

The Laughter Of Faith A Thesis Submitted To The Faculty Of Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary In Partial Fulfillment For The Degree Of Doctor Of Ministry

What if various members of a Christian family experienced a life-threatening illness, a kidney donation, the death of a baby, spiritual warfare, and an unexpected healing on hands and knees, most of it, in the span of a few years? How would they handle it as individuals and as a family? This true story promises lots of humor to make you laugh; overwhelming heartbreak to make you cry; and spiritual events that might cause you to wonder if they are really true, which they are. "In a nutshell," the author says, "everybody needs God and a sense of humor." Please feel free to contact Bill at the following email address: billmacnabb@gmail.com

Suffering the loss of her father and grandmother, and dealing with the ending of a relationship left the author tired, bereft, disappointed, emotionally drained, and feeling like God had forgotten her. She wondered what she could do to heal from this holy triumvirate of personal pain. She decided that spirituality would be the context from which she would make her journey back to herself. If she felt like God had forgotten her, then she would look for him everywhere and in the eyes of everyone she met. She made a commitment to visit a different place of worship every week for a year, whether that place of worship reflected her religious tradition or not. In total, she visited sixty-one churches, temples, mosques, synagogues, and gathering places in the United States, Mexico, the United Kingdom, Nigeria and South Africa. My 52 Weeks of Worship is the story of one woman's courageous journey. Read and see—will her journey lead her to deep, dark places in her soul or help her find peace and acceptance?

SHE LAUGHS! In the face of. . .Poverty. Grief. Brokenness. Disaster. Hopeless Situations. Life's Struggles. And you can too! Join CA Miljavac on a journey of joy. She believes with all her heart that laughter is a gift, providing a sliver of distraction from whatever struggle you might be facing. . .relief when you need rescuing. . .hope in the midst of hardship. Though her life has been dotted with disaster, it's through laughter that she found the strength and courage to persevere. . .joy for the journey. And she'll help you discover all the ways laughter can carry you through your very own painful situations. In ten laugh-till-you-cry chapters, Miljavac shares how laughter has been an essential and valuable part of her own healing, plus hilarious true stories will help you get started on the path to a life of peace and joy.

A collection of humorous stories and jokes drawn from the material and tapes of the speaker team of America's most popular Christian women's conferences offers amusing and uplifting material that can spark a laugh when it is most needed. Original.

Jacqueline Bussie's book tackles the following unanswered questions: What is the theological and ethical significance of the laughter of the oppressed? And what does it mean to laugh at the horrible--to laugh while one suffers? The majority of ethical philosophical theory and western theology (e.g. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, Oecolampadius, Reinhold Niebuhr) maintains that laughter is nihilistic and irresponsible, especially if occurring within tragic circumstance. However, she argues that the dominant social location of these theologians and theorists has led to a gap in inquiry, to a failure to consider laughter "from below." For Judeo-Christian theology, The Laughter of the Oppressed explores uncharted terrain. This book broadens the theological lens to examine the multicultural, modern historical fiction of Elie Wiesel, Toni Morrison, and Shusaku Endo as case studies. In these authors' well-respected texts, Gates of the Forest, Beloved, and Silence,

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we discover the laughter of the Jews during the Holocaust, the laughter of African Americans both slave and free, and the laughter of the persecuted religious minority of Japanese Christians. These texts, in dialogue with voices from within and beyond their traditions, help us construct a theology of laughter. Bussie's book concludes that laughter functions as invaluable ethical and theological mode of resistance in the face of radically negating oppression that has ruptured both language and traditional belief. The Laughter of the Oppressed not only interrupts the banality of evil and the dualism of faith and doubt, but also deconstructs the dominant consciousness. Such laughter challenges theology to rearticulate the relationships between God and evil, theology and theodicy, theology and language, paradox and faith, tragedy and hope, and oppression and resistance.

