eve? There she was, standing naked in front of him. The lady looked just like him – but with some very noteworthy improvements.

He must have jumped up and down as he celebrated: "Finally! Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh!" Then Adam blurted out the world's first one-liner: "Name her Woman," he gushed with a grin, "for she was made from Man." Adam gazed, Eve blushed, and God smiled as his grandest creations reveled in each other's company.

God wove this spirit of cheer and merriment into our DNA. The words "joy" and "rejoice" appear over 300 times in the Bible. Various forms of "laughter" are mentioned over 30 times.

I've found thirteen reasons God gave us laughter — and more than laughter — His sense of humor so we can be joyous despite our present circumstances. A comedian we don't quote anymore said, "If you can laugh at it, you can survive it." Or, as Anthony Burgess said, "Laugh, and the world laughs with you, snore, and you sleep alone."

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Reason 1 Humor Fights Disease

Where did the idea come from that laughter is the best medicine? King Solomon may be the source — he is considered one of the wisest men who ever lived. He didn't say that laughter was the "best" medicine, but he did say, "A cheerful disposition is good for your health; gloom and doom leave you bone-tired." Proverbs 17: 22

Doctors doubt that laughter heals like a properly dispensed antibiotic, but they agree it does improve your health. Psychologists have also long believed that positive thinking and an abundance of laughter bring pleasure and facilitate good health.

Here are some of the benefits of a cheerful disposition:

Laughter sets off a chain reaction of positive physical changes throughout your body. Not only does your laughter make you feel better emotionally, but it helps you heal physically. Here's what the MDs say happens: When you're stressed, your body produces cortisol, a primary stress hormone, that can lead to heart

disease, high blood pressure, and excess belly fat. Somehow, laughter lowers cortisol to safe levels.

Laughter also fortifies your immune system. How? When you laugh, your body produces antibodies in your saliva and bloodstream, fighting off bacteria, viruses, and parasites. Pretty cool, huh?

Want better skin? Laugh more and complain less. "People suffering from eczema noted an improvement in their complexions after consistently watching funny movies."¹ I'd rather watch *Young Frankenstein* for the 100th time than rub yukky cream on itchy skin, wouldn't you?

Guffawing is almost as good as an hour at the gym. When you laugh big, your heart and lungs work harder, increasing your oxygen consumption and heart rate — almost like a jog around the block, only not so hard on your knees.

Laughter has another benefit you have experienced many times — after a good time of hilarity and belly laughter, you feel relaxed, relieved, and recovered. Remember? Of course you do!

¹<https://science.howstuffworks.com/life/inside-the-mind/emotions/laughter-cure-illness.htm>

Laughter is also a natural antidepressant, better than any drug from Abilify to Zoloft. Watch a few episodes of *Seinfeld*, or *I Love Lucy*, and your depression and anxiety will be alleviated, at least for a while!

You live in a stressful world. Your life is littered with busy schedules, complicated relationships, disappointing jobs, sensitive health issues, financial problems, and more. Laughter is needed to combat the gloom and doom that leave you bone tired. Everyone could smile more, giggle more, and laugh more — that includes you and me. We can all feel better with laughter beginning right now just by starting with a smile, letting it grow into a grin, and exploding into laughter when the time is right!

God gave us humor to make us happier and healthier. He made it universally available, easy to administer, and affordable. Almost 100 years before doctors discovered cortisol, abolitionist and preacher Henry Ward Beecher (1813 - 1887) wrote, "Mirth is God's medicine."

"I have seen what a laugh can do. It can transform almost unbearable tears into something bearable, even hopeful." Bob Hope

Reason 2 Humor is Better than Exercise!

You may have read the meme, "Rabbits jump, and they live eight years. Dogs run and live for 15 years; turtles do nothing, and they live for 150 years. Lesson learned."

Or how about this: "A balanced diet is having a cupcake in each hand." OK, one more: "I signed up for an exercise class and was told to wear loose-fitting clothing. If I HAD any loose-fitting clothing, I wouldn't have signed up in the first place."

Are you laughing yet? I hope so because laughter is better than exercise. Your local gym owner will likely tell you exercise is a great way to cure nearly every disease. "Exercise more, and your brain works better, Alzheimer's disease decreases, and Parkinson's slowly disappears," they preach. The same (well, almost the same) claims are made for laughter.

