

## Food for Thought: Mom and Good Medicine

I have had many opportunities in the past few months to think about my mother and to ponder my favorite things about her. She had many excellent qualities and taught us by word and example to work hard, be diligent, be disciplined, etc.; but when I asked myself "Which things about her did I *enjoy* the most... Which things do I look back upon most fondly," the results were instructive.

My happiest memories associated with Mom were usually of the times she would do things that were playful, fun, or funny. When I was quite little, if we had to walk across a large parking lot and my four-year-old self lagged behind a little, Mom would hold my hand and say "Lions and tigers and bears, oh my!" (as in *The Wizard of Oz*) and we'd start skipping and holding hands, and we would both repeat "Lions and tigers and bears, oh my!" over and over, as many times as the size of the parking lot required, saying it faster and faster, and skipping faster and faster, and sometimes breaking into a run. I loved it! Mom's grandchildren loved the fact that she would still play wiffleball and freeze tag with them even when she was in her 70s and early 80s. And if my sister Susan planned a game involving mystery and costumes, Mom would play along.



Fun, laughter, and other aspects of joy are important in God's kingdom too. When a lost soul is saved, the scriptures say, there is great *rejoicing* in heaven—not just approval, but joy! David joyfully *danced* before the Lord (and so did Mom), the Wise Men *rejoiced* when they found Jesus, and laughter (not lewd or derisive laughter, but plain, honest, clean laughter) and a merry heart, the scriptures tell us, are *good medicine*. In recent times, science has discovered why (or at least how) this happens. Scientists have discovered that when we smile and laugh, our bodies (the pituitary gland and central nervous system mostly) begin to produce neurotransmitters, and neuromodifiers, such as dopamine, serotonin, and endorphins, which help reduce pain, fight depression, and enhance our overall sense of well-being.

Back to Mom... Mom knew how to stretch a dollar, but she could make that fun as well. When I outgrew clothes as a child, we almost never bought new clothes because the budget was tight. When it was time to dig through the boxes of hand-me-downs in the attic, Mom would say (sometimes with a silly accent), "Today we are going on a lovely excursion to the attic store! Hurrah!" and laugh and make it a game. Because this was turned into a game and a joke, it never occurred to me to feel sorry for myself for wearing hand-me-downs. And, hey, I still enjoy Goodwill and Salvation Army to this day. And that's good, right?

It is also nice that God has made joy and laughter—whether through self-effacing humor, playfulness, or silly accents—pretty easy to find and share if we'll just give it half a try. We can make a young child smile by doing something as simple as picking up a nearby object, let's say a spoon, and saying (with a silly accent, if possible), "Hi, I'm Mister Spoon. Can I be your friend?" This almost always produces a smile and can quickly progress into a full-out, fun pretend game. And playing with children makes them feel loved. It's not the only thing that makes them feel loved, but it is one of them.

Humor, furthermore, is good learning glue. If humor can be connected with what we're learning, we are likely to remember it far better. If one of your professors or teachers ever said something funny, you are very likely to still remember it. My social studies teacher in junior high—after showing us educational films (this was when they were literally reel to reel films) would then let us watch the film backwards while he rewound it. We thought it was hilarious (and it was)! When we watched a film about Holland, we got to see the backwards version of a Dutchman pole-vaulting over a canal. Because it was funny, there was basically zero chance thenceforth of my ever forgetting about canals in Holland.

Also, having a good sense of humor (especially self-effacing humor) can also be a helpful tool against pride, something that is perhaps a Christian's greatest enemy. Here is an example: If I think, "Jim Bob is late again," I can easily semi-subconsciously conclude that I am superior to Jim Bob. If, however, as soon as I think "Jim Bob is late again," I then facetiously say to myself, "I, of course, have never been late in my life [not true by a long shot] and am perfect in every way [this part IS true—OK, just kidding—that's not true either]," then I

laugh at myself and at human nature... instead of feeding my pride. Humor is good at exposing pride, and exposing pride is often more than half the battle.

Good play and humor are everyday manifestation of joy. They are useful, they are pleasurable, and they are good medicine.