

# Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement  
For The Real World

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*"If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified."—1 Peter 4:14*

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## Labels—Part 2

By Lorelei Nettles

*Labels are difficult to remove, but they cause far more trouble than just sticking around.*



**I**N [PART ONE](#) OF THIS TOPIC, we covered the fact that labels (derogatory terms) are stuck onto individuals and are difficult to remove, but labels can also be attached to an individual due to a past deed, way of life or due to an association they may have had.

In our vocabulary, such terms may be used quite generally (as in, “those people”) or can be more specific (as in, “Nazis”). Whatever the label, please don’t be responsible for it getting stuck onto an individual. It is fine to have convictions about what is right and wrong, but when we allow them to become prejudices, we may begin attaching labels to people without knowing it.

For instance, let’s say your convictions about alcoholism lead you to have a strong prejudice against alcoholics, with no tolerance for them. Then one day, you start telling a friend from church or your office how horrible alcoholics are and how they never change their ways. Maybe you announce you could never be associated with anyone who had ever been an alcoholic. Imagine you really don’t know much about this person’s past and lo and behold, find they struggled with alcoholism for a long time, but have now been alcohol free for ten years. This person has now been labeled by you and may never share that part of his or her life with you, thereby shutting down the possibility of building a relationship between the two of you.



***We must remember that God does not call the perfect.***

Now, remove the word alcoholism and insert the word addicts, aborters, homosexuals, Muslims, Jews, Germans, gamblers, adulterers, prostitutes or any other label you can think of. What kinds of labels have you assigned to these people? We must remember that God does not call the perfect. We are told in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the

flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence” (King James Version).

The point is we do not know where people have come from in their lives. We may not know their past struggles or whether they may still be struggling with something. When we attach labels in a general manner, we become judge and jury over a person’s past. We allow no room for change and we possibly turn their hearts from us. We can never know whom God is calling, nor do we know what they are being called from. We can’t tag the Nazi label on someone just for being German. We can’t assume that just because someone was once a drug addict, we can now tag that person with a drug abuser label. What if they are not or never were a part of the given label you pasted on them, but their spouse, parents or other family members are or were? What if they struggle with how to deal with those family members and then hear from us that we would shun such people? How would this affect our relationship with them? It’s something to think about.

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As God’s people, we are to be lights to the world. Our actions and words tell who we are. We must remember God allows for repentance through our Lord Jesus Christ. How can we hold on to unfair labels knowing this? No matter how much someone’s actions or past might bother us, even if it is something we could not fathom doing, it does not mean they are not or could not be repentant. (Because of human nature, we sometimes think of our own sins as small and those of others as large!)

Paul speaks of this repentance when he writes, “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortionists, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11, King James Version).

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*...when we apply labels to people, we might expose them for who they were, not who they are or could become.*

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The apostle Paul was a great example of someone who could easily be labeled. He had no sympathy for Christians in his past and had even been involved in their torture and executions—but when he found the truth, he changed his ways. He was not initially well accepted by the Church (Acts 9:26), but in order for him to become the leader he was, the people of the Church had to learn to accept him. They had to be forgiving and they were able to do so because of their faith through Christ’s teaching as well as the knowledge that they too had made mistakes in their pasts.



Labels are created so things can be easily identified, making the ingredients and other facts available for all to see, but when we apply labels to people, we might expose them for who they *were*, not who they are or could become. Labels are hard to remove. We can often justifiably label evil as evil, but we should accept God's definitions of evil as found in His word and not attach our own personal labels to others. In other words, we must be careful to not permanently apply labels, and we must be willing to drop our preconceived ideas, such as, "Once a \_\_\_\_\_, always a \_\_\_\_\_."

God allows for change. In fact, **He expects it from us**. Christ's sacrifice gave us this option and we must follow His forgiving nature. "Be merciful as your Father is merciful. Stop judging, and you will never be judged. Stop condemning, and you will never be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:36, God's Word Translation).

### Further reading

For more helpful information, request or download our free booklet, [\*Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion\*](#).

