



Reverend Lowell's Treasury of Humor

He Who Laughs, Lasts!

*Humorous Anecdotes, Quotes, and Quips
For Public Speakers and Writers*

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What have we got here? This is **He Who Laughs, Lasts**, one of the volumes of **Reverend Lowell's Treasury**. It contains Reverend Lowell's all-time favorite anecdotes, jokes, quips, and witty comments. Each volume covers a different topic, and the full set contains thousands of humorous anecdotes collected by Reverend Lowell during his long career as an ordained minister. After thirty years of public speaking from the pulpit, the podium, and on television, he has amassed quite a few, and **Reverend Lowell's Treasury** represents the "cream of the crop." These are Reverend Lowell's favorite funny stories, revealing quotes, interesting anecdotes, and zingy one-liners. And there's nothing that would be unsuitable in any public setting.



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*Probably the most pirated, photocopied, e-mailed, and otherwise reproduced humor material of the past few decades is Richard Lederer's compilation of bloopers and blunders found in student history exams. Extensive excerpts from Lederer's book, *Anguished English*, are found throughout the Internet under such titles as "History of the World" and "The World According to Student Bloopers." Rarely is Lederer given credit. I contacted him directly and asked him for an **authorized** selection. His reply follows.*

Dear Lowell:

Here's my approximately 329-word version of "The World According to Student Bloopers" -- as much humor per square syllable as I can possibly muster. Excerpted and adapted from Richard Lederer, *Anguished English* (Wyrick, Dell), this condensed version of the opening is composed entirely of genuine, certified, authentic student fluffs and flubs and goofs and gaffes.



Ancient Egypt was inhabited by mummies, and they all wrote in hydraulics. They lived in the Sarah Dessert, which they cultivated by irritation. Ancient Egyptian women wore a loose-fitting garment which began just below the breasts which hung to the floor.



The Bible is full of many interesting caricatures. Noah's wife was called Joan of Ark. Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day and a ball of fire by night. Moses went up on Mt. Cyanide to get the ten commandments, but he died before he ever reached Canada. Solomon had 300 wives and 700 porcupines. Jesus was born because Mary had an immaculate contraption. An epistle is the wife of an apostle.



The Greeks were a highly sculptured people, and without them we wouldn't have history. The Greeks invented three kinds of columns: corinthian, ironic, and dorc. They also invented myths. A myth is a female moth. One myth tells us that the mother of Achilles dipped him in the river Stinks until he became intolerable.



The Romans conquered the Geeks. Their leader, Julius Caesar, extinguished himself on the battlefields of Gaul and when the Ides of March murdered him, he expired with these immortal words upon his dying lips: "Tee hee, Brutus!"



Then came the Middle Ages, when everyone was middle aged. King Arthur lived in the Age of Shivery, with brave knights on prancing horses and beautiful women. Magna Carta ensured that no free man should be hanged twice for the same offense. Joan of Arc was burnt to a steak. People contracted the blue-bonnet plague, which caused them to grow boobs on their necks. They also put on morality plays about ghosts, goblins, virgins, and other mythical creatures.



Then came the Renaissance, a time of a great many discoveries and inventions. Gutenberg invented the Bible and removable type. Sir Walter Raleigh discovered cigarettes and started smoking. And Sir Francis Drake circumcised the world with a 100-foot clipper.

All Good Luck With Your Humor Projects,

Rich Lederer

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I was preaching in a small Methodist church in Georgia and I asked the congregation, "How many of you folks here this morning are Methodists?" And everybody raised their hand except one little old lady. After the service, she and I were shaking hands and I said, "Ma'am, I noticed you didn't raise your hand, that means you're not a Methodist. Would you mind telling me what you are?" She said, "Well, I'm a Baptist."

Well, some of the people standing around didn't seem to appreciate her answer. So, I asked her, "Ma'am, would you mind telling me why you're a Baptist?" She said, "Well I really don't know, except my mother was a Baptist, my father was a Baptist, my grandmother and my grandfather were Baptists." "Well, I said, "Ma'am, that's really not a good reason to be a Baptist. Suppose your mother and your father, and your grandmother and your grandfather had been morons, what would you have been?"

She didn't bat an eye, but said, "I guess I'd have been a Methodist."

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"Is it a sin to have sexual relations before receiving Communion?" the young woman asked her pastor.

"Only if you block the aisle," he replied.

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At an afternoon tea for officers and their wives, the commanding general of the base delivered a seemingly endless oration. A young second lieutenant, listening with obvious disfavor, grumbled to the woman at his side, "What a pompous and unbearable old windbag that slob is."

The woman turned to him, her face red with rage and said, "Lieutenant, do you know who I am?"

"No, ma'am."

"I am the wife of the man you just called 'an unbearable old windbag.' "

"Indeed," said the young lieutenant, looking steadfast and unruffled, "and do you know who I am?"

"No, I don't," said the general's wife.

"Thank God," said the lieutenant as he disappeared into the crowd.

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The local symphony orchestra in a small midwestern town was rehearsing for a concert at a Marriott hotel. After the last strains of Handel's *Largo* floated out, the mother of one of the violinists went up to the conductor and said, "Won't you please play Handel's *Largo*?"

"But we've just finished playing it," the conductor replied.

The woman sank back in her chair. "Oh, I wish I'd known it," she sighed. "It's my favorite piece."

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My wife rushed into the supermarket to pick up a few items. She headed for the express line where the clerk was talking on the phone with his back turned to her. "Excuse me," she said, "I'm in a hurry. Could you check me out, please?" The clerk turned, stared at her for a second, looked her up and down, smiled and said, "Not bad."

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Pastor Roger Matthews tells the following story: "We were traveling one summer in the Pocono Mountains and, like a good Presbyterian family, attended church while we were on vacation. One lazy Sunday we found our way to a little Methodist Church. It was a hot day and the folks were nearly "out" in the pews. The preacher was preaching on and on until, all of a sudden, he said, "The best years of my life have been spent in the arms of another man's wife." The congregation let out a gasp, came to immediate attention, and the dozing deacon in the back row dropped his hymnbook. Then the preacher said, "It was my mother." The congregation tittered a little and managed to follow along as the sermon concluded. I filed this trick away in my memory, a great way to get the congregation's attention back when it has been lost. Sure enough, the next summer, on a lazy Sunday, I was preaching and the flies were buzzing around and the ushers were sinking lower and lower in their seats in the back row until I could hardly see them. Then I remembered our experience in the Pocono Mountains, and I said in a booming voice, "The best years of my life have been spent in the arms of another man's wife." Sure enough, I had their attention. One of the ushers in the back row sat up so fast he hit his head on the back of the pew in front of him. I had them. But you know something, I forgot what came next. All I could think to say was, "And for the life of me, I can't remember her name!"



Hospitalized man to wife: "Do you have any idea what it does to somebody to be 'W.J. Hambley, Senior Vice President' one minute and 'the gall bladder in 403' the next?"

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Want ad:

Secretary wants job; no bad habits; willing to learn.

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Ronald Reagan was beyond the age at which most Americans retire when he ran for the presidency in 1980. At age 69, he conducted a vigorous campaign, never passing up the chance to defuse the issue of his age with humor.

On one occasion, he remarked, "I want to say that I don't mind at all any of the jokes or remarks about my age. Thomas Jefferson made a comment about the Presidency and age. He said that one should not worry about one's exact chronological age in reference to his ability to perform one's task. And ever since he told me that, I stopped worrying."

Probably his best such moment came during his second presidential election campaign, during his televised debate with Walter Mondale in 1984. A reporter asked Reagan if he was too old to serve another term. Reagan was more than ready for the question. He said, "I'm not going to inject the issue of age into this campaign," he began. "I am not going to exploit for political gain my opponent's youth and inexperience."

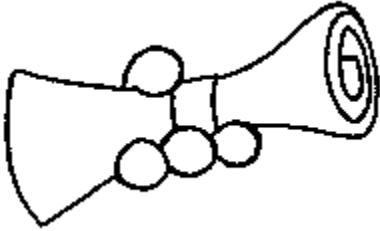


Tony attended the men's prayer breakfast and heard a visiting psychologist speak on the importance of showing appreciation to the important people in one's life. Tony decided to start with his wife, so after work that night, he went to the shopping mall where he bought a dozen long-stemmed roses, a box of chocolates, and a pair of earrings. He chortled with self-satisfaction as he contemplated surprising his wife and showing her how much he appreciated her.

He stood at the front door with the roses in his right hand, the gaily wrapped box of candy under his arm, an open jewelry box displaying the earring in his left hand. With an elbow he rang the doorbell. His wife came to the door, opened it, and stared at him for a long minute. Suddenly she burst into tears.

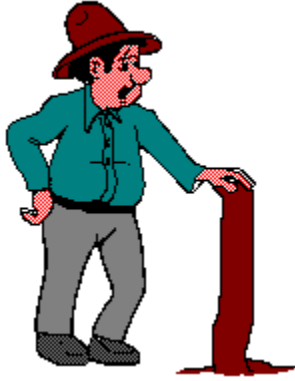
"Sweetheart, what's wrong?" asked the bewildered husband.