Laughter was honored by the ancients as a spiritual healing tool and celebrated by the world's great religions. So why aren't we laughing along the spiritual path today? What would happen if we did? In this personal and funny look at humor as a spiritual practice, Rev. Susan Sparks---an ex-lawyer turned comedian and Baptist minister---presents a convincing case that the power of humor radiates far beyond punch lines. Whatever your faith tradition---or if you have none at all---join this veteran of the punch line and the pulpit in reclaiming the forgotten humor legacy found in thousands of years of human spiritual history. "Like music, laughter is a universal language. And Susan Sparks speaks this language like no other. [This book] weaves humor and the sacred into one beautiful work of art. If you want to blast some fresh air into your spiritual life, then by all means read this book!"---Naomi Judd, multi-platinum country music artist; actress; author, Naomi's Guide to Aging Gratefully and other books "Thank God for Susan Sparks! By immersing ourselves in her honest insights, warm encouragement, and hysterical stories, we're able to shatter the crust around our hearts that has kept us from fully experiencing the grace of life as God intended."---Peter Wallace, host and producer, Day 1; author, Living Loved: Knowing Jesus as the Lover of Your Soul "Pure joy, Lively and lighthearted examples illustrate the connection between guffawing and God. A must-read if you want to laugh, learn, and lighten up your journey on your spiritual path."---Allen Klein, author, The Courage to Laugh and The Healing Power of Humor "The definitive book about how humor and laughter have everything to do with God. You will laugh out loud, and then it will move you to quiet contemplation and awe. It has done more for me than most of the theology books I've been forced to plow through. I'm still smiling...and contemplating."---Edward L. Beck, CP, author, God Underneath: Spiritual Memoirs of a Catholic Priest; ABC News religion contributor

"With honesty, humor, and strength Joni Parsley walks readers through the ups and downs of her life, inspiring them to "get real with God and with others and live with faith." The Christian life is not easy, and being a pastor's wife doesn't earn one extra credit. Daily life is mundane, stressful, joyous, and painful, and sometimes simply can't be explained. Joni Parsley's days find her facing many of the same issues that we all face. In this book she writes about and through life's challenges to weave an emotional tapestry layered with laughter, tears, questions, thoughts, errors, and struggles. With a conversational style full of engaging stories and enlightening metaphors, she demonstrates how readers can live a life of joy and faith as they:

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It is so easy to get caught up in all the little day-to-day challenges of life. Perhaps you worry about the house not being as clean as it could be or whether you can fix the "perfect meal," whatever that might be. And when things do not go smoothly, when forced to face trying circumstances, it is easy to feel as though you will never laugh again. In *Finding the Right Piece: Using Laughter and Faith in the Puzzle of Life*, author Jaime Rafferty shares vignettes of her family's life and how faith and laughter have helped her and her family. Readers will also learn how particular Bible passages have taught Rafferty to find the humor in everyday events. Rafferty believes that God puts things in our life to make us laugh. After reading *Finding the Right Piece: Using Laughter and Faith in the Puzzle of Life*, you'll believe it, too.

Laughter is important because we cannot really love anybody with whom we never laugh, and this is true of our relationship with God. Having a sense of humor is essential for maturity in faith and holiness. Unfortunately, humor and the role that laughter plays in life and spirituality have often been neglected and the aim of *Laughter and the Grace of God* is to restore laughter to its central place in Christian spirituality and theology. It examines the role of laughter in Scripture and finds it in unexpected places including the story of Abraham and the formation of the covenant and the tragedy of Job. There is laughter in the incarnation, the resurrection, and even the crucifixion. Jesus is the great Laugh-maker. Thomas Aquinas spoke of the sin of having too little laughter as well as the danger of having too much, while Martin Luther said, "If you're not allowed to laugh in heaven, I don't want to go there." Laughter is nothing less than a participation in the life and love of God.

"Between Heaven and Mirth will make any reader smile. . . . Father Martin reminds us that happiness is the good God's own goal for us." —Timothy M. Dolan, Archbishop of New York From *The Colbert Report's "official chaplain" James Martin, SJ*, author of the New York Times bestselling *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything*, comes a revolutionary look at how joy, humor, and laughter can change our lives and save our spirits. A Jesuit priest with a busy media ministry, Martin understands the intersections between spirituality and daily life. In *Between Heaven and Mirth*, he uses scriptural passages, the lives of the saints, the spiritual teachings of other traditions, and his own personal reflections to show us why joy is the inevitable result of faith, because a healthy spirituality and a healthy sense of humor go hand-in-hand with God's great plan for humankind.