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## Take Time for Hospitality!

By Becky Sweat

*There's more to the art of hospitality than hosting dinner parties. What does the Bible say about being hospitable, and how can you become a better host—regardless of budget?*



**H**OSPITALITY: \häs-pə-':ta-lə-tē\ (noun) the act, practice or quality of receiving and entertaining strangers or guests in a friendly and generous way (Webster's Dictionary).

That's the basic definition. Most of us would wholeheartedly agree that hospitality is a wonderful thing—especially when we're on the receiving end of it. After all, who doesn't enjoy

being invited over for a home-cooked dinner? But being the one bestowing the hospitality—well, oftentimes that’s easier said than done.

Preparing a nice meal and getting your home “company ready” can take a lot of time—something that is a scarce commodity these days. Maybe you think your house is too small or not nice enough to have guests over. You may be looking at your household budget and think you can barely afford to feed your immediate family, let alone host a dinner party. Or it could just be that the thought of hosting a get-together in your home completely stresses you out.

Those are all common reasons why people *don’t* have others over to their homes. Still, the Bible exhorts us to be hospitable. In Romans 12:13, Paul tells us to “Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality” (English Standard Version throughout). Hebrews 13:2 admonishes, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” We’re told in 1 Peter 4:9 that we should “Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.”

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*The fact is, you can convey hospitality anywhere, anytime. It doesn’t have to be in your home and it doesn’t have to be for dinner.*

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When we practice hospitality, we are modeling godly love, care and concern towards others. Many scriptures come to mind here, in particular Matthew 22:39, which instructs us to “love your neighbor as yourself,” and Romans 12:10, which says we are to “Love one another with brotherly affection.” Inviting others to our homes and sharing what we have with them is an ideal way to express this love.

Now if you’re not naturally the “hostess with the mostest,” this can seem like a very tall order. Really, though, it’s quite doable when you think beyond formal dinner parties and focus more on the actual meaning of the word “hospitality.”

To expand on the Webster’s Dictionary definition stated above, hospitality, in its broadest sense, is a love of other people. It means giving your time, energy, talents and resources to encourage, support and strengthen others. This is done in an attitude and demeanor that makes those around you feel welcome, comfortable and appreciated.

True, most people show their hospitality by hosting dinners in their homes. What typically comes to mind is the multiple-course meal served with the family’s best china, crystal and silver. However, it doesn’t have to be limited to that situation. The fact is, you can convey hospitality anywhere, anytime. It doesn’t have to be in your home and it doesn’t have to be for dinner. It also doesn’t have to be an extravagant, formal event, nor do you need a perfectly spotless “showcase home” to have people over.

Keeping this broad definition in mind, here are some ways to incorporate a little more hospitality into your life.

## Take advantage of low-cost and timesaving entertaining options

Don't let a tight household budget, a lack of time or culinary expertise deter you from having people over. To save on time and costs, consider hosting a potluck-style meal in your home. Have each of your guests bring either a main dish or a dessert and a beverage. You could plan a potluck around a theme where everyone brings an Italian or Mexican dish. Taco salad parties are also fun. Each of your guests could bring an ingredient such as grated cheese, salsa or guacamole. Or do a cookout where you supply the hamburgers and hot dogs, and your guests all bring side dishes (potato salads, fruit salads, chips and dip, coleslaw, potato salad, desserts, etc.). Assemble all the food and paper plates buffet style on your kitchen countertop, and let your guests sit where they like.



Convenience foods can also make entertaining easier. Pre-washed salad mixes, ready-to-grill marinated kabobs, ready-to-serve vegetable and dip trays, cooked rotisserie chickens, pasta salads from the deli, and brown 'n serve dinner rolls are all great time savers. You could also pick up some freshly baked rolls, pies or cakes from your local bakery. Your guests won't mind that you didn't do all the food preparation yourself. What matters most is that you make them feel welcome, not that you've invited them over for a gourmet dining experience.