"It's been the worst day of my life," she answered. "First, Jimmy tried to flush his diaper down the toilet. Then Eric melted his plastic airplane in the oven. Then the dishwasher got clogged and overflowed all over the kitchen floor. Then Brittany came home from school with a note from the teacher saying that she beat up a boy in her class. And now you come home drunk!"



When accepting an award, Jack Benny observed, "I really don't deserve this. But I have arthritis too and I don't deserve that either."

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Talking to the suntanned New Mexican about the weather in Albuquerque, the tourist asked, "doesn't it ever rain here?" The native replied, "Mister, do you remember the story of Noah and the Ark, and how it rained forty days and forty nights?"

"Of course I do," the man answered.

"Well," drawled the southwesterner, "we got half an inch that time."

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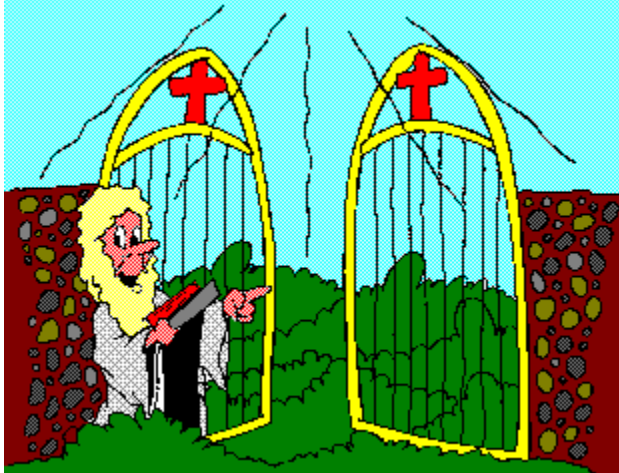
When the country goes temporarily to the dogs, cats must learn to be circumspect,
walk on fences, sleep in trees, and have faith that all this woofing is not the last word.
-- Garrison Keillor

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Lady Astor once said to Winston Churchill at a party, "Sir, if you were my husband, I would put poison in your tea." To which Churchill retorted, "And Madame, if you were my wife, I would drink it!"

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Reminds me of two fellows who died recently and were walking the golden streets of God's celestial realm. There was more beauty and more splendor and more joy there than they had ever dreamed imaginable.

One of them turned to the other and said, "Isn't this wonderful?"

The other replied, "Yes, and to think we could have gotten here ten years sooner if we hadn't eaten all that oat bran."

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There is a story about a monastery in Europe perched high on a cliff several hundred feet in the air. The only way to reach the monastery was to be suspended in a basket which was pulled to the top by several monks who pulled and tugged with all their strength. Obviously the ride up the steep cliff in that basket was terrifying. One tourist got exceedingly nervous about half-way up as he noticed that the rope by which he was suspended was old and frayed. With a trembling voice he asked the monk who was riding with him in the basket how often they changed the rope. The monk thought for a moment and answered brusquely, "Whenever it breaks."

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From an actual courtroom transcript:

Question: (Showing man picture.) That's you?

Answer: Yes, sir.

Question: And you were present when the picture was taken, right?

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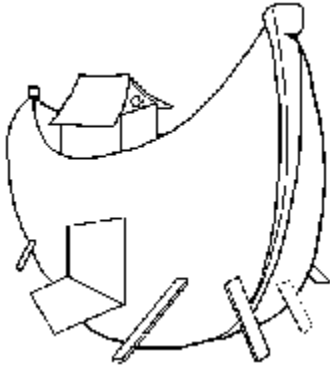
Accept good advice gracefully -- as long as it doesn't interfere with what you intended to do in the first place.

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I was once given the following advice by a secretary: "It's better to remain silent and be thought stupid than to open your mouth and forever remove all doubt."

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And the Lord said unto Noah: "Where is the ark which I have commanded thee to build?"

And Noah said unto the Lord: "Verily, I have had three carpenters off ill. The gopher-wood supplier hath let me down -- yea, even though the gopher-wood hath been on order for nigh upon 12 months. What can I do, O Lord?"

And God said unto Noah: "I want that ark finished even after seven days and seven nights."

And Noah said: "It will be so."

And it was *not* so. And the Lord said unto Noah: "What seemeth to be the trouble this time?"

And Noah said unto the lord: "Mine subcontractor hath gone bankrupt. The pitch which Thou commandest me to put on the outside and on the inside of the ark hath not arrived. The plumber hath gone on strike. Shem, my son who helpeth me on the ark side of the business, hath formed a pop group with his brothers Ham and Japheth. Lord, I am undone."

And the Lord grew angry and said, "And what about the animals, the male and female of every sort that I ordered to come unto thee to keep their seed alive upon the face of the earth?"

And Noah said: "They have been delivered unto the wrong address but should arriveth on Friday."

And the Lord said: "How about the unicorns, and the fowls of the air by sevens?"

And Noah wrung his hands and wept, saying: "Lord, unicorns are a discontinued line; thou canst not get them for love nor money. And fowls of the air are sold only in half-dozens. Lord, Lord, Thou knowest how it is."

And the Lord in His wisdom said, "Noah, my son, I knowest. Why else dost thou think I have caused a flood to descend upon the earth?"

--Journal of Eastern Region of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

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Everyone should have a spouse, because there are a number of things that go wrong that one can't blame on the government.

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According to David Frost, what a writer means by constructive criticism is six thousand words of closely reasoned adulation.

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Walking down the street, a man passes a house and notices a child trying to reach the doorbell. No matter how much the little guy stretches, he can't make it. The man calls out, "Let me get that for you," and he bounds onto the porch to ring the bell. "Thanks, mister," says the kid. "Now let's run."

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The following are children's answers to Sunday school questions in a Church of England, as they were reprinted by St. Paul's (Episcopal) Church in Seattle, Washington:

Noah's wife was called Joan of Ark.

Henry VIII thought so much of Wolsey that he made him a cardigan.

The fifth commandment is: Humor thy father and mother.

Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day but a ball of fire at night.

When Mary heard she was to be the mother of Jesus, she went off and sang the Magna Carta.

Salome was a woman who danced naked in front of Harrod's (a London department store).

Holy acrimony is another name for marriage.

Christians can have only one wife. This is called monotony.

The Pope lives in a vacuum.

Paraffin is next in order after seraphim.

Today, wild beasts are confined to the Theological Gardens.

The patron saint of travelers is St. Francis of the seasick.

Iran is the Bible of the Muslims.

A Republican is a sinner mentioned in the Bible.

Abraham begat Isaac and Isaac begat Jacob and Jacob begat twelve partridges.

The natives of Macedonia did not believe, so Paul got stoned.

The First Commandment: Eve told Adam to eat the apple.

It is sometimes difficult to hear what is being said in church because the agnostics are so terrible.



Mrs. Hansen had been a member of First Baptist church for 25 years. As she walked toward the pastor, who stood waiting at the sanctuary door after the service, it was obvious that she had something on her mind. "Reverend, if God were alive today, He would be shocked at the changes in this church!"

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James Agee's comment on a film: "Several tons of dynamite are set off in this picture -- none of it under the right people."

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A woman drove a mini-van filled with a dozen screaming kids through the mall parking lot, looking for a space. Obviously frazzled, she coasted through a stop sign.

"Hey, lady, have you forgotten how to stop?" yelled an irate man.

She rolled down her window and said, "What makes you think these are all mine?"

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The wit and charm of Adlai E. Stevenson II made him a constant target for autograph seekers. Once, as he left the United Nations Building in New York City and was as usual surrounded by admirers, a small elderly woman in the crowd finally succeeded in approaching him.

"Please Mr. Ambassador," she said, holding out a piece of paper, "your autograph for a very, very old lady."

"Delighted!" Stevenson replied with a smile. "But where is she?"

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A city man took a winter vacation in an isolated rural area. After a few days of pure peace and quiet, though, he started to get restless.

"What do you do for fun and excitement here?" he asked one of the locals.

"We go down to the lake and watch the moose dance on the ice," was the reply. "It's delightful."

The city fellow didn't think too much of that idea, but after another night of watching the wallpaper, he decided it was better than nothing. So that evening he went down to the lake. The next day he saw the local man who had recommended the trip. "I went down to the lake last night to watch the moose dance on the ice," the city man said. "It was the worst thing I ever saw. Those animals were so clumsy and uncoordinated, they were falling all over themselves."

"Well of course they were," snorted the local. "Nobody goes to the lake on Wednesday. That's amateur night."



There was a fellow who applied for a job as a press aide for a Congressman. Not long after he submitted his application, he received word from the official's office: "Your resume is full of exaggerations, distortions, half-truths and lies. Can you start work Monday?"

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Excerpts from church bulletins:

The ladies of the church have cast off clothes of every kind and they may be seen in the church basement on Friday afternoon.

As the maintenance of the churchyard is becoming increasingly costly, it would be appreciated if those who are willing would clip the grass around their own graves.

