

The
ONE
YEAR®

the one year® devotional of



joy and
laughter

365

*inspirational meditations
to brighten your day*

Mary Hollingsworth

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Joy and Laughter

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The One Year Devotional of Joy and Laughter: 365 Inspirational Meditations to Brighten Your Day

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Introduction

For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. . . .

A time to cry and a time to laugh.

ECCLESIASTES 3:1, 4

Welcome to the devotional that offers a small dose of joy and laughter for your spirit every day for a full year. We believe laughter is good for what ails you, so this book is seriously funny. As Solomon, God's wise man, said in Proverbs 17:22, "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength."

Our world is a serious place in which to live. People are often sad, afraid, worried, depressed, or in physical pain. Perhaps that's where you find yourself right now. I believe that what people need is not another bitter-tasting life lesson. Instead, they need something that will help to lift their spirits, give them hope, and make them smile. They need something that will give them the courage to go on, in spite of their difficulties. We hope this devotional can provide that spark of hope and courage for you day by day.

Perhaps you're wondering how a spiritual devotional can be funny and serious at the same time. That's a good question. Marshall Keeble, a great old African-American preacher I knew, once said, "If you want people to understand something serious, first you've got to get them laughing. Once they're laughing, then you can slap the plaster on, and it'll stick every time."

In other words, as the song from the movie *Mary Poppins* says, "A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down." That's why pharmaceutical companies sugarcoat pills and make cough syrup that tastes like cherries or grapes. Doing so makes it easier to take in what's really important. My hope is that while you are enjoying the lighthearted tales in this book, you will also be absorbing important spiritual truths . . . perhaps in spite of yourself.

The One Year Devotional of Joy and Laughter is a delightful collection of funny or joyful stories from which spiritual lessons can be drawn. These stories are told by a variety of contemporary Christian writers or retold from public facts or history so each day will have a unique approach and feeling. Some of the anecdotes and jokes have traveled a considerable path before making their way to this book. They're the kinds of stories that get passed around from friend to friend, from website to website, from one e-mail in-box to another. And that's the way it is with laughter

itself, isn't it? By its very nature, joy is contagious. Once we've experienced it ourselves, we can't help but share it with those we love.

In addition to the story for each day, we have provided a related Bible verse to challenge your thinking and remind you of an important teaching in God's Word. We suggest that you read the verse several times throughout that day, contemplate it, and think of ways to incorporate its lesson into your life.

Following each day's story is a prayer to help you begin your daily conversation with the Father. From that short prayer starter, you will likely think of other reasons to praise God and other requests to lift up to him as you focus your heart and mind on things above.

So join us in this day-by-day journey into joy and laughter—at the very heart of God, the eternal joy giver.

Blessings and joy!

—*Mary Hollingsworth*

January 1

Come as You Are!

*God showed his great love for us by sending Christ
to die for us while we were still sinners.*

ROMANS 5:8

On the way home from a fun New Year's Eve gathering, my husband and I decided to pull a prank on some of our friends. About six o'clock on New Year's Day morning, my husband got into our fifteen-seat passenger van, and I got into our car, and we went around town picking up our friends for a come-as-you-are breakfast.

The unsuspecting invitees were allowed only to put on robes and slippers. They couldn't comb their hair, brush their teeth, put on makeup, or do anything else to enhance their "natural beauty." Guys' hair stuck up, women sported curlers, and many wore robes and slippers with holes in them. It looked like Fright Night at a theme park.

We lived on the eighth floor of a large apartment building. So when we herded our pajama-clad crowd into the lobby and up the elevator to our apartment early on New Year's morning, none of the other tenants saw our friends arrive.

We cooked breakfast for everybody and had a great time with an impromptu style show. We gave prizes for the "best dressed" and played games for about three hours.

Then it was time to take everyone home. By that time the other people in our building were awake. The looks on their faces were priceless as we led our strangely garbed parade through the lobby and out to the cars. We especially enjoyed the shocked expressions of one of the elders of our church and his wife, who happened to live on the first floor of our building. It took awhile to explain that nothing sordid or weird had been happening.

Our friends have told us they don't sleep as well on New Year's Eve as they used to. Strange. I sleep like a baby.

Dear Father, thank you for your invitation to come to you just as we are—sinners who are lost without you. Amen.

January 2

Behold! or Not

Look! I stand at the door and knock.