### Become an advance planner

While not all the get-togethers you host will be big, formal sit-down meals, probably some will. And those are really also quite doable—if you plan ahead. It helps to create a preparation schedule (for what you need to do and when) for the weeks and days before, and the day of, a big event. This helps you organize your time and cuts down on stress.

A lot of tasks can be done in advance. Oftentimes I'll make place cards and candle centerpieces, fold cloth napkins, polish silverware, etc. several weeks before a formal dinner. Many appetizers and entrées can be prepared ahead of time and frozen. For instance, you can make mini quiches, egg rolls, meatballs, spaghetti sauce, scones, cupcakes, muffins, etc. several weeks in advance of serving them. Just bake or cook them, freeze them and then reheat them right before serving and they'll taste like they're freshly made. You can also make up menu items like cheesecakes, pies, casseroles and pasta salads two or three days in advance and keep them in the refrigerator until serving. Do whatever food prep you can ahead of time, and save the last minute cooking for the things that can only be done last minute.

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*What matters most is that you make them feel welcome, not that you've invited them over for a gourmet dining experience.*

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### Develop reliable menus

Much of the stress of entertaining is wondering if the food is going to turn out or go over well. Once you've discovered some entrées that are easy to prepare and your guests really like them, stick with them. Don't think you have to find new recipes every time you have guests over. It's

okay to serve the same menus again and again (especially if you are having different groups of people over, or if many months have passed since you served a particular entrée to certain guests). Your guests won't mind repeat menus, especially if the food is tasty.

### Don't try to do it all yourself

Make entertaining a family activity. Women will oftentimes try to handle all the entertaining details themselves, but they shouldn't. Hospitality is something both women *and* men should be involved with. Remember, it is listed as a character attribute required for church leadership in Titus 1:7-8 and 1 Timothy 3:1-2. Wives should encourage their husbands to be actively involved in any get-togethers that are planned—not only because it helps ease the workload, but because it is a vital aspect of our Christian calling.



I know husbands who host regular sushi parties, and they know how to make some incredible dishes. Certainly there are a lot of men who are masters at grilling. This works great for the wives, who can get side dishes ready while their husbands prepare the main entrée. But even if your husband isn't into cooking, he can still be involved in other aspects of being a good host—planning guest lists, inviting people over, greeting guests when they arrive, serving beverages and appetizers to guests before the meal, etc.

You should also involve your children. Children as young as five or six can sweep floors, wash vegetables for a salad, make place cards, set the table, or do other tasks to get ready for company. Not only does this help you out, but you also teach your kids that hospitality is a normal part of home life. The more they do it, the more hospitality becomes second nature to them. Many years ago I started asking my son, who is now 15, to help me get ready for our dinner parties. By now he's done it so much that he's a really confident chef and host—to the point that he's the one suggesting we invite people over after church.

One other idea is to ask a friend or other couple to co-host a dinner with you. That way, you're not the only one doing the cooking, and some of your stress may dissipate. I have routinely hosted ladies' teas with another friend; we share all the baking, preparation and cleanup duties—choosing one of our homes as the venue to host the party. We each invite half of the guests, which serves as a way for me to get to know new people (and vice versa), because my co-host might invite people I don't know well.

### Prepare for spur-of-the-moment entertainment opportunities

Try to always have certain kinds of food items on hand—bottled beverages, chips, jar salsas and dips, etc.—so you can be ready for spur-of-the-moment entertaining opportunities. Hamburger patties, hot dogs and buns are good to keep in your freezer, to be ready for a last-minute cookout.



I keep my freezer stocked with homemade entrées that I can easily pull out, thaw in the microwave and bake if I need to. Often I'll make double batches of lasagna, meatballs, chicken Kiev, tuna casserole, meatloaf, chicken pot pie, spaghetti sauce, etc. (it's just as easy to make a double batch as it is a single batch!) so that I can have one batch for the current meal I'm cooking for my family and a second batch that I can freeze. I also usually have homemade piecrusts and cookie dough (in rolls that can be sliced up) frozen in my freezer, which can be pulled out and baked for last-minute desserts. This way, if we meet someone new or an out-of-town visitor at church, we are always ready to invite company over.