A note from the pastor: I shall be away from the parish attending the Diocesan Clergy School from April 21-24. It will be convenient if parishioners will abstain from arranging to be buried, or from making other calls on me during this time.

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A man with a nagging secret couldn't keep it any longer. In the confessional he admitted that for years he had been stealing building supplies from the lumberyard where he worked.

"What did you take?" his parish priest asked.

"Enough to build my own home and enough for my son's house. And houses for our two daughters. And our cottage at the lake."

"This is very serious," the priest said. "I shall have to think of a far-reaching penance. Have you ever done a retreat?"

"No, Father, I haven't," the man replied. "But if you can get the plans, I can get the lumber."



A four-year-old boy accompanied his pregnant mother to the gynecologist's office. When mother heaved a sigh and clutched her stomach, her son looked alarmed. "Mommy, what is it?" he asked.

"The baby brother you're going to have is kicking," mother explained.

"He's probably getting restless," the youngster decided. "Why don't you swallow a toy?"



The mother of three notoriously unruly youngsters was asked whether or not she'd have children if she had it to do over again.

"Sure," she replied, "but not the same ones."

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The main course at the big civic dinner was baked ham with glazed sweet potatoes. Rabbi Cohen regretfully shook his head when the platter was passed to him. "When," scolded Father Kelly playfully, "are you going to forget that silly rule of yours and eat ham like the rest of us?"

"At your wedding reception, Father Kelly," said Rabbi Cohen without skipping a beat.

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Diet Tips:

If no one sees you eat it, it has no calories.

If you drink a diet soda with a candy bar, they cancel each other out.

When eating with someone else, calories don't count if you both eat the same thing.

Food used for medicinal purposes NEVER counts, such as hot chocolate, brandy, toast, and Sara Lee cheesecake.

If you fatten up everyone else around you, you look thinner.

Movie-related foods don't count because they are simply part of the entertainment experience and not a part of one's personal fuel, such as Milk Duds, popcorn with butter, and Junior Mints.

Enjoy your Diet!!!!

-- Malcolm Kushner, How to Use Humor for Business Success

In the immortal words of Zsa Zsa Gabor, "I am a very good housekeeper. Each time I get a divorce I keep the house."

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One Halloween night, a neighborhood practical joker decided to frighten the young "trick-or-treaters" who rang his doorbell. He put on a floor-length black cape, a black hat fitted with devil's horns, and a hideous mask that seemed to combine the most gruesome features of "Dracula," "Frankenstein," and the "Wolf Man." Then he waited. Finally, his doorbell rang. He turned off all the lights and, shining a flashlight on his mask, he opened the door and pierced the night air with an eerie scream. Then he looked down and saw standing before him a tiny, golden-haired five year old, dressed as a dainty fairy. The little tyke stared wide-eyed for a moment. Then she raised her eyes up along the massive black cape, looked straight into the hideous mask, smiled and said, "Is your mommy home?"

A famous author was autographing copies of his new novel in a department store. One gentleman pleased him by bringing up not only his new book for signature, but two of his previous ones as well.

"My wife likes your stuff," he remarked apologetically, "so I thought I'd give her these signed copies for a birthday present."

"A surprise, eh?" hazarded the author.

"I'll say," agreed the customer. "She's expecting a Mercedes."

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One Sunday late in Lent a Sunday School teacher decided to ask her class what they remembered about Easter. The first little fellow suggested that Easter was when all the family comes to the house and they eat a big turkey and watch football. The teacher suggested that perhaps he was thinking of Thanksgiving, not Easter, so she let a pretty young girl answer. She said Easter was the day when as you come down the stairs in the morning you see all the beautiful presents under the tree. At this point, the teacher was really feeling discouraged. But after explaining that the girl was probably thinking about Christmas, she called on a lad with his hand tentatively raised in the air. Her spirits immediately perk up as the boy says that Easter is the time when Jesus was crucified and buried. She felt she had gotten through to at least one child until he added, "And then He comes out of the grave and if He sees His shadow we have six more weeks of winter."

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A young man of 32 had been appointed president of the bank. He'd never dreamed he'd be president, much less at such a young age. So he approached the venerable Chairman of the Board and said, "You know, I've just been appointed President. I was wondering if you could give me some advice."

The old man came back with just two words: "Right decisions!"

The young man had hoped for a bit more than this, so he said, "That's really helpful, and I appreciate it, but can you be more specific? How do I make right decisions?"

The wise old man simply responded, "Experience."

The young man said, "Well, that's just the point of my being here. I don't have the kind of experience I need. How do I get it?"

Came the terse reply, "Wrong decisions!"

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"Pastor Quits Sports: Twelve Reasons Why A Local Clergyman Stopped Attending Athletic Contests."

Every time I went, they asked me for money.
The people with whom I had to sit didn't seem very friendly.
The seats were too hard and not comfortable.
The coach never came to call on me.
The referee made a decision with which I could not agree.
I was sitting with some hypocrites -- they came only to see what others were wearing.
Some games went into overtime, and I was late getting home.
The band played some numbers that I had never heard before.
The games are scheduled when I want to do other things.
My parents took me to too many games when I was growing up.
Since I read a book on sports, I feel that I know more than the coaches anyhow.
I don't want to take my children, because I want them to choose for themselves what sport they like best.

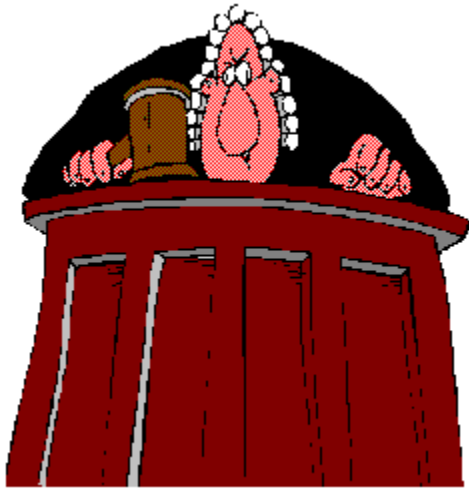
On the bottom of the page was this one line postscript: "With apologies to those who use these same excuses for not coming to church."

--Moody Monthly

A lecturer asked her audience, "Who is wiser than Ann Landers, more controversial than Phil Donahue, wittier than Mel Brooks and handsomer than Tom Selleck?"

From the audience came a forlorn voice: "My wife's first husband!"

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A criminal with a long record of transgressions was on trial for his latest crime. The jury found him guilty on 33 counts and the judge sentenced him to 189 years. Realizing that even with time off for good behavior he would be over one hundred when he was released, the prisoner burst into tears. Noting this display of remorse, the judge reconsidered. He said, "I didn't mean to be so severe. Thinking it over, I can see that I've imposed an extremely harsh sentence. So you don't have to serve the whole time." The prisoner beamed with new found hope until the judge leaned toward him and said, "Just do a much as you can."

A friend of the George Bernard Shaws tells of an evening he spent with them. While G.B.S. told stories, Mrs. Shaw busied herself knitting.

"What are you knitting?" asked the guest in an aside.

"Oh, nothing, nothing at all," whispered Mrs. Shaw. "It's just that I've heard these stories of his 2000 times, and if I didn't do something with my hands, I'd choke him."

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The bride brought her new husband up to meet Granny at the family picnic. The old woman looked the young man over carefully and then said to him, "Young man, do you desire to have children?" He was a bit startled by her candid approach, but finally came out with, "Well, yes, as a matter of fact, I do." She looked at him scornfully and then surveyed the very large clan gathered around a half-dozen picnic tables and said, "Well, try to control it."

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Says one humorist: "Life is unfair. I lost my car keys at a ball game and never found them. I lost my sunglasses at the beach and never found them. I lost my socks in the washing machine and never found them. I lost three pounds on a diet -- I found them and five more."

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Arriving for a visit, the woman asked her small granddaughter, "Megan, how do you like your new baby brother?"

"Oh, he's all right," the child shrugged. "But there were a lot of things we needed worse."

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How many executives does it take to change a light bulb?

Five. One to change the bulb, and four to yank the ladder out from under him.

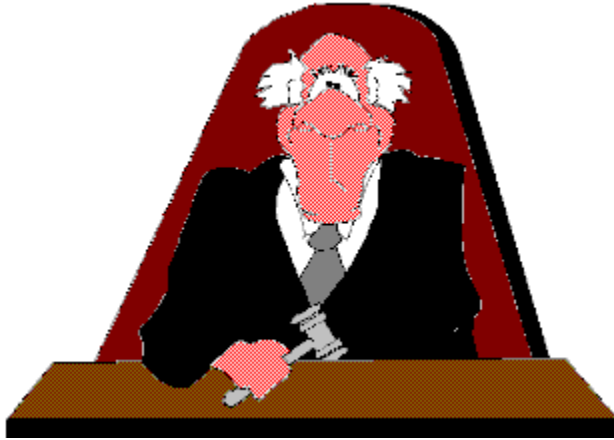
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Billionaire J. P. Getty was once asked the secret of his success. Said Getty, "Some people find oil. Others don't."