REVELATION 3:20

It was a chilly winter day in Chicago. Snow had fallen during the night, and the streets were still a bit icy. However, the new minister at a community church felt compelled to make a few house calls to members who had not been in church services for a few weeks. So he trekked across town carefully, going from house to house.

When he arrived at the third home on his list, he rang the doorbell and waited, but no one came to the door. He could tell that someone was at home, so he kept ringing the bell. Still, no one answered.

As a final departing act, the minister wrote, “Revelation 3:20: ‘Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends’” on the back of one of his calling cards and stuck it under the door.

The minister left the house, puzzled as to why the member did not answer the door. He had no recollection of having done anything to upset her. Unsure of what else to do, he returned to his office at the church building, intending to speak to the member about it the next time he saw her.

Two days later, the minister received his calling card back in an envelope with a short note attached that read, “Genesis 3:10: ‘I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.’”

Father, I often hear you knocking and wanting to come in and be with me. Please help me to remember that I can never hide from you, no matter what my sin. And please help me always to be ready to welcome you into my heart and life. Amen.

January 3

The Perk from Above

I will go to . . . God—the source of all my joy.

I will praise you . . . , O God, my God!

PSALM 43:4

Several years ago I was driving down a rain-swept street in Long Beach, California, on an errand from my office. It was cold, the day was dreary, the sky was overcast, I couldn't find the address I was seeking, and my spirit was out of sorts. I hadn't wanted to leave the comfort of a warm office, but I had no choice. You know how it goes—the demands of duty.

As I was driving along, fretting about a problem that was sapping my emotional energy, I said to God, "Lord, would you please give me a perk? Some little something to lift my spirit? Doesn't have to be big. Doesn't have to be flashy. Just do something creative to cheer me up and to remind me that I'm glad I'm alive. I'd appreciate that very much."

At that moment I turned the corner, looked to my left, and there in the cab of a pickup truck sat two clowns. They were fully decked out in clown regalia, complete with red woolen yarn hair, big bow ties, painted faces, and each holding a helium-filled balloon. As I looked at them, they simultaneously turned, looked at me, and flashed toothless grins from ear to ear.

What a unique answer to prayer! I absolutely *loved* it, and all alone in my car I yelled, "*All right!* Great perk, Lord. What an idea. How clever you are. Who would ever have thought of two clowns in a pickup?"

But we don't have to wonder, do we? God gave us the gift of laughter, so he must enjoy a good giggle now and then too.

—Luci Swindoll

Father, thank you for the surprises and delights you put in my life. Without you life would be such a drag. I love you, Father. Amen.

January 4

All the Way to the Tub

*Your word is a lamp to guide my feet
and a light for my path.*

I've promised it once, and I'll promise it again:

I will obey your righteous regulations.

PSALM 119:105-106

My husband's Granny Jordan lived to be ninety without suffering a broken bone. But that's not to say she never fell. Whether she had an equilibrium problem or was just clumsy, the family never decided. Suffice it to say, she never hurt herself badly enough to decide to see a doctor for testing. And she never owned up to being clumsy.

It became a family joke even before she became elderly. When her teenagers left for school in the morning, they would say, "Now, Mama, don't go out to get the mail until we get home. We don't want you to fall off that curb—what would the neighbors say about finding you in the gutter?"

Later in life, Granny Jordan lived with her daughter and son-in-law. One night she got up to go to the bathroom, and when she stood up from the toilet, she tipped herself over into the nearby bathtub. Not wanting to wake the "kids" at two o'clock in the morning, she just pulled a towel over her arms and lay there until their alarm clock went off.

When someone teased Granny Jordan about her frequent falls, she would laugh and explain, "I only fall enough to stay in shape."

I wonder how many of us could say the same thing about our spiritual lives. How often do we have to wait for our Father to pull us up out of the problems into which we fall?

—Dianna Booher

Lord, thank you for guiding my steps and keeping me safe on the path that leads to you. Help me not to fall for the devil's tricks but to stay on solid footing with you. I know that without your care and grace, I would stumble and fall. Bless me, O Lord. Amen.

January 5

You Can't Do That!

*Repent of your sins and turn to God, so
that your sins may be wiped away.*

ACTS 3:19

Sulphur Springs, Texas, where we live, has one of those famous old Texas brick town squares in the middle of downtown. It's a bit like an English roundabout with traffic coming in at all four corners of the square and traveling around the square until drivers get to the appropriate street to exit.