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### **Don't obsess about your home**

Obviously you should try to tidy up your home before company arrives, but don't think it has to be in "show home" condition before you have people over. If you do, you may *never* feel ready to have people over. Your guests won't care if your furniture isn't dusted, kids' toys are scattered in the family room, or that you still haven't gotten those spots off the carpet or painted the kitchen walls. Just try to get your home as neat and clean as time allows. If it's far from perfect when guests arrive, don't go on and on apologizing to your guests. If you do, you'll only make them feel uncomfortable.

### **Invite people who are truly in need**

True hospitality means not only extending ourselves to our friends and family, but also reaching out to people outside our social circle—to entertain "strangers" as we're told in Hebrews 13:2. Luke 14:12-14 has a similar message—that we should not just invite our friends over to our homes, but also the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind. It is the same principle we read about in James 1:27, which states that "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (New King James Version).

Be on the lookout for people who are in need of a friend and have them over to your home. This could include new neighbors, new members of your church, recent widows or divorcees, or others who seem disconnected. When my husband and I plan a dinner party, we try to invite a few couples or individuals we know really well (people we know who are truly outgoing and interested in others) and then one or two couples or individuals we don't know that well.

Giving to those who are lonely, disconnected, downtrodden or discouraged is certainly the heart and essence of true hospitality. You are not only providing them with physical sustenance, but even more importantly, connections with you and your family and your other guests.

### **Involve all your guests in conversation**

As the host, you should try to include everyone at the table in conversation. Certainly all of your guests may not be familiar enough with every topic addressed to have something to add, but the bulk of the issues discussed should be of interest to most of the people present for the majority of the meal. Don't leave anyone out.

If you're bringing together a diverse group of friends, or people who don't know each other that well, it might help to throw out a few conversation icebreakers. For instance, you could ask your guests what their plans are for the summer, how they got into their line of work, how they met their spouses, or if they have any travel stories they would like to share.

It's a good idea to stay on top of current events (for many reasons, in addition to having good dinner conversation topics!), which everyone will probably be interested in talking about. Avoid discussing gossipy, negative or controversial topics; that would only lead to a negative interaction. You want the dinner conversation to be pleasant.

### Think outside the dinner table

There's a whole lot more entertaining possibilities than just planning full meals in your home. Be creative. You could have people over for dessert and coffee or an hors d'oeuvres party (where your guests bring appetizers to share) rather than host a full meal. Or plan a snacks and cards or group games night. These types of get-togethers are usually easier to pull off than a full dinner.

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If your home truly isn't in condition for company, you could plan a picnic in the park, or make "to go" meals that you can deliver to others. A coworker and I used to take meals we made ourselves to elderly shut-ins during our lunch hour. We'd figure out what foods we were going to make, put them all in a picnic basket (along with plastic eating utensils and paper plates) and head over to a different lady's house once a week. We'd eat lunch with the lady have some good conversation and leave. It may have been a short visit, but it was usually just right for an elderly person who may not have been feeling the greatest.

Being hospitable could also include taking meals to new parents just home from the hospital, dropping off house-warming gourmet food gift baskets to new neighbors, or delivering portable food gifts like homemade jams, canned produce and fresh baked goods to anyone who needs a pick-me-up. I know people who make homemade soaps, dried flower arrangements and other crafts to give to others just because. For them, that's easier than having people over to their home. And that's fine. It's *still* hospitality.

Now, if something you make flops—whether it's delivered food or a meal in your home—realize it happens to the best cooks. Don't let it dampen your good intentions. Remember, true hospitality isn't about being a gourmet chef. What matters most is that you're giving of yourself to others, showing a genuine interest in them and making them feel special. That's what hospitality is all about.

### Further reading:

To learn more about the principles of leading a successful life with healthy relationships, request or download our free booklet, [Making Life Work](#).