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Early one morning, a woman made a mad dash from her house when she heard the garbage truck pulling away. She was still in her bathrobe. Her hair was wrapped around big curlers. Her face was covered with sticky cream. She was wearing a chin-strap and a beat up old pair of slippers. In short, she was a frightful picture. When she reached the sidewalk, she called out, "Am I too late for the garbage?" And the reply came back "No, hop right in."

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From an actual courtroom transcript:

Question: Do you know how far pregnant you are right now?

Answer: I will be three months November 8th.

Question: Apparently then, the date of conception was August 8th?

Answer: Yes.

Question: What were you and your husband doing at that time?

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There was a golf match between an eminent Supreme Court Justice and an equally distinguished Virginia bishop. The bishop missed four straight short putts without saying a single word. The Justice watched him with growing amusement and remarked, "Bishop, that is the most profane silence I ever heard."

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A man and his ten-year-old son were on a fishing trip miles from home. At the boy's insistence, they decided to attend the Sunday worship service at a small rural church.

As they walked back to their car after the service, the father was filled with complaints. "The service was too long," he lamented. "The sermon was boring, and the singing was off key."

Finally the boy said, "Daddy, I thought it was pretty good for a dime."

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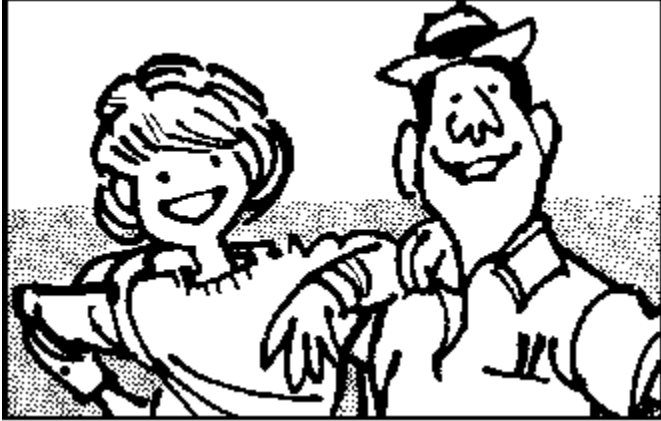
My home church welcomes all denominations, but really prefers tens and twenties.

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"While I was playing with the Pirates," writes Joe Garagiola, "I gave a speech to the Pittsburgh Junior Chamber of Commerce. Trying to make the best of a terrible season, I said, 'We may not be high in the standings, and we don't win many ballgames, but you've got to admit we play some interesting baseball.' A voice from the back of the room yelled, "Why don't you play some dull games and win a few?"

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Says actor Tom Selleck, "Whenever I get full of myself, I remember that nice couple who approached me with a camera on a street in Honolulu one day. When I struck a pose for them, the man said, 'No, no, we want you to take a picture of us.' "

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Actor James Garner, when asked if he would ever do a nude scene, replied, "God, no. I don't do horror films."

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Mr. and Mrs. Ivers were pushing their cart down the aisle at the supermarket when they spotted an elderly pair walking hand in hand. Said Mrs. Ivers: "Now, that looks like a happy married couple."

"Don't be too sure, dear," replied Mr. Ivers. "They're probably saying the same thing about us."

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Oscar Levant, after listening to his friend George Gershwin's monologue about himself, inquired: "George, if you had it to do over, would you fall in love with yourself again?"

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Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. began a speech with one of the all time best opening lines: "I feel like a mosquito in a nudist colony. I look around and I know it's wonderful to be here, but I don't know where to begin."

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In a talk to the Louisiana Trial Lawyers Association, speech professor Waldo Braden demonstrated a four-item variation. Braden began by noting that all the other speakers had highly technical backgrounds related to the practice of law. Then he analogized his position to William Howard Taft's great granddaughter. When she was asked to write her autobiography in the third grade, the young lady responded. "My great grandfather was president of the United States, my grandfather was a United States senator, my father was an ambassador, and I am a Brownie."

"On this morning, at this elegant hotel here in the French Quarter in this distinguished company, I feel like a Brownie."

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Two fellows are talking religion. One says to the other, "Sometimes I'd like to ask God why he allows poverty, famine and injustice when he could do something about it."

"What's stopping you?" asks the second.

And the first replies, "I'm afraid God might ask me the same question."

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A salesman dropped in to see a business customer. Not a soul was in the office except a big dog emptying wastebaskets. The salesman stared at the animal, wondering if his imagination could be playing tricks. The dog looked up and said, "Don't be surprised, buddy, this is part of my job."

"Incredible!" muttered the man. "I can't believe it! I'm going to tell your boss what a prize he has in you -- an animal that can talk!"

"No, no," pleaded the dog. "Please don't! If that bum finds out I can talk, he'll make me answer the phones!"

One lawyer successfully defended a client in a scandalous and highly publicized trial. At a party after the trial ended, he was cornered by an indignant woman. "Is there no client so low, so despicable, so outrageous, that you wouldn't take the case?" she demanded.

"It all depends," said the lawyer equably. "What did you do?"

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Life is what happens to you while you're busy planning more important things.

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Hell hath no fury like a lawyer of a woman scorned.

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Sister Serafina was on a much desired mission assignment to the Apache Indians. She was so excited that she drove past the last gas station without noticing that she needed gas. She ran out of gas about a mile down the road, and had to walk back to the station. The attendant told her that he would like to help her, but he had no container to hold the gas.

Sympathetic to her plight, he agreed to search through an old shed in the back for something that might suffice. The only container that would hold fuel was an old bedpan. He was doubtful, but the grateful nun told him that the bedpan would work just fine. She carried the gasoline back to her car, taking care not to drop an ounce. When she got to her car, she carefully poured the contents of the bed pan into the tank.

A truck driver pulled alongside the car as the nun was emptying the container into the tank. He rolled down his window and yelled to her, "I wish I had your faith, Sister!"

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How many graduate students does it take to change a light bulb?

One -- but it takes him nine years.

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How many auto mechanics does it take to change a light bulb?

Two. One to screw in the wrong-sized bulb and one to replace the burned-out socket.

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A perfect minister is hard to find...

One of the toughest tasks a church faces is choosing a good minister. A member of an official board undergoing this painful process finally lost patience. He'd watched the pastoral relations committee reject applicant after applicant for some fault, alleged or otherwise. It was time for a bit of soul-searching on the part of the committee. So he stood up and read a letter purporting to be from another applicant. "Gentlemen: Understanding your pulpit is vacant, I should like to apply for the position. I have many qualifications. I've been a preacher with much success and also have had some success as a writer. Some say I'm a good organizer. I've been a leader most places I've been.

"I'm over 50 years of age. I have never preached in one place for more than three years. In some places, I have left town after my work caused riots and disturbances. I must admit I have been in jail three or four times, but not because of any real wrongdoing.

"My health is not too good, though I still get a great deal done. The churches I have preached in have been small, though located in several large cities. I've not gotten along well with religious leaders in towns where I have preached. In fact, some have threatened me and even attacked me physically. I am not too good at keeping records. I have been known to forget whom I baptized.

"However, if you can use me, I shall do my best for you."

The board member looked over at the committee. "Well, what do you think? Shall we call him?"

The good church folk were aghast. Call an unhealthy, trouble-making, absentminded, ex-jailbird? Was the board member crazy? Who signed the application? Who has such colossal nerve?

The board member eyed them all keenly before he answered, "It's signed, 'the Apostle Paul.' "

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A Sunday School teacher read a passage from the Old Testament Book of Jonah to her class:

"And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying 'I called to the Lord out of my distress and He answered me' ... and the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land."
(Jonah 1:17--2:1-2,10)

When she had finished reading, the teacher said, "Now, children, you have heard the Bible story of Jonah and the whale. What does this story teach us?" Mark, a ten-year-old, shouted out: "You can't keep a good man down!"

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Boss to new employee: "I want you to know that my door is always open. Please walk by quietly."

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How many mystery writers does it take to change a light bulb?

Only one, but it needs a spectacular twist at the end.

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When Barbara and Jim were dating, Barbara became concerned over the lavish amount of money Jim was spending on her. After an expensive dinner date, she asked her mother, "What can I do to stop Jim from spending so much money on me?"

Her mother replied simply, "Marry him."

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A little boy in Sunday School gave the explanation as to why Mary and Joseph took baby Jesus to Egypt. He claimed: "They couldn't get a sitter."

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How do you tell the Episcopal priest at an ecumenical ceremony?

He's the one who sends back the wine.

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To his horror, the pastor discovered during the service that he had forgotten his sermon notes, so he said to the congregation, by way of apology, that this morning he should have to depend upon the Lord for what he might say, but next Sunday he would come better prepared.

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A rabbi and a soap maker went for a walk together. The soap maker said, "What good is religion? Look at all the trouble and misery of the world! Still there, even after years -- thousands of years -- of teaching about goodness and truth and peace. Still there, after all the prayers and sermons and teachings. If religion is good and true, why should this be?"