This is my DMin Thesis for Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. I did not "improve" it or work to make it more readable. Many have requested it, so my producing it here is in response to them. From the abstract... This work is a study of laughter and its importance in congregational life from the perspective of pastors. It is concerned with the history and theories of laughter in terms of how they connect with current pastoral attitudes towards it. Questions of appropriateness are central to this exploration. A primary premise of the work is that laughter is a significant component

of pastoral ministry, but its study seems marginalized by the church. This incongruency is further aggravated by the fact that much of the rest of the world accurately sees laughter as a significant social force. Except for the church, almost all other entities in society interested in shaping society seem to know the power and place of laughter. To address this inconsistency, this study reviewed all available literature and the Scriptures in order to discover the theories and views of laughter leading theologians and philosophers have had and then apply the best of the categories emerging from this to a current understanding of laughter. Both surveys and interviews uncovered what the current understanding of laughter is for a sample group of pastors within the geographical framework of New York's Hudson Valley. The research findings led to the development of ideas for applying an enlightened view of laughter to pastoral ministry for the purpose of making it more effective.

But be forewarned, once you start, you may not be able to stop! Help, I Can't Stop Laughing! offers a collection of nonstop fun, foibles, and rib-tickling humor for those who know that laughter is the best medicine. Contributors like Barbara Johnson, Martha Bolton, Mark Lowry, Patsy Clairmont, Becky Freeman, and Chonda Pierce share their most hilarious and embarrassing moments to remind you that God's love and a little laughter will keep you smiling no matter what curves life throws you. This cheerful collection of quips, stories, anecdotes, and quotes offers a continual source of refreshment in the midst of life's struggles and stresses. Let the laughter begin!

A Norman Rockwell painting it wasn't. But we wanted it to be. No one called it autism, much less Asperger's back in the sixties when we were growing up. They called it weird, odd, different. We were a tight knit family in our little town, where my parents were teachers at the local school. At times it seemed a childhood filled with conflict about my older brother John. He was quiet and sweet. Yet, at times he would also make strange noises, shake his hands and fingers, while being completely consumed in his own thoughts. My confusion grew in trying to make sense of his differences, the over protectiveness of my parents, the teasing and bullying of him at school. Loved him, sometimes hated him, and really didn't want to be like him. Felt guilty about all of it. The years following school rolled on, until both family and personal crisis brought me back home. I quickly became aware that there was a significant distance between John and me. This is where our real journey began. Step by step, as I tried working my way back into his life, my perception of him began to change. Yet, I couldn't have imagined that he would one day become my hero and a teacher I could only hope to emulate.

What woman doesn't love to grab her favorite hot drink at the local coffee house and sit down to gab with girlfriends. Laughter and latté-it's an irresistible combination! Striking a balance between hilarity and helpful advice, this book appeals to the bond women share through laughter and words of encouragement. The lively and accessible text is written

by a variety of best-selling female authors and WOF speakers such as Sheila Walsh, Luci Swindoll, Marilyn Meberg, Nicole Johnson, Patsy Clairmont, Thelma Wells, and many more. The colorful and contemporary design is sure to appeal to women of all ages.

Cancer. It's a word that strikes fear in the hearts of those who hear it. *I Choose to Laugh* is one woman's story of overcoming that fear. What started as an on-line journal has become a collection of essays. Chapters include practical helps in choosing doctors and dealing with chemotherapy. There is even a section for caregivers and friends of the patient. Mostly, this book seeks to find the laughter of the moment. The overall theme is one of overcoming, of finding the joy of life amidst the pain. The message is clear; one can have cancer without being a victim of cancer. The author's ultimate source of hope is her faith in Jesus Christ. She believes that God allowed her to have cancer for a reason and that reason is to point people to Him. "If God isn't glorified, it's just a disease."