## A Key to a Happy Life

By Arthur Morris

*The secret to a happy life isn't much of a secret at all—it's been in the Bible for over 3,000 years!*



**I**T IS A MYSTERY TO MOST of mankind. A few have discovered the secret, but most don't have a clue. Why do so many financially successful people seem so bored and unhappy? They get into drugs, drinking and all kinds of excesses striving for the next ultimate thrill, and it doesn't satisfy anymore than the last. Some even get suicidal in their thinking. This is not a "new [thing] under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9), as Solomon said. Even he, who had everything a human of that time could have, was prone to the same mindset. He literally tried everything in a great experiment to see what would satisfy and gratify the human soul and came to this conclusion: There is "nothing...better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God" (Ecclesiastes 2:24).

I had the good fortune to discover this early in life, although it was not by choice. In fact, it was the direct opposite of what I wanted at the time. When I was five, my dad gave up his job in Wheeling, West Virginia and we moved to a 96-acre hill farm in southeast Ohio. The farm produced barely enough to survive on, and it required every member of the family to work long hard hours. There were always mountains of work ahead of us. As a young boy, I began to see that if I were going to be happy at all, I would have to learn to like to work and enjoy the resulting accomplishments. When we plowed, dragged, harrowed and finally planted a field, no one could take that



accomplishment away. It was the same at harvest time.

When I was nine, the neighbor man (who was an expert at stacking) stacked wheat and oats for many people. He always wanted me to be on the stack with him placing the sheaves just where he wanted them. He praised me often for doing it just right, so I began to feel respected for the work I did, and for a child that is a great feeling. I was proud to work with him.

When my brother was old enough, we became a real grain shocking team and shocked the wheat and oats on our own farm and several of the surrounding farms the way it seems only the Amish do anymore. We would each pick up two sheaves and sock the straw ends hard onto the ground, repeat that process one time to fill out the shock, then each of us would break down a sheaf for a header, or mini roof, on the shock and move on to the next. I estimated we could shock on average two shocks a minute.

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We eventually got to the point where we could keep up with an 8-foot binder, which was unheard of at that time. That gained us the respect of all the farmers on the ridge; and whenever we rode through the countryside we would look at our shocks and stacks still standing firm while others were in a sad state. We often shocked grain for neighbors, not for money, but because it was work that needed done and they couldn't afford to pay for it. If the planting and harvest was successful, all the poor families on the ridge, including us, could eat and feed their cattle for another winter.

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*Solomon tells us  
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fruit of our labor.*

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We made work on the farm a game or a sport and enjoyed the feeling of winning and accomplishment. We enjoyed days off so much more because we felt we had earned them. I'm glad people don't have to work that hard anymore, but I don't think it hurt me a bit.

We've applied the same principle to work all through life. We both could have retired years ago, but are instead still working. My brother retired from teaching and now drives the monorail at Disney World, and I am still working at the company that hired me right out of the Air Force nearly fifty years ago.

I'm not telling you any of this to boast. We accidentally (and even against my will) discovered a great key to happiness. The secret is to learn to enjoy work and accomplishment. It's been there in Ecclesiastes for 3,000 years.

Modern society runs ragged trying to entertain itself—but humans can only be entertained so long before it all gets boring and depressing. Instead of producing hard, efficient, happy workers, we all too often produce a generation of bored, shiftless people.



If you want happy children, let them help you from an early age and teach them to work. Teach them to look for work and do it—then praise them for their accomplishments. Not all kids can work on a farm, but they can help out in their neighborhood by mowing a widow’s lawn, trimming her shrubs, weeding her flowers, painting her fence or picking up litter. There are all kinds of work that need to be done if we look for them. Diligent, hardworking children will earn the respect of adults. Otherwise, they will learn to show off for it, which can lead to a lack of respect for themselves and others.

Widows aren’t the only ones who may need help. Young mothers with three kids and a car full of groceries could

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*Sometimes they just want to talk. That’s as close to pure religion as we can get.*

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use help, too. (Of course, parents need to be sure the things kids do are safe in this sick world.) Our daughter Linda and grandson Cody have delivered “Meals on Wheels” to shut-ins for years, and Cody often plays the violin for them and those in nursing homes. Sometimes they just want to talk. That’s as close to pure religion as we can get (James 1:27).