The rabbi said nothing. They continued walking until he noticed a child playing in the gutter.

Then the rabbi said, "Look at that child. You say that soap makes people clean, but see the dirt on that youngster. Of what good is soap? With all the soap in the world, over all these years, the child is still filthy. I wonder how effective soap is, after all!"

The soap maker protested. "But, Rabbi, soap cannot do any good unless it is used!"

"Exactly," replied the rabbi. "Exactly!"

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Receptionist to salesman: "You can either wait till the boss comes back or I can give you the old runaround myself."

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Golfer Tommy Bolt had a terrible temper. Once, after missing six straight putts, generally leaving them teetering on the very edge of the cup, Bolt shook his fist at the heavens and shouted, "Why don't you come down and fight like a man!"

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How many surrealists does it take to change a light bulb?

Two. One to turn the giraffe and the other to fill the bathtub with multicolored clocks.

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And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto Him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting Him, that they might have to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down, and with His finger wrote on the ground, as though He heard them not. So when they continued asking Him, he lifted up Himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her (John 8:3-7).

And at that, a large rock came down out of the clouds and killed the woman.

Jesus looked up toward Heaven and said, "Aw, Dad, I'm trying to make a point here."

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They say there are six phases to any project:

1. Enthusiasm
2. Disillusionment
3. Panic
4. Search for the guilty.
5. Punishment of the innocent.
6. Praise and honors for the nonparticipants.

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Mark Twain warned, "Be careful about reading health books. You may die of a misprint."

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From the reports on 4-H Club activities in Mount Vernon, Ohio, News: "The seventh meeting of the Knox County Jersey Boosters was held at the home of Katherine and Maxine Cochran. The group inspected the girls' calves."

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Two cars collided on a winding, backwoods road. The drivers got out and traded insurance information in a gentlemanly fashion. Then one driver took out a bottle and said, "Look, fellow, you seem a bit shaken up. How about a drink to steady your nerves?" The other took the proffered flask and gulped some down. Gratefully he handed it back. When the first man simply put it away, the second asked, "Aren't you going to have any?" The first man replied, "Not till after the police get here."

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The wolves were decimating the farmers' sheep. So the farmers' association raised the bounty on them to a hundred dollars a pelt. Two hunters, Sam and Ed, decided they could use the money. So they got their gear together and headed out to the wide open spaces to shoot some wolves and make themselves rich.

They had just fallen asleep out under the stars when a noise woke Ed. By the light of the campfire he saw the eyes of a hundred wolves -- teeth gleaming. He shook his friend and whispered hoarsely, "Sam! Sam! Wake up! We're rich!"

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Deputy Todd pulled alongside a speeding car on the freeway. Glancing at the car, he was astounded to see that the woman at the wheel was knitting!

Todd cranked down his window and yelled, "PULL OVER!"

"NO," the woman yelled back, "IT'S A SCARF!"

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The daughter of a wealthy producer was asked at school to write a story about a poor family. Her essay began: "Once upon a time there was a poor family. The mother was poor. The daddy was poor. The children were poor. The butler was poor. The chauffeur was poor. The maid was poor. The gardener was poor. Everybody was poor."

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An Episcopalian died and went to Heaven. St. Peter was leading him past Purgatory where he saw some people who were in deep agony. So he asked, "Who are those people and what have they done to deserve this?"

St. Peter said, "Those are Jews, and they are guilty of eating ham."

They went on and passed another group in worse shape, so the man asked who they were and what they had done. St. Peter said, "Those are Catholics, and they are guilty of eating ham on Fridays."

They went on and found a group of people much more despondent than the other two, and so he asked, "Who are these people, and what have they done that was so bad?"

"Those are Episcopalians," said St. Peter, "and they were caught eating ham with their salad forks."



The city man bought a farm and was visited by his new neighbor. He asked him, "Can you tell me where the property line runs between our farms?"

The farmer looked him over and asked, "Are you talking owning or mowing?"

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Johnny's father kept bringing home office work just about every night. Finally his first grader son asked why. Daddy explained that he had so much work he couldn't finish it all during the day. Asked Johnny, "In that case, why don't they put you in a slower group?"

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Over at Fortitude Holiness Tabernacle, Dexter Rice, the Sunday School teacher, was telling his class the story of the Prodigal Son. Wishing to emphasize the resentful attitude of the elder brother, he laid stress on this part of the parable.

After describing the rejoicing of the household over the return of the wayward son, Dexter spoke of one who, in the midst of the festivities, failed to share in the jubilant spirit of the occasion. "Can anybody in the class," he asked, "tell me who this was?"

Nine year old Olivia Crombie had been listening sympathetically to the story. She waved her hand in the air. "I know!" she said beamingly. "It was the fatted calf."

An economist was asked to talk to a group of business people about the recession. She tacked up a big sheet of white paper. Then she made a black spot on the paper with her pencil and asked a man in the front row what he saw. The man replied promptly, "A black spot." The speaker asked every person the same question, and each replied, "A black spot." With calm and deliberate emphasis the speaker said: "Yes, there is a little black spot, but none of you mentioned the big sheet of white paper. And that's my speech."

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Three people were visiting and viewing the Grand Canyon -- an artist, a pastor and a cowboy. As they stood on the edge of that massive abyss, each one responded with a cry of exclamation. The artist said, "Ah, what a beautiful scene to paint!" The minister cried, "What a wonderful example of the handiwork of God!" The cowboy mused, "What a terrible place to lose a cow!"

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A father was watching his young son try to dislodge a heavy stone. The boy couldn't budge it. "Are you sure you are using all your strength?" the father asked. "Yes, I am," said the exasperated boy. "No, you are not," the father replied. "You haven't asked me to help you."

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Question asked of actor Jimmy Stewart: "Why did you never think of running for President?"

Answer: "I can't talk fast enough to be a politician."

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Question asked of Woody Allen: "Is it your dream to live on in the hearts of people?"

Answer: "I would prefer to live on in my apartment."

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The two law partners were having lunch one day, when one of them suddenly jumped up and exclaimed, "Oh, no! I've got to get back to the office! I left the safe unlocked!" The other lawyer looked at his partner calmly and replied, "What are you worried about? We're both here."

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It all depends on your point of view. Here is a tongue-in-cheek review of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as it appeared in *Field and Stream*, November 1959:

"Although written many years ago, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* has just been reissued by Grove Press, and this fictional account of the day-by-day life of an English gamekeeper is still of considerable interest to outdoor-minded readers, as it contains many passages on pheasant raising, the apprehending of poachers, ways to control vermin, and other chores and duties of the professional gamekeeper. Unfortunately one is obliged to wade through many pages of extraneous materials in order to discover and savor these sidelights on the management of a Midlands shooting estate, and in this reviewer's opinion this book cannot take the place of J. R. Miller's *Practical Gamekeeping*."

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Former Undersecretary of the Interior John C. Whitaker is reminded of how easy it is to get an out-of-perspective feeling about one's importance in government whenever he thinks of an 85-year-old woman who has lived her life in one spot in Nova Scotia. The population there swells to nine in summer and stays steady at two during the winter. Whitaker, who has been fishing there every year since he was 12, flew in one day. Miss Mildred welcomed him into her kitchen and said, "Johnny, I hate to admit I don't know, but where is Washington?" When Whitaker realized that she wasn't kidding, he explained: "That's where the President is. That's like where you have the Prime Minister in Ottawa." Then she asked how many people lived there, and Whitaker said there were about two million. She said, "Think of that, two million people living so far away from everything."

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After reading his prepared statement at a press conference, the feisty senator threw the meeting open for questions.

"Is it true," asked one sarcastic reporter, "that you were born in a log cabin?"

"You're thinking of Abraham Lincoln," replied the senator nonchalantly. "I was born in a manger."

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A very dignified pastor was visiting a lady in a nursing home who was confined to a wheel chair. As he stood to leave, the lady asked him to have a word of prayer. He gently took her hand and prayed that God would be with her to bring her comfort, strength and healing. When he finished praying her face began to glow. She said softly, "Pastor, would you help me to my feet?" Not knowing what else to do, he helped her up. At first, she took a few uncertain steps. Then she began to jump up and down, then to dance and shout and cry with happiness until the whole nursing home was aroused. After she was quieted, the solemn pastor hurried out to his car, closed the door, grabbed hold of the steering wheel and prayed a little prayer, "Lord, don't you ever do that to me again!"

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A basketball coach reportedly told some friends about a dream he had. "I was walking down the street," he said, "when this Rolls Royce pulled up beside me. Inside, there was a beautiful young woman -- blonde, maybe 24 or 25 years old. She asked me to get in. She took me to a fantastic restaurant where we ate and drank and she paid the bill. Then she asked me if I wanted to go home with her. And I said yes. And we did."

"Then what happened?" a listener urged.

"The best part of all!" the coach drooled. "She introduced me to her two brothers, and both of them were over 7 feet tall!"