A few years ago, the New York Times reported a study done at Oxford University with many graduate and undergraduate men and women. Do you know what the researchers made them do? They made them laugh.

They discovered that laughter is part emotion (I'm pretty sure they already knew that), but also recognized that laughter is real physical activity — exercise if you please. When you laugh, you forcefully and repeatedly exhale your breath from your lungs, which requires effort by your diaphragm muscles — that's exercise, right?

You have undoubtedly placed your hand on your stomach and declared, "I laughed until it hurt." The pain you felt was real, and if you laugh for an extended period, you will be both tired and sore — the same pain and exhaustion you get from doing a few dozen or a few hundred sit-ups.

There is another way laughter and exercise are similar. Because laughter is an infectious activity, people laugh more when others are around. I experienced this personally when I participated in a humorous speech contest. When practicing my speech with one or two people, they seldom laughed out loud. The laughter was exponentially more robust when I performed it before 300 people packed into a room. It's the same when working out. You will work out harder when the gym is full and every machine is buzzing than you will if you're the only one there.

A funny thing circulating online shows a Chinese-looking gentleman dressed in a white lab coat – the kind you see doctors

wear. Someone asks him, "Doctor, I've heard that cardiovascular exercise can prolong life. Is this true?"

His answer: "Heart only good for so many beats, and that it. Don't waste on exercise. Everything wears out eventually. Speeding up heart not make you live longer; it like saying you extend life of car by driving faster. Want to live longer? Take nap." It's apparently a spoof because exercise is good for the body and the soul, but so is laughter, and for that matter, so is a nap.

"Did you ever laugh so hard that you had trouble breathing? Well, when you laugh long and hard, it helps ventilate your lungs. This may help remove residual air from your lungs and allow for oxygen-rich air to enter."

"Another physical benefit to laughter is improved circulation of lymph. When you enjoy prolonged laughter, a large portion of your body muscles contract. This pushes lymph forward, which is important for proper immune function."

<https://exerciseforinjuries.com/laughter-really-best-medicine/>

Reason 3 Humor Reduces Stress

God made us able to laugh because there's nothing like a hardy, har, har, har to reduce our stress, and God knows we have enough pressure in our world. Here are a few stunning statistics about stress I found on WebMD.com:

- Forty-three percent of all adults suffer adverse health effects from stress.
- Seventy-five percent to 90% of all visits to the doctor are for stress-related ailments and complaints.
- Stress can play a part in problems such as headaches, high blood pressure, heart problems, diabetes, skin conditions, asthma, arthritis, depression, and anxiety.
- The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) declared stress a workplace hazard. Stress costs American industry more than \$300 billion annually.
- The lifetime prevalence of an emotional disorder is more than 50%, often due to chronic, untreated stress reactions.

I feel stressed just writing about stress!

What's the best relief for stress? A vacation. Sure — who doesn't like a holiday on the beach? How about a quiet day at home without any children? Yup, that would work. What if you could get a nice raise and reduce the number of hours you have to work? Ahhh — that sounds like a great stress reducer.

Each of those is possible, but they are not readily available. Humor is. Humor, especially laughter, reduces the negative impacts of stress.

Dr. Lee Berk, an associate professor at Loma Linda University in California, says your mind, hormone system, and the immune system continuously communicate in ways that affect your mood and your ability to fight off a variety of sicknesses and diseases. According to the doctor, stress induces hormones that inhibit your immune system from doing its job. Researchers continue to link significant ailments to stress.

Do you feel your shoulders tightening? Do you sense a headache coming on? Is some looming danger causing fear in your Heart?

Here is one thing you can do right now to stop the negative impact of stress on your mind, Heart, and body: LAUGH.

Laughter, according to Dr. Berk, "appears to cause all the reciprocal, or opposite, effects of stress." He says laughter helps your body produce feel-good neurochemicals like dopamine while, at the same time, it shuts down the release of nasty stress hormones like cortisol.

Laughter also impacts your brain positively. Your brain is made of a complex network of neurons, the building blocks of your nervous system. They transmit information to and from the brain via your very complex nervous system. Laughter improves the way your brain's billions of neurons communicate with one another.

To get the most out of laughter as a medicine, here are a couple of hints: First of all, you will get better results if you laugh with others. The fact is, a crowded room of laughing people increases the amount of laughter in the place. Laughter begets laughter.