In *Ironies of Faith*, celebrated Dante scholar and translator Anthony Esolen provides a profound meditation upon the use and place of irony in Christian art and in the Christian life. Beginning with an extended analysis of irony as an essentially dramatic device, Esolen explores those manifestations of irony that appear prominently in Christian thinking and art: ironies of time (for Christians believe in divine Providence, but live in a world whose moments pass away); ironies of power (for Christians believe in an almighty God who took on human flesh, and whose "weakness" is stronger than our greatest enemy, death); ironies of love (for man seldom knows whom to love, or how, or even whom it is that in the depths of his heart he loves best); and the figure of the Child (for Christians ever hear the warning voice of their Savior, who says that unless we become like unto one of these little ones, we shall not enter the Kingdom of God). Esolen's finely wrought study draws from Augustine (*Confessions*), Dante (*The Divine Comedy*), Shakespeare (*The Tempest*), and Tolkien ("*Leaf, By Niggle*"); Francois Mauriac (*A Kiss for the Leper*), Milton (*Paradise Lost*), and Alessandro Manzoni (*The Betrothed*); the poems of George Herbert and Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Edmund Spenser (*Amoretti*); Charles Dickens (*A Christmas Carol*), Dostoyevsky (*The Brothers Karamazov*), and the anonymous author of the medieval poem *Pearl*, among other works. Readers who treasure the Christian literary tradition should not miss this illuminating book.

An inspirational guide for the maintenance of wellness of body, mind and spirit. The author believes passionately in the healing power of the emotions and the importance of faith and hope in the recovery process. He has gathered together this collection of writings on holistic healing, ranging from the biblical, to medical writers.

It was year of the Ice Bucket Challenge when MaryFran Peterlin-Kolp was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis. A top college athlete and having earned a Ph. D in Exercise Physiology she was never afraid to rise up to a challenge and she decided that she would do "whatever it takes" to try to find a cure. MaryFran always had a strong Catholic Faith to rely on, great family support and would soon see how a small Northern Michigan town would rally around her. She would explore not just conventional western medicine but alternative treatments and therapies, diets, and of course rely on her faith to guide her. Using her positive attitude she takes us on her ALS journey with the belief that God chose her so that others could be spared with the hope that maybe she could help find a cure. You will laugh, cry and be amazed at how one woman could have such a lasting impact on a community and how that community helped to care for her. MaryFan will show you

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that all you need is faith, family, and some "Frantabulous Friends" to live a happy life.

We all have those days when it's good to be reminded that we are not alone, God is with us, and He will get us through! Keep this book close by for your daily dose of inspiration and prayer along with a good measure of laughter.

Throughout your life you are faced with challenges. Some are easy to overcome, and then there is that one that hits you square and takes your breath away. You don't see it coming. You are never prepared for it. You never forget it. I am a cancer survivor. This is my story. It is about the discoveries, the frustrations and fears, the pain, the laughter and most of all the insight I gained through my faith in God. God doesn't promise life without troubles. However, He does give us strength and unconditional love when we trust in Him. Also included is a journal called, *Recovering Your Spirit*. I discovered very early on in life you don't get to pick your challenges; however, you do get to choose how you react to them. Come with me on my one year journey. It begins on a cold February night].

Creative ideas, real-life stories, and Scriptural guidance for being the family that loves being together. *Building Family Ties with Faith, Love, and Laughter* is the second of three books in the Faithful Families series where Dave applies his practical, conversational, and humorous approach to the challenge of building strong spiritual ties to each other as a family. Topics include: Contentment, Security, Loyalty, Gratitude, Spontaneity, Communication, and more. Preaching is his gift, but Pastor Dave Stone's family is his life's blessing. While raising three kids with his wife, Beth, as well as shepherding the diverse families of his congregation, his heart, and passion for building strong families rings louder than ever. He knows that raising faithful families is a key to the future of the church. "Dave's book is full of no nonsense, common sense suggestions, and biblically inspired truth. As a parent of two "under construction" children still finding their way in a fallen world, I am keenly aware of the importance of living a life of faithful integrity in order to actually teach it to our kids. I, of course, have failed miserably on occasion. But then, I didn't have Dave's book like you do!"—Kathie Lee Gifford

For many, depression is associated with shame and humiliation—even a lack of faith. But in this refreshingly honest and oh-so-very-real revelation of one woman's journey through depression, you'll hear the voice of a kind friend. And in her words you'll find hope and renewed confidence that will guide you through your own darkness and into the light. -If you are currently suffering from depression—this book will help you realize you're not alone. -If you have a loved one dealing with depression—this book will help you understand. -If you are a mental-health professional—you now have a new tool to encourage your clients. Along with the humor, Chonda shares practical insight, biblical teaching, emotional support, and sympathetic concern. Whether you've experienced depression in your own life or in the life of someone you love, this friend has something to offer you: help, hope and, believe it or not, plenty of laughter.