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In the days when the sun never set on the British empire, the Foreign Office posted Miles Cavendish in Khartoum, Libya. The colonial government had decorated the central square of the city with a dramatic equestrian statue of General Charles George Gordon. Gordon had died heroically in 1885 when Khartoum fell to the troops of the Mahdi after a ten-month siege. Converted into stone, Gordon now forever would survey the city from the back of his spirited horse.

Cavendish had one son. The boy was named Charles--after General Gordon, of course. Cavendish was a dedicated British civil servant. His heart swelled with the spirit of imperial obligation and pride. He made it his business to impress his son with the importance of the statue. "That is Gordon," he said to his son, and bowed his own head in a moment of reverent silence. The boy loved the statue and virtually every day he would run to the square to take a look at Gordon. When the Foreign Office informed the elder Cavendish that he was being transferred from Khartoum to Lahore, the boy's last deed before leaving was to proceed to the square to say a solemn farewell to Gordon. As Miles watched, his eyes welled up with tears. He said to himself, "Indeed, here beats the heart of a true Englishman. The lad is well named indeed!"

On board the steamer to Lahore, the boy turned to his father thoughtfully and said, "Father, I have a question I have always wanted to ask."

"Yes, my son?"

"It concerns Gordon. There's one thing I don't understand."

"What is that, my son?"

"Tell me. Who is that silly looking man who sits on Gordon?"

Dear Abby:

I have been going with a girl for a year. How can I get her to say Yes?
- Robert

Dear Robert:

What's the question?

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Reputation is character minus what you've been caught doing.

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A despondent woman was walking along the beach when she saw a bottle on the sand. She picked it up and pulled out the cork. Whoosh! A big puff of smoke appeared.

"You have released me from my prison," the genie told her. "To show my thanks, I grant you three wishes. But take care, for with each wish, your mate will receive double of whatever you request."

"Why?" the woman asked. "That bum left me for another woman."

"That is how it is written," replied the genie.

The woman shrugged and then asked for a million dollars. There was a flash of light, and a million dollars appeared at her feet. At the same instant, in a far-off place, her wayward husband looked down to see twice that amount at his feet.

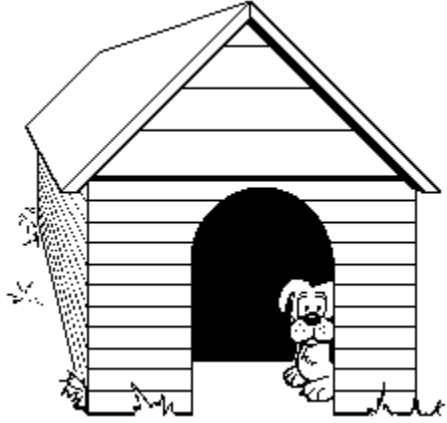
"And your second wish?"

"Genie, I want the world's most expensive diamond necklace." Another flash of light, and the woman was holding the precious treasure. And, in that distant place, her husband was looking for a gem broker to buy his latest bonanza.

"Genie, is it really true that my husband has two million dollars and more jewels than I do, and that he gets double of whatever I wish for?"

The genie said it was indeed true.

"Okay, genie, I'm ready for my last wish," the woman said. "Scare me half to death."



Real-estate agent to prospective home buyers: "Yes, we have a house in your price range. Its present owner is a German shepherd named Prince."

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An antelope and a lion entered a diner and took a booth near the window. When the waiter approached, the antelope said, "I'll have a bowl of hay and a side order of radishes."

"And what will your friend have?"

"Nothing," replied the antelope.

The waiter persisted. "Isn't he hungry?"

"Hey, if he were hungry," said the antelope, "would I be sitting here?"

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From the bulletin of the Church of the Incarnation in Sarasota, Florida: "*The Magic of Lassie*, a film for the whole family, will be shown Sunday at 5 p.m. in the church hall. Free puppies given to all children not accompanied by parents."

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I used to say that politics was the second oldest profession. I have come to know that it bears a gross similarity to the first.

-- Ronald Reagan

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During the children's sermon the Pastor asked, "What is gray, has a bushy tail and gathers nuts in the fall?" One five year old raised his hand. "I know the answer should be Jesus," he stated, "but it sounds like a squirrel to me."

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A dignified English solicitor-widower with a considerable income had long dreamed of playing Sandringham, one of Great Britain's most exclusive golf courses, and one day he made up his mind to chance it when he was traveling in the area. Entering the clubhouse, he asked at the desk if he might play the course. The club secretary inquired, "Member?"

To which he replied, "No, sir."

"Guest of a member?" "No, sir." The answer came back, "Sorry." As he turned to leave, the lawyer spotted a slightly familiar figure seated in the lounge, reading the London Times. It was Lord Parham. He approached and, bowing low, said, "I beg your pardon, your Lordship, but my name is Higginbotham of the London solicitors Higginbotham, Willinby and Barclay. I should like to crave your Lordship's indulgence. Might I play this beautiful course as your guest?"

His Lordship gave Higginbotham a long look, put down his paper and asked, "Church?"

"Church of England, sir, as was my late wife."

"Education?"

"Eton, sir, and Oxford."

"Sport?"

"Rugby, sir, a spot of tennis and No. 4 on the crew that beat Cambridge."

"Service?"

"Brigadier, sir, Coldstream Guards. Victoria Cross and Knight of the Garter."

"Campaigns?"

"Dunkirk, El Alamein and Normandy, sir."

"Languages?"

"Private tutor in French, fluent German and a bit of Greek."

His Lordship considered this briefly, then nodded to the club secretary and said, "Nine holes."



When college football's undefeated Notre Dame was about to play Miami in 1989, an impromptu theological debate occurred between Fighting Irish coach Lou Holtz and Miami's chaplain, Father Leo Armbrust. In his invocation at a booster luncheon, Armbrust assured his audience that the Almighty was impartial. When Holtz got up to speak, he agreed with Father Leo.

"I don't think God cares who wins tomorrow either," said Holtz. "But His mother does."

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Rodney Dangerfield went to a psychiatrist. "You're crazy," the psychiatrist said. Dangerfield protested, "If you don't mind, I want a second opinion." The psychiatrist said, "All right. You're ugly too."

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A pompous Baptist minister was seated next to an overbearing attorney on a flight to Wichita. After the plane was airborne, the flight attendant came around for drink orders. The attorney asked for a whiskey and soda, which was brought and placed before him. The attendant then asked the minister if he would also like a drink. The minister replied in disgust, "I'd rather savagely rape a brazen whore than let liquor touch these lips." The attorney then handed his drink back to the attendant and told her with delight, "I didn't know there was a choice."

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Henry Ward Beecher, the famous New England minister, was entering his pulpit one Sunday morning. Awaiting him was an unmarked envelope. Opening it, he found a single sheet of paper on which was written the single word **FOOL**. After chuckling to himself, he held the paper up to the congregation and said: "I have known many an instance of a man writing letters and forgetting to sign his name. But this is the only instance I've ever known of a man signing his name and forgetting to write his letter."

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In the words of Robert Frost, the great American poet, "The brain is a wonderful organ. It starts working the moment you get up in the morning and does not stop until you get to the office."

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A priest and a rabbi were enjoying the fights at Madison Square Garden. One of the fighters crossed himself before the opening gong sounded. "What does that mean?" the rabbi asked. The priest said, "Not a damn thing if he can't fight."

--Belle Barth

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Several years ago, a retrospective showing of Pablo Picasso's works was held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Nearly a thousand of Picasso's works were displayed in chronological order, beginning when he was a very young boy. The early works were traditional landscapes and still-lives. Then, as the artist advanced in age, brilliant colors began to emerge, and the still-lives were no longer very still. Finally, of course, the works turned into the kind of bold, zesty abstractions for which Picasso is best known. One art critic who saw the show recalled that once, when Picasso was eighty-five, he was asked the reason why his earlier works were so solemn and his later works so ecstatic and exciting. "How do you explain it?" asked the interviewer. "Easily," Picasso responded, his eyes sparkling. "It takes a long time to become young!"

In America, the young are always ready to give to those who are older than themselves the full benefit of their inexperience.

--Oscar Wilde

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I am not young enough to know everything.

--James Matthew Barrie

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Who Is Reverend Lowell?

Rev. Lowell D. Streiker is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ and holds a Ph.D. in religion from Princeton University. He has written, co-authored, edited, and contributed to more than fifteen books, including **The Pastor's Complete Handbook Of Model Sermons** (Prentice Hall), **Fathering: Old Game, New Rules** (Abingdon), and **The Promise Of Buber** (Lippincott).

He has co-produced and moderated the television series **Counterpoint** for CBS, and appeared on numerous radio and television programs including **The Oprah Winfrey Show**, **The Merv Griffin Show**, and **CBS Morning News**.

He Who Laughs, Lasts!

An essay on humor by Rev. Lowell D. Streiker

Mark Twain observed that humans are the only animals that blush. Or need to. And Samuel Butler noted, "Man is the only animal that laughs and has a state legislature." We laugh because we sense the contradiction between the way things are and the way they ought to be. The same impulse that makes us religious also makes us humorous. As a minister, I have found humor a valuable resource as I have sought to communicate spiritual truths to church audiences on Sunday mornings. Sometimes the truth contained in a humorous story or quip gains attention while the same truth in its usual prosaic form is ignored or taken for granted.