Second hint: laugh out loud. Humor is good and improves your mood, but laughter, especially guffawing, belly laughter, and a great big hardy-har-har, does the most to help reduce stress. That's why you always feel so good, relaxed, and happy after having a good laugh.

"Laughter is an instant vacation." - Milton Berle

<https://www.elitedaily.com/life/laugh-at-yourself-key-to-happiness/1186573>

<https://www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management/effects-of-stress-on-your-body>

Reason 4 Humor Helps You Learn

Your brain has a direct connection to your funny bone; no joke! Over 40 years of educational humor research indicates that "non-aggressive, relevant, appropriate humor appears to be a helpful learning tool. It seems particularly useful to sandwich humor between instruction and repetition." ²

Think back to your favorite teacher. That teacher likely made learning challenging and fun, whereas the most uninteresting teacher made learning a pain in the brain.

Some types of humor work better than others to help students learn. Research shows that classroom or seminar humor must be appropriate to the audience and relevant to the subject. To tell a joke unrelated to the issue is a distraction, while humor related to the topic increases retention.

²<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/laughter-learning-humor-boosts-retention-sarah-henderson>

Sarcasm appears to do little to foster learning. Psychologists say that sarcasm is hostility disguised as humor.³Sarcasm is usually funny at the moment, but the recipient of a sarcastic comment feels put down and considers the sarcastic person an offensive nitwit.

A skillful way to use humor to enhance learning is to make students laugh while discussing complicated material. If you teach math, you might want to pause and tell your students this old but always funny anecdote:

A team of engineers was required to measure the height of a flagpole. They only had a measuring tape and were frustrated trying to keep the tape along the pole. It kept falling. A mathematician comes along, finds out their problem, and immediately removes the pole from its base, lays it down, and measures it. When he leaves, one engineer says to the other: "Just like a mathematician! We need to know the height, and he gives us the length!"

If you're in a class on computer programming, your mind will relax, and you'll learn more if, in the middle of a particularly

³<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/think-well/201206/think-sarcasm-is-funny-think-again>

complex lesson, your teacher tells you, "A computer once beat me at chess, but it was no match for me at kickboxing."

The following line would work in a psychology or sociology class: "Did you know that dolphins are so smart that within a few weeks of captivity, they can train people to stand on the very edge of the pool and throw them fish?" But the same line would be out of place and a distraction in an algebra class, even though it is still funny.

I think *Sesame Street's* Count Dracula taught more children how to count than any classroom teacher; it made you smile just to look at him.

There is a limit, I suppose. Too much humor is like too much sugar — sugar decreases memory formation and can lead to learning disorders. Here's proof: A nurse at a hospital received a call from an anxious patient. "I'm diabetic, and I'm afraid I've had too much sugar today." The nurse asked, "Are you light-headed?" The patient answered, "No, I'm a brunette." Did my jokes work? Did you learn anything by reading this?"

"There is little success where there is little laughter." - Andrew Carnegie

Reason 5 Humor Dulls Pain

The writers on WebMD.com say this, "the most convincing health benefit . . . seen from laughter is its ability to dull pain. Numerous studies of people in pain or discomfort have found that when they laugh, they report that their pain doesn't bother them as much." ⁴

Research shows that distraction increases our ability to tolerate pain. There are two kinds of distraction that seem to work: humor and tragedy. Four groups of 20 people were tested. Three groups were shown a film: group 1 – a humorous film, group 2 – a repulsive film, and group 3 – a neutral film. The fourth group was not shown any film.

The results showed that the funny film and the repulsive film both worked to distract the viewer from their pain. The neutral film and the group shown no film were not distracted.⁵ So choose your medicine — a repulsive movie or a funny one. Not hard for me to

⁴<https://www.webmd.com/balance/features/give-your-body-boost-with-laughter#3>

⁵<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/8628586>

decide. I prefer to laugh my way to less pain than upchuck it by watching an awful film.

Humor also dulls emotional pain — or at least it is a coping mechanism. Depression is emotional pain that finds some relief in laughter, especially guffawing. A few minutes of joyful belly laughter takes the inward focus of depression and moves it outward into a world of amusement and delight.

The late great comedian Robin Williams made at least two generations laugh and cry. From the revelry of *Mork & Mindy* to the darkness of *Boulevard*, this incredible comic and acting genius distracted us from our pain, but he neglected his demons.