What do we believe? And in God's name why? These are the thorny questions that Lewis Black, the biting funny comedian, social critic, and bestselling author, tackles in his new book, *Me of Little Faith*. And he's come up with some answers. Or at least his answers. In more than two dozen essays that investigate everything from the differences between how Christians and Jews celebrate their holidays, to the politics of faith, to people's individual search for transcendence, Black explores his unique odyssey through religion and belief. Growing up as a nonpracticing Jewish kid near Washington, D.C., during the 1950s, Black survived Hebrew school and a bar mitzvah (barely), went to college in the South during the tumultuous 1960s, and witnessed firsthand the unsettling parallels between religious rapture and drug-induced visions (even if none of his friends did). He explored the self-actualization movements of the 1970s (and the self-indulgence that they produced), and since then has turned an increasingly skeptical eye toward the politicians and televangelists who don the cloak of religious rectitude to mask their own moral hypocrisy. What he learned along the way about the inconsistencies and peculiarities of religion infuriated Black, and in *Me of*

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Little Faith he gives full vent to his comedic rage. Black explores how the rules and constraints of religion have affected his life and the lives of us all. Hilarious experiences with rabbis, Mormons, gurus, psychics, and even the joy of a perfect round of golf give Black the chance to expound upon what we believe and why—in the language of a shock jock and with the heart of an iconoclast. "To put it as simply as I can," Black writes, "this is a book about my relationship with religion, where my—dare I say it?—spiritual journey has taken me...what it's meant and not meant to me, and why it makes me laugh." By the end of Me of Little Faith, you'll be a convert.

Sarah's Laughter provides a reflection on suffering that is deeply personal and both theologically and philosophically astute. Vinoth Ramachandra draws on his distinctive positioning as a Sri Lankan Christian theologian – one who has lived and ministered in contexts shaped by the destruction of natural disasters and the violence of human evil – to confront the intellectual, moral, and political challenges posed to faith in the increasingly broken world of the twenty-first century. Yet far from being an abstract discussion of theodicy, this book is intimate and vulnerable, embracing the biblical practice of lament and inviting an authentic response to grief – one that makes space for serious doubt and profound questioning. Sharing his own ongoing journey with suffering and a questing faith, Ramachandra reminds us that lament and joy, faith and protest, clarity and ambiguity, belong together in faithful Christian discipleship. It is not in bypassing the darkness of the world, but in embracing it – in imitation of the incarnate God – that we may glimpse the new creation.

OMG! LOL! Faith and Laughter Gemma

A collection of short stories about growing up in a small town, stories about faith and stories about living life on the grey side. The Women of Faith Study Series helps you turn the laughter and lessons of Women of Faith conferences into a journey of growth shared by special friends. Whether or not you've attended a conference, you will appreciate the bonds that form as you join with other women linked together in friendship, prayer, joy, and faith. Each study will also lead you to a deeper love of the Bible and a greater appreciation of the power of God's Word. Each session includes six sections: A Moment for Quiet Reflection . . . Just for Fun - Knowing God's Heart . . . Praying Together - Friendship Boosters . . . Making it Real in Your Own Life. The leaders guide that's included makes it easy to facilitate weekly Bible studies that will nurture your knowledge of Scripture and your sense of God's presence in your life. Six Sessions Include -- The Women of Ill Repute: Extravagant Faith - Elizabeth: Intimate Faith - Sarah: Laughing Faith - Ruth: Obedient Faith - Mary Magdalene: Unwavering Faith - Martha: Obedient Faith

Couldn't we all use a good laugh? Whether you're running full-speed-ahead or disappointed that it's Monday (again), you'll find joy in these pages where women—and a few men—share their hilarious stories and insights on daily life. Pets, potlucks, husbands, hot flashes, typos, tykes... This world can be a funny place, and these stories are bound to prove it. Read a chapter to brighten your morning, or catch a few words to make you smile before bed. There's never a bad time for a good laugh, and Laugh Out Loud is . . .