Solomon tells us over and over to work and enjoy the fruit of our labor, and this is an extremely important lesson to learn and to teach our children. (Ecclesiastes 5:18-19; 9:9-10; 11:6).

In Revelation 22:12, Christ says, “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.”

Let’s learn to enjoy the work that we find to do upon the earth. We will be happy, others will enjoy the benefits and we will be rewarded for it.

### Further reading

For more information on how to have a good life, request or download our free booklet, [\*Making Life Work\*](#).

## The Number of Our Days

By Kodesh Gagnon

*What if we knew the number of our days? How would that influence the way we lived our lives?*



**I** RECENTLY RECEIVED AN E-MAIL which asked me to answer a series of questions in order to determine relatively what my actual age should be in comparison to my biological age. This was based on questions about my lifestyle and habits in order to give me a rough idea of my real age and my life expectancy. As I completed the questions, I finally reached the screen where it gave me the results. It said that my real age was 20 years old, compared to my biological age of 26, and that my life expectancy was 78 years.

Granting that God would allow me to even live as many years as that, what I found more interesting was that it converted my remaining life expectancy into days. It said, "You can expect to live approximately another 19,600 more days." When I focused on that amount, I was clearly reminded that our lives on this earth don't last forever. A sense of urgency comes to us as we realize that our physical existence is so very temporary. King David knew this very well. He wrote in Psalms 103:14-16, "For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more" (King James Version throughout).



Moses had a similar cry to God knowing that, despite all that was given to him in power and authority to lead God's people, his life also had to come to an end,

and he would not be able to enter the long-awaited Promised Land. He exclaimed with an urgent heart concerning his fragile life in Psalm 90:12, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” Moses knew that taking each day of life and making it count for good was man’s real purpose. I work full—time as a machinist, and I often find myself doing equations and calculations. So, as I continued to think about that number of 19,600 days that I had left to live, I realized that I don’t even have that amount when I consider many other factors.

### Do the math

First of all I subtracted all necessary hours that I would need to sleep and work. So let’s systematically do the calculation. You have 19,600 days to live, but when you subtract at least half of that for sleeping and working, you come to roughly 9,800 days. I would assume that, realistically, the average person in North America drives at least 1 to 2 hours per day, which is what I do regularly. So let’s say for sake of argument that we do 1.5 hours per day, multiplied by 365 days a year, divided by 24 hours a day, multiplied by 53 years of life remaining, and you finally get 1,209 days of driving. So then, we can take 9,800 days, subtract 1,209 days, and we get 8,591 days remaining to enjoy life. And considering other factors, depending on your lifestyle, you can easily see how quickly life passes by. It’s not a surprise that King David could say, “For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding” (1 Chronicles 29:15).

*Although our years of life are few, and our days as a shadow fading away, may we rest and find comfort in the fact that Jesus assures us that this life is not the end, but the beginning.*

We are all at different ages in our lives, but you can hopefully see the picture I’m painting about the short span of our existence. We also must remember that it could end at any moment in time, according to God’s plan and will for our lives. Solomon knew this too. He wrote, “For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them” (Ecclesiastes 9:12).

Despite not knowing when we will breathe our last, we can find great assurance that our heavenly Father holds all of our lives in his hand. In Job 34:13-14, Job makes a profound statement pointing us to the One who knows each moment. He said, “Who hath given Him a charge over the earth? or who hath disposed the whole world? If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and breath; all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust.”

### 24 hours to live?

Let me bring you back to the question that I asked earlier: How would knowing the number of our days influence us in the way we lived our lives today? It may be a clichéd question, but what would you do if you had 24 hours to live? What if that truly became your full reality in this moment? How would you respond, in the way you treat God, and the way you treat your neighbor? Would you come to see what truly matters in each moment that you spend?