I sometimes wonder what made Robin Williams laugh. What treatment would have helped him battle depression? Humor can dull the pain of the one laughing, but sometimes, it carries a high price for the humorist — the one who makes the other laugh.

How does it work? The research shows that when you laugh, your brain releases endorphins. Endorphins are chemicals that activate the same receptors as drugs like heroin, but without hooking you on them for the rest of your life! When you laugh, God created natural painkillers in your brain that go to work! Pretty cool, huh?⁶

⁶<http://healthland.time.com/2011/09/14/its-no-joke-why-laughter-kills-physical-pain/>

Two more discoveries: 1. Research shows a relationship between the amount of laughter and pain. You'll love the conclusion: The people who laughed more felt less pain! 2. the physical act of laughing reduced the pain, not the positive emotions gained from the comedy.

Perhaps God gave us laughter because he knew we would live in a world of such great pain. He tells us in His Word, "There is a time to weep and a time to laugh." Ecclesiastes 3:4.

I've done both – and so have you. For some reason, it's easier to wallow in my pain than to laugh my way out. I'm choosing to laugh more and wallow less. Join me?

"Good humor is the health of the soul; sadness is its poison." - Philip Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield

Reason #6 Humor Increases Your Creativity

Got a problem? Laugh awhile at the dilemma, and the solution may quickly arrive. Why laugh? Because God wired your brain in such a way that humor and logic use different pathways to solve problems. Spend too much time on one route, and you'll seldom utilize the other. Use them both, and all kinds of possibilities may arise!

The logic pathway, linear thinking, anticipates previously known and clearly defined steps where each move is planned first and then taken. It's useful, even necessary in life, no question. However, sometimes, logical thinking gets in the way of creativity. Many great ideas remain veiled when locked in the "we always do it this way" mindset. That's because linear thinking avoids new pathways; it deals primarily with what you know.

If you have ever written a business plan and then started a business, you know there is a big difference between the linear thinking of your project and the unpredicted problems you must solve daily. Everything doesn't work out as planned; if something

can go wrong, it probably will. I'm sure you, too, have noticed that about life. That's why you have to laugh!

When you laugh, when you have fun, when you "play" at work, you change brain pathways. You move from dealing with what you know (logic) to imagination, creativity, and what might be possible "if?"

How does that work? Humor shocks the brain; it blows away conventional expectations. It diverts the mind from the way it usually operates to a way it does not anticipate, which is what makes something funny.

Problem-solving and creativity come better when you're relaxed, when the tension leaves your shoulders, your furrowed brow smooths out, and your acidic stomach settles down. Smiling, playing, and laughing can improve your creativity even more. Your humor gives you a fresh set of eyes to help you find solutions to problems that once seemed unsolvable.

There's some science to this. Researchers say a joke yanks your mind from logic to absurdity. Before the punchline makes you laugh, it takes your brain for a dance of sorts; it makes it twist and turn. Watch how your brain processes this short joke: "A bus station is where a bus stops. A train station is where a train stops. On my desk, I have a workstation..."

To get the joke, your mind must visit a bus station and then a train station, all in a nanosecond. Then, ba-da-boom, it is dazed when forced to disobey the expected, linear logic and reconcile the unpredicted end. In a nanosecond, your brain resolves it all, and you laugh!

The brainiacs who study the impact of humor on the human mind say they are coming closer to proving that a great sense of humor improves the brain and its ability to think creatively, solve problems, and make life much more pleasurable.

It sounds to me like the reason humor makes us creative is that comedy is an art, not a science. In science $1 + 1 = 2$. In comedy, 1: My dog has no nose. + 2: How does he smell? = 1: Awful. See the difference? Funny, isn't it?

"Humor is the ability to see three sides to one coin." - Ned Rorem

Reason 7 Humor Helps You Grieve

When my wife of 52 years died, nothing about it was funny. Nothing. However, while Amy was alive, humor was a big part of our marriage. She could be hilarious and knew precisely how to take the stuffing out of my over-inflated shirt with a couple of humorous comments. I, too, like to make people laugh; we often would crack up together over something funny or could have been funny should something else have happened.

Even when Amy was dying, she played a significant part in a funny verbal exchange. Aunt Jan (Amy's sister-in-law and a retired hospice nurse) came from Iowa at just the right time to help us through her final days. One afternoon, Aunt Jan asked me to help her manage Amy's position in bed. Within Amy's hearing, Jan said, "Ron, you need to get Amy a couple of additional nightgowns so we can always have a clean one should she spill some water on herself."