Regardless of where the townspeople are trying to go, they almost always end up on the square at some point. And navigating the traffic on the square can be entertaining.

One busy Saturday morning, an old farmer came into town to get a haircut and do his shopping. He was in an original Model T Ford, which he guided proudly into the traffic on the square. About halfway around the square, he decided he did not want to *be* on the square so he stuck his hand out the window, indicating he was going to make a U-turn right in the middle of the one-way traffic.

Seeing what he was about to do, a policeman yelled, "Hey, mister! You can't do that!"

The old man stopped, poked his head out the window, took a good look around, and yelled back, "Yeah, I think I can make it!" Then he wound up that old Ford and drove upstream through dodging, honking traffic back to the place where he had come in and headed back to the country, where he belonged.

The policeman was so shocked that he just stood there in the middle of the square, laughing his head off.

Although what that farmer did wasn't legal, it *is* biblical. When you realize you are headed in the wrong direction in life, make a U-turn and go the way that will get you back home where you belong.

—Clyde Shrode

Lord, I know I often need to turn around and run to you. Thank you for loving me and for always taking me back. Amen.

January 6

Wunny Wace

*Sing praises to God . . .
Father to the fatherless . . .
God places the lonely in families . . .
and gives them joy.*

PSALM 68:4-6

When my cousin Donna first learned to talk, she had a bit of difficulty making the *f* sound. She automatically substituted the *w* sound for an *f*. So instead of “foot,” she said her “woot” hurt. And in popular fairy tales, things were “war, war away.”

Donna loved my brother, who was a teenager at the time. He teased her unmercifully, which she objected to loudly with fake indignation.

My brother would say, “Donna, you’re a funny face.”

And she would say, “I’m *not* a wunny wace.”

He would say, “You’re a big, fat elephant.”

And she would reply, with feeling, “I’m *not* a big, wat elewant!”

He would say, “Your face is full of freckles.”

And she would say, “My wace is *not* wull of wreckles!”

This game went on every time our two families were together until Donna’s sixth birthday, when we came to celebrate with her. She opened her gifts. We played games with the children at the party. And we had cake and ice cream.

After the party was over, my brother, in standard form, said, “Donna, you’re still a funny face.”

And to everyone’s surprise, she said, “I am not a funny face”—the *f* sound clear and accurate.

“Well, what happened to my ‘wunny wace’?” he asked, laughing.

To our amazement she said, “I’m six years old now. I don’t have to talk like that anymore.” And she never did again.

Wamilies! Aren’t they wabulous?

Father, thank you for creating families, and thank you for my family. They mean so much to me, and I’m so grateful for them. Thank you especially for allowing me to be one of your children and part of your family. Bless you, Father. Amen.

January 7

Trading Up

*God showed his great love for us by sending Christ
to die for us while we were still sinners.*

ROMANS 5:8

One night, at the front gate of a large military base in south Texas, a marine private was standing his first guard-duty assignment. Rain was falling gently. It was cold, and the wind was beginning to pick up as a storm moved closer. Still, the new private stood his post staunchly, as a proud marine should.

Presently a two-star general stepped out of his house on base to take his dog for a walk. The nervous young private, wanting to make a good impression, snapped to attention, made a perfect salute, and cried out, "Sir, good evening, sir!"

The general, out for some relaxation, returned the salute and said casually, "Good evening, soldier. Nice night, isn't it?"

It was hardly a nice night, but the private was not about to disagree with a two-star general, so he saluted again and replied, "Sir, yes sir!"

The general walked slowly about with his dog and continued talking to the private. "You know, there's something about a stormy night that I find soothing. It's all really relaxing, don't you agree?"

The private did not agree, but then the private was just a private, so he responded, "Sir, yes sir!"

Indicating the big, friendly dog, the general said, "This is a golden retriever, the best type of dog to train."

The private glanced at the dog, saluted yet again, and said, "Sir, yes sir!"

The general smiled at the private's obvious desire to please him and continued by saying, "I got this dog for my wife."

The private responded, "Good trade, sir!"

O Lord, because of you we have been allowed to "trade up." We have traded our sinful ways for a life of joy and hope through you. Thank you for giving us that chance. We love you, Lord. Amen.