I believe that this is the key to redeeming our time—remembering what the purpose of our life is. Solomon, a man of abundant wealth, wisdom, power, and fame, still came to only one conclusion for the purpose of man during his lifetime. He said in Ecclesiastes 12:13, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.”

A famous country singer by the name of Tim McGraw came out with a song called “Live Like You Were Dying,” which makes some good points. The song’s protagonist, having been told he was dying of a terminal condition, sings that, “I loved deeper, spoke sweeter, and gave forgiveness I was denying.” May we learn to love those unlovable and forgive the unforgivable. Then we can live with a clear conscience and allow our hearts and minds to enjoy life to its fullest.

### Turning our days over to God

Although our years of life are few, and our days as a shadow fading away, may we rest and find comfort in the fact that Jesus assures us that this life is not the end, but the beginning. Jesus said to Martha, before he raised Lazarus from the dead, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” (John 11:25-26).

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We must always remember that we can never get back or replace a day that has passed; let us therefore learn from yesterday as hope for the future, but most importantly live in the beauty of this present moment. May we surrender all our days to Him so that He may exchange them for all of eternity. “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16).

### Further reading

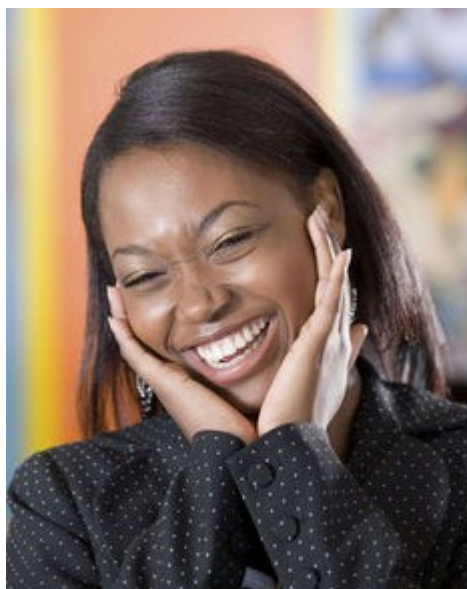
For more on the subject of making the most of your time, see our articles “[It’s Time for a Timely Reminder on Time](#)” and “[Turning Your Life Around: Where to Start](#)” or request or download our free booklet [Making Life Work](#).



## Laughter

By Robert Berendt

*There are different types of laughter—some to be enjoyed, and some to be avoided.*



**R**ESearch has once again verified what the Bible has told us for thousands of years: laughter is good medicine. God inspired that message in Proverbs 17:22 when the writer noted, “A merry heart does good, like medicine.” There is nothing quite as delightful as the giggle and laughter of a little baby. There is something so pure and happy about that sound that it brings a smile to our faces.

Laughter and the appreciation of good humor is something adults need to learn. Somewhere between childhood and our mature years, we have lost far too much of this wonderful blessing. At four years of age, children laugh about 400 times a day. Adults laugh less and less as the years pass. Fifteen laughs a day is rare for an adult. A quote attributed to Will Rogers goes, “We are all here for a spell; get all the good laughs you can.”

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*Happy hearts and  
smiling faces go  
together.*

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Authorities in the medical profession inform us that laughter releases endorphins which make us feel happy. Laughter also relieves stress and increases red blood cell count. That’s quite amazing when we stop to think about it. Another benefit of laughter is that people migrate towards a happy person. That old adage, “Laugh and the world laughs with you—cry and you cry alone,” does carry some weight.

There is something about the laughter we hear that tugs at triggers in our minds. We can tell when a person is laughing wholeheartedly, and when his or her laughter rings false. When little children laugh, or when people are enjoying a really good belly laugh, we smile and laugh with them.

We may not even know why a person is laughing, but nevertheless, it is infectious. There are, however, different kinds of laughter.