I agreed immediately. "Jan, here's our Kohl's credit card. Go down to the store and buy her whatever she needs. It's only a

few blocks down the road." Amy, who we both thought was sound asleep and perhaps in a coma, said in a cracked voice, "No! Macy's! Macy's!" With a bewildered voice, I repeated to Jan, "Kohl's is only a few blocks down the road. Go there and get her a couple of nightgowns – whatever you think she needs."

Amy, who could barely speak, suddenly gained strength, sat up straight in bed, and declared with a loud voice, "No! Macy's! Macy's!" Then she laid down, closed her eyes, and Jan went to Macy's. I often tell this story, and though it might initially seem morbid, it always brings laughter. The story reminds me of the fantastic lady I was blessed to be married to for over five decades – and it helps me find a slice of sunshine in an otherwise cold and cloudy world.

As a pastor, I officiated at many funerals. The post-funeral family meals were often a storytelling time, and many stories were humorous. Some caused chuckles, and others created guffaws, but all were healing moments for the mourners.

You expect tears at a funeral, right? But some are surprised and experience genuine relief when they are allowed to laugh. There's an emotional conflict, I'm sure. "Why am I laughing?" we think. "I should be crying!"

Here is what's going on: Humor is a defense mechanism we use to help us cope with a crisis. Who, amid a grave mistake or disaster, hasn't explained, "It was so bad, all we could do was laugh."

There is something wonderfully healing about laughter. That's why God gave us a funny bone, and that's why the Bible says in Proverbs 17:22: "A merry heart does good like medicine: but a broken spirit dries the bones." Amen to that.

*"One more day - that's all I want
Just one more day with you
A day to sing and smile and play
A day to sit and chat away
The memories of a long-lived life
The days of joy - the days of strife
The days of solemn quiet tone
With each other and never alone."
— Ron Ross*

(Written a few days before Amy died)

Reason 8 Humor Heals the Past

Screw-ups are common. Fortunately, most of our past blunders are quickly forgotten – like when you lost your keys or forgot to brush your teeth in the morning. But those big, bad, bodacious boo-boos can hold you back from being the person you were born to be.

One gift God gave us to help heal our past hurts is the ability to find humor in them. How does laughing at your stupid stunts of yesteryear bring healing? In three ways:

Your laughter highlights your humanity. I read a story recently about a woman who wanted to be the perfect wife. She tried so hard that she ended up failing in about every category. She had such a high bar for herself that her good intentions led to great disappointments for her and her husband. There is no such thing as the perfect wife or husband.

The fact is, nobody's perfect. The Bible says it like it is, "All have sinned." So, you might want to think twice about seeking perfection, but think several times about being yourself, loving yourself, and forgiving yourself for your imperfections. "To err is

human," said English poet Alexander Pope (1711), and you are human.

Your laughter marks your maturity. Think about the insult shouted at you in the 7th grade. You suffered from the unkind words for hours, weeks, and maybe years. I know a young man who was regularly called "fatso" in middle school. He left behind those nasty insults and focused on his future. Today, he is a highly respected medical doctor who is also slim and handsome. The bullies in middle school mocked him, but he laughed off their insults and became the person he was meant to be.

Author Brené Brown, Ph.D., says in her excellent book, *The Gifts of Imperfection*, "Practicing self-love means learning how to trust ourselves, to treat ourselves with respect, and to be kind and affectionate toward ourselves."⁷ I would add, "and to laugh at ourselves."

Your laughter frees your future. Being a slave to the misery of your mistakes is easy. I have a friend who, as a high-school basketball player, missed a shot that would have won the state tournament. He spent years agonizing over that mistake even though he became a successful college and semi-pro player.

⁷ Brown, Brené, *The Gifts of Imperfection*, Hazelden, pg. 27

Today, he is a successful motivational speaker who laughs at his "missed shot story." The story no longer hurts; it heals.

Happiness is known widely as a great elixir. Add to your delight some belly laughter and persistently joyful spirit, and you could potentially have an almost miracle medicine. Laughter strengthens your immune system and helps you resist the diseases and demons of your daily deficiencies.

The poet Victor Hugo summarized this idea in one short sentence: "Laughter is the sun that drives winter from the human face."