While organizing a community interfaith Thanksgiving event, a pastor discovers that people of all religious traditions laugh in the same language. He explores the connections between faith and laughter, examining his own holy heritage in dialogue with

followers of other faiths. The story culminates with Interfaith Laughter Night, with an open mike that encourages participants of all the faiths gathered to laugh with each other and at themselves. Come along on a journey of ecumenical silliness! "

All of us have or will have struggles in our lives that end up causing scars we could never have imagined would happen. I needed to trigger a positive outcome from my possibly fatal larger-than-life injury. I absolutely had to find a way to make sense of it. That is what compelled me to capture it and then write about my experience. That desire was to help others as well as myself. By telling you what I went through "in detail," this story places me in a very vulnerable position. Yet, I am willing to subject myself to that knowing it could possibly benefit others. Throughout parts of this memoir, I needed to take my life back from the grips of death, and you will see how family, faith, and laughter helped me to do that.

Is comedy an inconsequential part of life, useful primarily for relaxation and escape? Conrad Hyers asserts that comedy is central to all aspects of existence. In *The Comic Vision and the Christian Faith* Hyers offers the first detailed study of the special significance of comic and religious themes to show that the comic tradition enriches and informs as well as entertains. Maintaining that comedy constitutes its own mythology, Hyers examines the great array of comic figures - tricksters, clowns, jesters, fools, humorists, comedians, and the like - and shows their historical significance in giving meaning to the major issues with which humankind has been concerned. Finally, Hyers shows us that when we appreciate the importance of the comic vision, we gain a keener, fresher, and more meaningful outlook.

The Bible's great Faith Hall of Fame in Hebrews chapter 11 honours Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham as outstanding examples of faith and identifies the acts that qualified them for this prestigious list. Then we read, "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future" (Hebrews 11:20). Merely speaking a blessing? How does this act rate alongside Noah's building the ark or Abraham's leaving his country? "And thereby," believes Henderson, "hangs a tale." The first half of the book, *By Faith Isaac*, explores Abraham's faith journey and listens in to conversations between Abraham and Isaac as Abraham carefully passes on the faith lessons he has learned. When Abraham faces his greatest faith test, the sacrifice of his son, Isaac embarks on his own faith journey. After marrying Rebekah, Isaac has to learn a new lesson of faith—one which his forefathers had not had to deal with. Whether you love the Old Testament or struggle to read it, *By Faith Isaac* educates as it entertains, and at times borders on being devotional.

The best of the best stories, one-liners, and jokes from some of today's funniest Christian speakers and best-selling writers This new book, like its best-selling predecessors, is packed with the kind of smiles and smirks, chuckles and giggles that thousands of readers have come to love and expect. It includes some of the funniest stories from today's Christian writers like Barbara Johnson, John Ortberg, Mark Buchanan, Patsy Clairmont, Becky Freeman, Chonda Pierce, and more. Whether the topic is kids, marriage, pets, church, parenting, aging, or life's most embarrassing moments, the writers will help you keep life in perspective by revealing their own foibles, follies, and failings. Realizing that laughter and

faith can go hand in hand, they offer real-life.

When Laura Jensen Walker was diagnosed with breast cancer on her first wedding anniversary, she found humor to be healing in the midst of terrifying circumstances. In this energetic and hope-filled book, she draws on her faith and her sense of humor to encourage others going through the same thing. From discovering that "bald is beautiful" to navigating the world of saline breast implants, Walker recounts the highs and lows of coping with cancer. Infused with strength and dignity, this classic book has now been revised and updated for a new generation, showing women confronting the disease--and those who love them--that faith, hope, and a healthy dose of laughter can make all the difference. Laughter is the best medicine, so here's a big dose of fun from the Women of Faith. No one can resist laughing out loud at the crazy stories that fill this brightly designed gift book in a cool new format. Let these funny tales bring you lots of laughter and joy in God's own awesome sense of humor.

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