

Live Laugh and be Blessed



finding humor
and holiness in
everyday moments

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author of *Tickle Your Soul*

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THIS BOOK IS FOR
MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS—
THE BLESSINGS IN MY LIFE.

Thank you for all you are to me.

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Introduction

I love giving lectures. I meet so many wonderful people. I truly believe that when we touch another's life or another touches ours we are never the same. We carry all those people in our heart forever. We are forever connected. What a grace!

I am humbled when someone speaks to me about one of my books and comments on the content of a lecture. They open their heart and confide how a certain line or a story I had told helped them see things in a different way. Sometimes I hear marvelous sharings that occur in cancer groups or in meditation groups where they are using one of my books for discussion. I am often touched by the letters I receive from people who have read a story in one of my books, and they need me to know what it did to unlock a hurt or a bitterness or challenged them to forgive another.

Truly, I do not deserve this praise. I love to tell these stories and I love to share these moments of joy and laughter. I get so much more out of it than those to whom I am speaking or for whom I am writing. I guess that's what the boomerang principle is all about. Whatever we give away always comes back. When we help others laugh,

they bless us with laughter in our life. When we are kind and thoughtful toward others, we receive that gift back a hundredfold.

It's really wonderful to think that it's never too late to be happy, to be kind, to be generous, to be more fully alive. It's never too late to take time to spend a few minutes with someone we love or call someone on the telephone for no other reason than to just say "Hi" and tell them we were thinking of them. It's never too late to forgive someone and let go of some hurt. Life is short. We only really have this very moment! To live it fully is a gift we give back to ourselves.

It's not hard to find the joy in life and grasp the beauty of the moment. It's a choice we can make. And then we find ourselves lighter, more in touch, more aware, and more eager to share life with others.

People spend so much time worrying about getting old that they get old! They worry so much about not having enough money or being sick or being alone that they create that life script for themselves. There are only so many things we can control; getting older isn't one of them, but growing old is. Our health is a gift that we must be grateful for, appreciate, and do all we can to maintain. Harvard Medical School conducted a study on adult development with healthy people born in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s and found that attitude is the deciding factor in how we age. We mature as we age and some of our functions even improve. Because of many advance technologies we have learned to live longer, but have we learned to live well? It is not enough to just exist—to be physically alive. We must be physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually alive. We must live each moment. We must develop attitudes of gratitude, compassion, and reverence. We must grow to see

the joy in the moment in front of us—the joy of a sunny day, or the beauty of a winter snowstorm, or the exquisite colors of a sunset, or the smile on the face of a young child, or the twinkle in an older person's eye.

All of us need to check our attitudes and monitor our reactions. What do you do if you are caught in a traffic jam and know it will result in your being late for an appointment? What do you do when someone needs just a few minutes of your time and needs to share a concern with you? What do you do when you have to change your plans because the weather prevents you from going someplace, or travel plans have changed, or an unexpected crisis occurs? How do you respond when you are waiting for someone and he is late? Or when someone shares a story with you that she has told you a million times?

If only we could learn to live each moment and find joy in it. The next time it begins to snow, put on your coat and boots and stand still for a moment and let the snow cover you. Stand in awe that no two snowflakes are the same. The next time you pass a park, pull over and sit for a moment and watch the children play. Stay there until you find yourself laughing as hard as they are. The next time you are caught in a traffic jam, decide that it is a gift to yourself. No one knows where you are. We have few private moments; when we get one we miss it. So it is my hope that you will enjoy these stories and use them to live the moment.

I have another love—photography. My camera is my stress reducer. I relax and treat myself to those healthy moments we all need when I go out with my camera and find the beauty of a flower or the story revealed in someone's eyes. My photos are special to me, and each holds a story. Some of them are included throughout the

book. It is my hope that you, too, will find them special, that they will speak to you, and that you will discover something beautiful in them.

My wish for all of you will always be that you live well, love much, and laugh often.

CHAPTER I

Laughter

TIME SPENT LAUGHING IS TIME SPENT WITH THE GODS.

—JAPANESE PROVERB

There is a wonderful story about a construction worker who brought his lunch every day to his work site.