"Laugh at your past mistakes, and the clouds that darken your day will part, and the sun will shine on you." - Ron Ross

Reason 9 Humor Keeps You Humble

Self-deprecating humor may be the safest and best kind of humor there is. You use it when you acknowledge that you are not perfect; you have weaknesses and are quite capable of screwing up your own life. For instance:

"Someone asked if I knew of a good plastic surgeon. I answered: would I look like this if I did?"

"If I had a dollar for every math exam I failed, I'd have \$12.77."

In some ways, we are wise; in others, we're foolish. Sometimes, we are strong — at different times, we're weak. To one person, we are brilliant — to another, we are dim-witted. But when we admit our vulnerabilities and laugh at ourselves, the humor causes us and the people nearby to see us as amusing, approachable, and authentic.

When you think of yourself more highly than you ought, you set yourself up for embarrassment. I once heard Dr. Robert Schuller say, "The easiest thing for God to do is humble you." At

that moment, I realized it is easier to be authentically humble and have a fair and realistic opinion of myself than to be self-flattering — and then, at a most inopportune time, to have my ugly underbelly revealed.

Trust me; it will happen! Many years ago, my wife and I received an invitation to attend the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC. We flew to the event and checked into a nice hotel. The morning of the breakfast, I shined my shoes, ironed my shirt, and wore my best suit. I even bought Amy a lovely corsage to wear.

As we walked into the event, we mingled with various VIPs — senators, members of Congress, judges, and other celebrities. Once the ceremonies began, we stood and applauded each time the notable dignitaries were introduced, including General Colin Powell, Vice-President & Mrs. Quayle, and President and First Lady George and Barbara Bush.

I was quite impressed with myself because I was hanging out with such influential people. As the event drew to a close, I leaned back in my chair to look around the room and congratulate myself for being such an esteemed person. That's when I noticed that throughout the entire event, my fly was open.

What happened to me is what the Bible teaches: "Pride goes before a fall." The moment you think you are smarter or better or more important than others is when someone or something will remind you that you are not.

Theologian Thomas Merton said, "Pride makes us artificial, and humility makes us real." Here's the lesson: make yourself the butt of your jokes, laugh at your folly, and reveal your real humanity.

Isaac Asimov wrote or edited over 500 books. He was a pretty smart guy — smart enough to use some self-deprecating, tongue-in-cheek humor to make fun of himself when he said, "People who think they know everything are an annoyance to those of us who do."

"I always wanted to be somebody, but now I realize I should have been more specific." – Lily Tomlin, comedian

Reason 10 Humor Extends Your Life

I'm 86, and that good-looking lady standing next to me is 84," a gentleman bragged to me. "We've been married 63 years and plan to live long enough to celebrate our 70th wedding anniversary." The couple grinned like two newlyweds that were just pronounced husband and wife.

While they both moved slowly and the "good-looking lady" standing next to him was wrinkled and bent over, they both were bright and articulate — smiling and laughing with ease.

Do you think their positive attitude and sense of humor helped them stay active, mobile, and alive? Researchers think so. They found that among older people, optimists have a 77% lower risk of heart disease than pessimists. Why? Optimists believe they can solve problems or "negotiate life's stressors without becoming irritated."⁸

The researchers found that an optimistic attitude about growing old will keep you alive for an average of 7.5 years longer

⁸<https://www.healthline.com/health/happy-healthy-living#7>

than a pessimistic mindset. Smile, laugh, and look hopefully at each day, and you will enjoy a lower heart rate, deal with stress better, and have a physical and emotional vitality that nourishes both body and soul.

Here's another benefit of cheerfulness: Happy people are less likely to get sick and tend to recover quicker if they do.

Optimism and a sense of humor make all of life better. When you're optimistic, you are excited about life, you have a sense of meaning and purpose, and you do more than endure life; you celebrate it daily.

From personal experience, I can tell you it's not easy to stay positive and maintain a happy spirit. As I grow older, my feet hurt, my eyes weaken, and my reflexes decelerate. Not only that, I worry about my grandchildren, miss my wife, and fret about the future. Sometimes, I have to work hard to smile or think good thoughts. I can be grumpy with ease.

But I hate it when I'm grumpy. My spirit sours, my brow furrows, and my lousy attitude affects the people around me. When I whine and complain, I get fewer perks, have fewer friends, and willingly increase my misery. How stupid is that? Who wants that? Not me. Not you.