Sometimes, to quote comic actor Woody Harrelson, "the only way to get a serious message across is through comedy." Also the humorous illustrations in a talk, a lecture, or a sermon are remembered long after the other content of the address is forgotten. As Isaac Asimov, author of hundreds of books and lifetime collector of humorous anecdotes, once related, "Jokes of the proper kind, properly told, can do more to enlighten questions of politics, philosophy, and literature than any number of dull arguments." Actor-comedian John Cleese maintains, "If I can get you to laugh with me, you like me better, which makes you more open to my ideas. And if I can persuade you to laugh at the particular point I make, by laughing at it you acknowledge its truth." And Joel Goodman remarks, "Mirth can be a major tool for insight, changing 'ha-ha' to 'aha.' "

This is a collection of some of my all-time favorite anecdotes, jokes, quips, and witty comments. I trust that they will be of value to you as you meet and communicate with others -- whatever your vocation may be. Laughter is powerful force and it is yours to use whether you are a public speaker, a minister, a teacher, a salesman, an office worker, a psychologist, or a plumber!

The laughter encouraged by this collection is supportive of human dignity. It is life-affirming and life-giving. And it is, to borrow a word from religion, prophetic. It comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable. It ennobles our spirits and extends our love to others.

I believe that God is a fantastic humorist and we are all his jokes. God fills each of our lives with more irony and coincidence than a Shakespearean comedy or an afternoon soap opera.

Did you know that Jesus was a fabulous comedian? It is hard to read his parables without laughing. They are filled with irony, wit, and surprise endings. His teachings are replete with hyperbole and exaggeration: "If your eye offends you, pluck it out... Don't be so concerned about the speck in your brother's eye. Take care of the rafter in your own." He puts the pretentious and pompous in their place. He celebrates the triumph of little people. If only we could see the smile on his face, we might understand him much better. If I had to summarize his teachings in a single sentence,

that sentence would be: "The first shall be last and the laughs shall be first."

Many observers claim that a sense of humor is essential to mental well being and good physical health. When struggling to overcome a painful and debilitating disease, Norman Cousins discovered, "Ten minutes of genuine belly laughter had an anesthetic effect and would give me at least two hours of pain-free sleep." As Anne Wilson Schaef recognizes, "A chuckle a day may not keep the doctor away, but it sure does make those times in life's waiting room a little more bearable." Mahatma Gandhi confessed, "If I had no sense of humor, I should long ago have committed suicide."

"Laughter," says an anonymous commentator, "is like changing a baby's diaper -- it doesn't permanently solve any problems, but it makes things more acceptable for a while." Psychologist Rollo May explains, "Humor is the healthy way of feeling "distance" between one's self and the problem, a way of standing off and looking at one's problems with perspective." And to quote Anne Wilson Schaef again, "I realize that humor isn't for everyone. It's only for people who want to have fun, enjoy life, and feel alive."

I have read that Saint Theresa of Avila "always looked for novices who knew how to laugh, eat, and sleep. She was sure that if they ate heartily they were healthy, if they slept well they were more likely free of serious sin, and if they laughed they had the necessary disposition to survive a difficult life."

As serious a person as Billy Graham recognizes the value of humor. He writes: "A keen sense of humor helps us to overlook the unbecoming, understand the unconventional, tolerate the unpleasant, overcome the unexpected, and outlast the unbearable."

Laughter, of course, can be helpful or harmful. It can be derisive. It can ridicule whatever and whomever we fear, we misunderstand, we resent. Hence, there are racial and ethnic jokes, in-law jokes, sexist jokes, etc. Archie Bunker is never far away in American humor.

In this collection, I have sought to avoid being unnecessarily offensive -- which means that at times I may have been a bit rough on someone in order to make a point. Remember what I said about "afflicting the comfortable." Pompous, self-important, insensitive people are always fair game to the humorist. Even so, I have attempted not to be mean spirited. All humor walks this fine line.

And I have selected "good, clean" anecdotes and jokes. If I could not tell a story from the pulpit or when speaking on television, it is not in this collection.

But let me do more than *tell* you about this collection and how it can be of value to you. Let me *show* you exactly what the laughter evoked by a good story can do. (All of the following anecdotes are taken from the body of this collection.)

Laughter sets things in their proper perspective.

I am reminded of the college student wrote to her parents as follows:

"Dear Mom and Dad, I'm sorry to be so long in writing, but all my writing paper was lost the night the dormitory burned down. I'm out of the hospital now, and the doctor says my eyesight should be back to normal sooner or later. The wonderful boy, Bill, who rescued me from the fire, kindly offered to share his little apartment with me until the dorm is rebuilt. He comes from a good family, so you won't be surprised when I tell you we are going to be married. In fact you always wanted a grandchild, so you will be glad to know you will be grandparents early next year." Then she added this postscript: Please disregard the above practice in English composition. There was no fire. I haven't been in the hospital. I'm not pregnant. And I don't have a steady boyfriend. But I did get a D in French and an F in chemistry, and I wanted to be sure you received the news in proper perspective. Love, Mary."

Laughter is the great leveler.

Three burly fellows on huge motorcycles pulled up to a highway cafe where a truck driver, just a little guy, was perched on a stool quietly eating his lunch. As the three fellows came in, they spotted him, grabbed his food away from him and laughed in his face. The truck driver said nothing. He got up, paid for his food and walked out. One of the three cyclists, unhappy that they hadn't succeeded in provoking the little [guy] into a fight commented to the waitress: "Boy, he sure wasn't much of a man, was he?" The waitress replied, "Well, I guess not." Then, looking out the window, she added, "I guess he's not much of a truck driver, either. He just ran over three motorcycles."

Laughter keeps us from taking ourselves too seriously.

I was once invited to speak at a local Rotary club. I felt flattered by the invitation until the master of ceremonies rose to introduce me. "Unfortunately," he said, "our original choice to be today's speaker is unable to attend." Then, in a clumsy attempt at humor, he pointed to a broken window pane which had been covered over with a piece of cardboard. "Our speaker," he said, "is like that piece of cardboard in the window. He's a substitute." Being somewhat taken aback by the ungraceful introduction, I decided to show them: Substitute or not I would knock their socks off. And I did! When I finished the speech, I received a standing ovation. But when the emcee returned to the lectern, his attempt to thank me was even more awkward than his introduction. "Reverend," he said, "we want you to know that you were not at all like a cardboard substitute. You were a real pane!"

That humiliation was nothing compared to what happened later. After the meeting, the club president gave me a check for \$100. I gave it back and told him to use it for his club's favorite charity. He said, "Oh, good, we can put it in our "special fund," the one we use to pay for really good speakers!"

Actually neither incident really happened to me. They are anecdotes which I applied to myself so that my audience could have a laugh at my expense. And since I am in a profession that is notorious for taking itself too seriously, such self-deflating humor is of enormous value.

Leonard I. Sweet, President of United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, gives a vivid illustration from his own career.

It was my first "stewardship campaign." I had been appointed by the bishop to the missionary church in a small-college community in New York's Genessee Valley. The first year had been a nervous one for both me, a young, not dry-behind-the-ears pastor and wetback Ph.D., and the congregation which was comprised of an odd and unconsummated coupling of rural folk and "academic types." But there was significant enough progress to warrant the belief that we could double the budget after my first year there. If only we had a slogan...some catchy motto or jingle around which to design our development campaign.

Or so I thought. The weekend before the "Stewardship Sunday" kickoff, I sought some solitary confinement in Toronto, Canada. There I hit first on a slogan and then an idea: Why not have T-shirts made up for those "every-member canvassers" who could then call on parishioners emblazoned with my newly brainstormed stewardship theme? It seemed the perfect plan.

During the "Community Concerns" time of the morning worship the next Sunday, the chair of the campaign, Doug Klapper, did an outstanding job of making the committee's case for our controversial financial leap forward. As soon as he finished, I bolted to the front, prevented him from returning to his seat, and presented him with a "surprise gift" that I announced confidently would give our campaign focus and force.

The color of Doug's face when he unwrapped his "surprise gift" should have alerted me to what was to come. His embarrassed refusal ("You do it," he giggled) to hold up the T-shirt for the congregation to see was another missed warning signal. But it was not until the moment that I held up that T-shirt and announced that there were enough of these "surprise gifts" for every one of our canvassers to wear that I realized exactly what I had done. Our stewardship slogan would be, I proudly read,

I Upped *My* Pledge.
Up *Yours*

I had lost it. At first a tricking tickle, then a torrent of laughter. I tried to preach. But convulsions of laughter drowned out my sermon at unpredictable moments, ebbing and flowing like a moonshine tide. But that moment of my greatest embarrassment and mistake, a moment from which that worship service never fully recovered, was the moment of my ministry's recovery in that community. For

suddenly this upstart preacher and hotshot Ph.D. became human, and could do something so outrageously stupid and foolish that it redeemed all his jarring strangeness. From that Sunday on, I became their pastor and was bonded to them for life. And for the next seven years, as I walked the streets of the village, I would find myself greeted with the query "Are you the 'up-yours' preacher?"