All the men working at the project ate lunch together at break time. Each day, the construction worker opened his lunch box and said, “Bologna again.” Every day the same scene was repeated: the construction worker opened his lunch box and said, “Bologna again.” This went on for weeks. The other men were tired of hearing him say the same thing every day. One of them finally said to him, “If you’re so tired of baloney sandwiches, why don’t you ask your wife to make you something besides a bologna sandwich?” The construction worker replied, “Oh, my wife doesn’t make my sandwiches. I do.”

This story resonates with many of us. We sometimes feed ourselves a lot of baloney and don’t do anything about it! Many stay stuck in negativity with a perspective framed in deprivation rather than abundance. For

example, they choose to see the glass as half empty. Negative people are very interesting. Did you ever notice how they whine? They develop an irritating sound to their voice as they incessantly whine with such interminable phrases as:

“Nothing good ever happens to me”;

“I never get picked for any committee”;

and

“I’ll never win the lottery.”

After listening for a while you really want to say, “Get off the cross. We need the wood.”

We have been blessed with the ability to make choices; these choices offer us the opportunity to see things differently and to change our behavior. We don’t have to eat bologna sandwiches every day. We can let our lives be touched with the positive energy around us and see the good that is right in front of us. We can find ways to laugh and be connected to others. We can find ways to be grateful for the blessings that are granted us daily. We can change our thinking from negative to positive. We can learn to believe in ourselves and live each moment we are given more fully.

I think it would be great if we could open our spiritual lunch boxes daily and find some soul food in them. If we could find some laughter and joy we would be healthier and wiser people. If we could find some surprises and reasons to hope we would be more balanced people. The best thing about this is that we can be empowered to do this for ourselves! We can be people who make a choice to live life fully. We can be people who learn to see the joy in the moment. We can be people who surround ourselves with positive, healthy people. We can be people who feed ourselves more than bologna.

Recently, a priest friend of mine was suffering through a very stressful situation. He is a public figure and is often quoted in national papers as a spokesperson for his brother priests. We were talking about the impact of stress on those being unjustly judged in the media. Both of us were concerned about the impact that the current crisis in the church would have on the mental and physical well-being of those who were misjudged or unjustly accused. I asked him how he was dealing with it in his own personal life. Without hesitation he said, “Each day I have a *holy* hour and I have a *happy* hour!”

What wonderful balance! We all need a holy hour where we can grow in our faith. We feed our soul and stay focused and in touch with God’s presence in our life. We all need a happy hour, too, where we can balance our daily stresses. Happy hours can be filled with surrounding ourselves with happy people. They can be moments in our day where we give ourselves life-giving seconds to breathe deeply in the moment, relaxing our bodies. I believe happy hours can be holy hours as well; they are the present moments when we choose to live intentionally, allowing those times to touch us in the depth of our souls. We become refreshed. Our perceptions are broadened as we see things in a new and different way, often finding ourselves to be more creative as a result.

In both holy hours and happy hours we are connected to others. It is this connection that empowers us and helps us deal with stresses and frustrations. Connections gift us with a way out of our ruts and into a creative space with new eyes and ears, empowering us to experience life beyond bologna sandwiches. The energy we feel from our connections carries us through difficult moments. This energy is like soul food. It is the nutrition that gives us

20/20 vision to see our world through wide eyes, including the periphery. This energy enables us to perceive all the world without blinders; it allows us to have a clearer, wider picture of our place in the human family. We can then care about the starving people in the world. Homeless people are not foreign to us. What happens in Sudan or Iraq affects us because we feel connected. The more we are connected to other people, the more we realize our connection to the whole universe. Connections take us beyond ourselves and place us in the context of the whole. We are connected to the earth and the stars. “It is your business,” Horace writes, “when the wall next door catches fire.”

You—and you alone—will have stars as
no one else has them.

In one of them I shall be laughing.
And so it will be as if all the stars were
laughing when you look at the sky at
night.

You—only you—will have stars that can
laugh!

And when your sorrow is comforted
(time soothes all sorrows),

You will be content that you have known
me.

—ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPERY,
THE LITTLE PRINCE

THEN OUR MOUTH WAS FILLED WITH LAUGHTER, AND OUR
TONGUE WITH SHOUTS OF JOY; THEN IT WAS SAID AMONG
THE NATIONS, "THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR
THEM." THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US, AND
WE REJOICED.

—PSALM 126:2-3