Understand this: there are no emotional, physical, or relational benefits to being gloomy, but a bundle of benefits for being blissful. Simply put, happy people — people who continue to laugh, love, and learn no matter how difficult daily life is — will live longer than those who hibernate, bellyache, and stagnate.

I hope that happy couple makes it to their 70th wedding anniversary; they deserve it. So do you. Start today to laugh a little more at life's stressors and, in the process, add a few years to your life.

"You don't stop laughing because you grow old. You grow old because you stop laughing." —Michael Pritchard

Reason 11 Humor Enhances Harmony

Want your family to get along better? Would you like to have a happier marriage? Do you desire more harmony in your workplace?

This will help: Lighten up and laugh because humor brings people together; it makes them like each other. It's one more reason God gave us humor!

Here's how it works: humor releases endorphins within the brain that make you feel good about yourself and the people you are with — ergo, you tolerate differences, get along better, and disagree less.

Humor heightens love relationships. It is well established that women like men who make them laugh, and men like women who laugh at their jokes.⁹ Here's a quote from an online blog written by a woman: "Gentlemen, can I let you in on a little secret? A guy who makes me laugh — I'm talking out loud, contagious, straight-from-the-gut, don't-care-who's-around laugh — instantly

⁹<https://www.sciencealert.com/here-s-why-humor-is-important-in-romantic-attraction>

wins over the hot, boring guy. Every. Single. Time. A man who isn't afraid to look stupid in front of you is one of the most attractive things in the world." ¹⁰

Humor charms and disarms people. Speakers, preachers, and politicians include humor in their speeches to win over the audience and get their message across. Coaches, managers, and leaders use it to create cooperation and team unity.

Married couples who laugh together have stronger bonds between them. Life can get boring for even the most compatible couples. The relationship is taken for granted, and disappointments come. But a little laughter spices the relationship and relieves the stress of daily life. Jay Leno said, "You can't stay mad at someone who makes you laugh."

People who smile and laugh are more attractive. When you are mad, everything tightens up — your shoulders draw together, your brow furrows, your fists clench, your mouth curls down, your eyes squint, your voice gets shrill, and your stomach turns sour.

Laughter has all the opposite effects. When you laugh, your whole body opens up. You relax, you feel good all over, and your

¹⁰<https://www.elitedaily.com/dating/why-the-funny-guy-beats-the-hot-guy-every-time/995281>

eyes sparkle. Your laughter makes you more interesting, attractive, and open to connecting with others.

You've heard of the term 'infectious laughter,' right? There is something to that. When you laugh, your upbeat manner becomes a positive virus easily caught and quickly spread by those around you. Happy people project well-being, an authentic vigor for life, and an inner joy missing in so many people.

If you want to increase the intimacy of your relationships, tickle your funny bone. Relax your face and smile. Learn to laugh easily. The pain and sting of life are universal, but it must not be allowed to quiet our laughter, steal our joy, and separate us from each other.

It's time to laugh again. It's time to love again. It's time to collaborate more and separate less. How about you and I stop fussing at everyone who doesn't agree with us? Instead, let us find humor in every situation. Let's drop the drama, throw our heads back, and laugh at life from the depths of our souls.

When we do, we'll like ourselves better, and others will delight in our presence. As humorist Victor Borge declared many years ago, "Laughter is the closest distance between two people."

"A wonderful thing about true laughter is that it just destroys any kind of system of dividing people." - John Cleese

Reason 12 Humor Acknowledges Mortality

I'm over eighty years old now, and when I look in the mirror, I have a choice: grin or groan, laugh or cry. I do both — but most of the time, I smile. Why? Because the mirror confronts me with the obvious facts: I'm growing old, I look like my grandpa Fred, and my time on earth is limited.

Sorry about sounding morbid. I've buried all four of my grandparents, my dad, my mom, my friend, and most recently, my wife. My grandpa had a heart attack, my dad had cancer, my friend was murdered, and my wife died of brain cancer. Not much to laugh at there, right?

Not when it happened - but now there is an occasion to smile. I remember the day I broke Grandpa's favorite fishing pole. Whenever I recall the afternoon my dad hit a home run in our little league father/son ball game, I smile big.

And my friend who was murdered? We loved to drive down the road and sing hymns and songs at the top of our voices.