The healthy kind is genuine, unpretentious, involuntary and sometimes hard to control. I recall when I was on an airplane flight some years ago. A friend had given me a book with the stories of veterinarian James Herriot. I had a headset on and was listening to music as I was reading the humorous stories. I began to smile, chuckle, laugh and then roar to the point that I had to put the book down. It just got funnier and funnier. Maybe it was the high altitude, but it seemed every story was bursting with pure humor. That was what I would call a healthy laugh. Luckily, I managed to stop before I disturbed too many of the passengers, though several were trying to see what I was reading.

I can also remember sitting in a large audience when a respected speaker told a joke. Everyone was laughing, but for the life of me, I did not get the joke at all. I am not sure that everyone around me did either, but for some reason we do not want to appear foolish when we don't understand a joke. We may smile or twitter a bit, but the laughter is contrived and phony. I can recall a number of times when someone in a high position was telling a story that was intended to be humorous and people about him were roaring with laughter, but it was obvious that the laughter was not genuine, and the story was not truly funny. Some people are very poor joke tellers, and wisdom would dictate that they don't try. Likewise, when the person laughing is only making noise for fear that he would be criticized for not appreciating a speaker, or to be polite, it just does not sound "happy."

My mother had a saying: "After too much laughter comes crying." We tarnish our honesty when we laugh uproariously at a poor joke told poorly. Sometimes in embarrassing situations, people laugh to cover up their deep inner feelings. A forced laugh might be our way of conforming to situations or making ourselves look supportive of and interested in someone we want to impress. Negative laughter is not really laughter at all, in my way of thinking.

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Another type of laughter is connected to scorn and ridicule. When Jesus said a young girl who died was only sleeping, some "laughed Him to scorn" (Luke 8:53). This was more of a sneering, mocking laugh. There is nothing positive that comes out of such a response. Sometimes when people are afraid of something they cannot understand or that they feel threatened by, they give a nervous laugh.

Jesus knew His followers would have periods of great concern and sober contemplation—even periods of weeping. But He promised the time would come for them to laugh (Luke 6:21); a time in which they would leap for joy (Luke 6:23). God is clearly not against joy, happiness, laughter and healthy mirth. He created the ability for humans to have and develop a sense of humor, but He does not develop it for us. As in so many areas of life, our great Creator places choices before us and gives us abilities. As we choose wisely and well, our ability to choose also improves. A good sense of humor is a vital key to maintaining a hopeful and positive outlook on life. There is "a time to weep, and a time to laugh" (Ecclesiastes 3:4).



God's sense of humor is shown as He tested Abraham and Sarah. He promised them a son, but because He wanted them to know for sure that this was a "miracle baby," God waited until Sarah was far too old to conceive. When He told them of the soon-coming pregnancy, Sarah and Abraham both laughed within (Genesis 17:17-19; 18:12). This was more of an incredulous laugh, so God told them to name the son Isaac, which means "Laughter." Later, after Isaac was born, Sarah said God had made her laugh—a little different kind of laugh this time; it was one of pleasure or merriment (Genesis 21:6-7). Peter said we have reason to feel inexpressible and glorious joy because we are receiving the goal of our faith (1 Peter 1:8-9). It is hard to think of that degree of joy without whooping and hollering. Happy hearts

and smiling faces go together.

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We live in a world controlled by the god of darkness. Negative influences barrage us constantly. Fighting the good fight includes learning how to deflect the negatives and maintain a positive outlook until Christ returns. We are expected to do that. Knowing the value of laughter and humor can inspire us to develop the ability to laugh—at ourselves, at circumstances and at life. Good humorous stories, good jokes and appreciating the joys of life (and dwelling on these things) will put a smile on our faces and in our hearts. There are some wonderful comedies and terrific comedians in show business. There are also some comedies that are simply crass and anything but uplifting. It is the situations that do not make fun of people, but highlight the fun in life (that which is fun today and will not leave lingering negative effects) that build the healthy mind. It does not come naturally; it is something God wants us to reach for and make our own.

In times of trouble, a good sense of humor will cushion us. In good times, it enhances life. Let us not lose this valuable gift from God. Learn to laugh, and it will add years to your life.

### Further reading

For more on the subject of a healthy mind, please read our article, "[The Bible's Keys to Mental Health](#)."