As a pastor, Dr. Sweet was no longer affected by that debilitating disease of preachers, terminal seriousness. In the eyes of his congregation, he was no longer a stranger, he was a human being who -- just like them -- could "do something ... outrageously stupid and foolish." As humor writer Larry Wilde proclaims, "If you are willing to make yourself the butt of a joke, you become one of the guys, a human being, and people are more willing to listen to what you have to say."

A story that punctures the pomposity of experts in general and ministers in particular is told about

... an engineer, a psychologist, and a theologian [who] were hunting in the wilds of northern Canada. [Suddenly, the temperature dropped and a snow storm descended, lashing them with its fury. As they trudged on, they] ... came across an isolated cabin, far removed from any town. Because friendly hospitality is a virtue practiced by those who live in the wilderness, the hunters knocked on the door to ask permission to rest.

No one answered their knocks, but, discovering the cabin was unlocked, they entered. It was a simple place -- two rooms with a minimum of furniture and household equipment. Nothing was surprising about the cabin except the stove. It was large, potbellied, and made of cast iron. What was unusual was its location: it was suspended in midair by wires attached to the ceiling beams.

"Fascinating," said the psychologist [,stroking his beard]. "It is obvious that this lonely trapper, isolated from humanity, has elevated his stove so he can curl up under it and vicariously experience a return to the womb."

"Nonsense!" replied the engineer [as he scratched some calculations in the dust on the cabin floor]. "The man is practicing the laws of thermodynamics. By elevating his stove, he has discovered a way to distribute heat more evenly throughout the cabin."

"With all due respect," interrupted the theologian, [folding his hands in a gesture of piety,] "I'm sure that hanging his stove from the ceiling has religious meaning. Fire LIFTED UP has been a religious symbol for centuries."

The three debated the point for several hours without resolving the issue. When the trapper finally returned, they immediately asked him why he had hung his heavy potbellied stove by wires from the ceiling."

His answer was succinct: "Had plenty of wire, not much stove pipe!"

Humor, notes Southern folklorist Loyal Jones, "helps us keep objective, reminds us that we are fallible, that we are not the center of the universe, and that there is a whole lot that we do not know and still more that we don't understand. Humor puts us in our place just as the teachings of Jesus do. Humor reiterates what he said: The one who exalts himself shall be humbled and the one who humbles himself shall be exalted.

But humor does more than encourage humility.

Laughter makes pain palatable.

A group of high school students went to New York for their senior trip. They had reserved rooms in one of the finest hotels. When they arrived in the city they went to the hotel and registered. A bellhop led them to their rooms, which were on the 30th floor. After getting settled in their rooms they went out to see the sights. They went to Rockefeller Center, the United Nations Plaza, the Guggenheim Museum, the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty, etc. Finally they came back to their hotel, utterly exhausted. They went to the desk and asked for the keys to their rooms.

The clerk said, "I am sorry, the elevators are not running. You will have to walk up or wait until the elevators are repaired."

They were so weary that all they could think of were the comfortable beds in their rooms. Tired as they were, they decided they would climb the thirty flights of stairs. One of them had an idea. He said, "On the way up, each of us will tell the funniest story we know." The others agreed and they started the climb. When they reached the tenth floor they were still going strong.

When they reached the twentieth floor their legs were like lead and they were panting for breath. The steps got longer and longer but they trudged on. The one whose turn it was to tell the next funny story said, "I'm sorry, I'm just too exhausted to laugh."

They trudged on in silence. When they reached the 29th floor one of them began to laugh. He sat down on the steps and almost had hysterics. Finally, he said, "I have just thought of the funniest things I have ever heard of in my life."

The others said, "What is it? Tell us!"

He said, "Our room keys--we left them in the lobby!"

Laughter is therapeutic.

It can mend anything from a broken heart to the crack of dawn. From Alison Crane, executive director of the American Association for Therapeutic Humor, comes a story originally told to her by a middle-aged pastor:

I had a very serious accident a few years ago; it was amazing I survived. And, of course, I was in the hospital for a very long time recuperating.

Because I was there for so long, I became rather nonchalant with the nurses about the procedures they subjected me to -- you can't keep decorum up for very long with no clothes on. I was also having trouble finding a relatively painless spot to put yet another injection of pain medication.

One time I rang for the nurse, and when she came on the intercom, I told her I needed another pain shot. I knew it would take just about as long for her to draw up the medication as it would for me to gather the strength to roll over and find a spot for her to inject it. I had succeeded in rolling over, facing away from the door, when I heard her come in. "I think this area here isn't too bad," I said, pointing to an exposed area of my rear. But there was an awful silence after I said that. My face paled as I rolled over slowly to see who had actually come in -- it was one of my twenty-two-year old female parishioners! I apologized and tried to chat with her, but she left shortly thereafter, horribly embarrassed.

Well, about thirty seconds after she left, the impact of the situation hit me and I started to laugh. It hurt like you can't imagine, but I laughed and laughed. Tears were rolling down my face and I was gasping when my nurse finally came in. She asked what had happened. I tried to tell her, but couldn't say more than a word or two before convulsing into laughing fits again. Amused, she told me she would give me a few minutes to calm down and she'd be back to give me my shot.

I had just started to regain my composure when my nurse reappeared and asked again what had happened. I started to tell her, but got to laughing again, and she started to laugh just from watching me, which made it worse. Finally, she left again, promising to try back in fifteen more minutes. This scenario repeated itself a couple of more times, and by the time I could tell her what had happened, I felt absolutely no pain. None. I didn't need medication for three more hours. And I know it was an emotional turning point in my recovery.

As an editorial writer for the Chicago Tribune declared about the therapeutic power of humor:

Jokes are no laughing matter to the brain. They are a type of release valve that enables us to think the unthinkable, accept the unacceptable, discover new relationships, adjust better and maintain our mental health. They are also funny. Without them we probably would be a dull, dimwitted society, trapped in a harsh world too serious to bear.

And finally,

Laughter reminds us how poorly we communicate with others and how readily

we misunderstand those who communicate with us.

There was a nice lady, a minister's widow, who was a little old fashioned. She was planning a week's vacation in California at Skylake Yosemite campground (Bass Lake, to the uninitiated), but she wanted to make sure of the accommodations first. Uppermost in her mind were bathroom facilities, but she couldn't bring herself to write "toilet" in a letter. After considerable deliberation, she settled on "bathroom commode," but when she wrote that down, it still sounded too forward, so, after the first page of her letter, she referred to the bathroom commode as "BC." "Does the cabin where I will be staying have its own 'BC'? If not, where is the 'BC' located?" is what she actually wrote.

The campground owner took the first page of the letter and the lady's check and gave it to his secretary. He put the remainder of the letter on the desk of the senior member of his staff without noticing that the staffer would have no way of knowing what "BC" meant. Then the owner went off to town to run some errands.

The staff member came in after lunch, found the letter, and was baffled by the euphemism, so he showed the letter around to several counselors, but they couldn't decipher it either. The staff member's wife, who knew that the lady was the widow of a famous Baptist preacher, was sure that it must be a question about the local Baptist Church. "Of course," the first staffer exclaimed, "'BC' stands for 'Baptist Church.'" And he sat down and wrote:

Dear Madam,

I regret very much the delay in answering your letter, but I now take the pleasure in informing you that the BC is located nine miles north of the campground and is capable of seating 250 people at one time. I admit it is quite a distance away if you are in the habit of going regularly, but no doubt you will be pleased to know that a great number of people take their lunches along and make a day of it. They usually arrive early and stay late.

The last time my wife and I went was six years ago, and it was so crowded we had to stand up the whole time we were there. It may interest you to know that right now there is a supper planned to raise money to buy more seats. They are going to hold it in the basement of the 'BC.'

I would like to say that it pains me very much not to be able to go more regularly, but it is surely no lack of desire on my part. As we grow older, it seems to be more of an effort, particularly in cold weather.

If you decide to come down to our campground, perhaps I could go with you the first time, sit with you, and introduce you to all the folks. Remember, this is a friendly community."

Well, the particular local church each of us attends is also a friendly community, and a

community that knows there is a time for laughter. We know that God cares, that he takes away our sorrows and turns them into delight. We know that God weeps with us when we weep and laughs with us when we laugh.

So here is Dr. Lowell's prescription for being happy and spreading happiness: take two jokes before you go to bed and call me in the morning -- or whenever you have a laugh to spare. And the next time you see someone on the street who appears to have no happiness in him, not even a smile to share, give him one of yours.

Finally, always remember: laughter is an expression of confidence -- in God, in yourself, in the future. Laugh and you will endure. Laugh and you will triumph. Laugh and you will overcome adversity. In simplest terms: He who laughs, LASTS!

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