Every time I look at the picture of my wife and me standing atop a Mayan Pyramid in Belize or gaze at the sweet photo of the two of us taken in the kitchen a few months before she died, a tear comes to my eye. At the same time, a smile breaks out — if not on my face, at least in my Heart.

Ten out of ten people die, you know. Nearly all of them fear death; some of the mortally sick fight it, and a few scoff at it. You can do all three if you want, but no matter how much you ignore or deny the reality of death, it is certain. You will die.

That, my friend, is why God gave you the gift of humor; you need it to survive. Humor, joy, and contentment make life bearable; they shield your soul. Playfulness, bliss, and harmony create a cushion between the wonder of birth, the pain of life, and the certainty of death.

The sureness of your finite circumstances should cause you to consider the Infinite God and the meaning of life. At your birth, He created within you an awareness of eternity and a sense of destiny. Who am I? Why am I here? What is life all about? What happens to me when I die?

Again, it may sound morbid to contemplate your limited lifespan, but It can be healing and helpful. Try it. Ponder your destiny; mull over life's meaning and your mortality. When my

wife and I discussed her imminent death, it was far from morbid. Our openness and godly hope allowed us to sing, smile, and enjoy the months, weeks, days, and even our final hours together.

When she died, I cried and cried and cried. But it wasn't long until I smiled with the comfort of knowing what she meant to me, where she is now, and with whom she enjoys a life of no more turmoil, pain, or tears. My memory of the brave and hallowed way she departed this life gives me peace, makes me happy, and helps me accept the reality of my mortality.

"Laughter is the noise your heart makes when it smiles!" - Ron Ross

The Plus One Reason God Gave Us Humor: Life is Tough

We see children playing, and we smile because they are so happy, carefree, and authentic. And they are. But, so were you when you were seven years old. So was I. What happens to us as we age? Over the years, we can be slighted by a playmate, betrayed by a partner, hurt by a slander, damaged by a mistake, insulted by teacher, injured by an enemy, or ill-treated by a friend. We discover the short distance between laughter and melancholy, elation and desolation, joy and sorrow.

In one of his many books, author Max Lucado tells the story of a contented seventy-seven-year-old man. He quotes the man, saying, "I've had a good life, I am enjoying my life now, and I am looking to the future." Lucado then reports that two weeks later, a tornado ripped through the region and took the lives of his son, daughter-in-law, grandson, and daughter-in-law's mother. The man went from pleasure to pain in a millisecond.

It has happened to you as well. Perhaps not as horrible as the man Lucado wrote about, maybe worse. Nobody has an easy life — not even those whose Facebook profile makes them appear to live in perpetual pleasure.

Because life is tough, God gave us humor to help us survive. After all, what would we do if we couldn't laugh at our mistakes? Where would we turn for relief from our agony? Humor, laughter, and inner joy are possible because God embedded in our hearts the ability to find peace in chaos, hope in despair, and laughter in tears.

However, God does not force us to see the good in the bad, to find any pleasure in our pain. He leaves it up to us to decide which feeling to focus on. Our long-term response to life's short-term bruises and blunders makes the difference. That's why the Bible says there is a time to weep and a time to laugh.¹¹

It's your choice. Focus forever on the sorrow, and you'll bury the lessons and restrict the usefulness of your experiences. Or, seek to find joy amid life's misfortunes, and you'll learn more, be happier, and live longer. Accept, understand, and expand the wisdom and joy already in your heart.

¹¹ Ecclesiastes 3

And through it all, thank God for the gift of humor and the ability to rejoice; it enables you to endure the absurdities of life and survive to laugh, smile, and celebrate – again and again and again.

David, the Psalmist, said to God, "You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing. You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy." That, my friend, describes something that is way more than a good laugh.

"I realize that humor isn't for everyone. It's only for people who want to have fun, enjoy life, and feel alive". - Anne Wilson Schaef

About the Author



Ron Ross grew up in a parsonage, served as a missionary in Africa, and ministered as a Christian pastor. He traveled the world and wrote several books. Ron is an experienced publisher, radio show host, public speaker, podcaster, and newspaper columnist. Today, he reads voraciously, speaks authoritatively, and writes daily.

Married for over 52 years before his wife died in 2015, Ron is a father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. He currently lives in Indiana.

Watch for his "Senior Moment" videos circulating on "Reels" and Facebook. See them on his YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/RonRoss>

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