

Everyone Needs a Laugh

By Marilyn Meberg

Announcer:

This morning we have the pleasure of having the person who has influenced the lives of many Biolans over the past few years. She was well known for her speaking ability or her humor, for her ability to reach people. She did that here by for many years as an English professor. And now is I'm sure touching the lives of many people at Pepperdine where she is a studying [inaudible].

Meberg:

Thank you very much. And as far as I know I haven't touched a single life at Pepperdine. I've never done. They seem to be utterly indifferent to me. This is an incredible crowd. Is there a renewal of interest in chapel? [laughter] I understand you're getting some administrative encouragement about the [inaudible]. Good to see you. It is wonderful to be here. I apologize for my voice. I've not been a real woman for some time but it is now showing [laughter].

I'm at Pepperdine in the pursuit of a new career of psychology. Those of you are here at Biola may remember and I'm loving it. It's challenging and it's exciting. I'm also writing a book which I had not anticipated doing for [inaudible] press which I hope you get them by December and it's on the subject of humor or laughter. And it's from that book that I will be taking some of my thoughts this morning but as I stand here in front of you again when I walked in I got the most

incredibly powerful deja vu. I really miss Biola. There is no place quite like it. And I think you probably know it. But particularly when you leave I think you have a greater sense of it even than when you're here. I hope you are appreciating it as you are here and I would imagine that you are.

For those of you that are old timers at Biola you might possibly remember me telling this story I'm about to tell. If it is a past a memory you might think into a quiet dose until I'm done. And then hopefully I'll rouse you when it's time to move on to new things.

Well a number of years ago - quite a number of years ago in fact - our son Jeff at the age of 18 months was hopelessly addicted to an all rubber pacifier called the Beebee. This pacifier was the bane of my life because for a while the pacifier is an innocuous little thing. It doesn't bother you much and it hangs over the mouth and makes the person look more moronic. But otherwise that's fine except that after a while that little pacifier - which is all rubber - begins to smell. It is just [inaudible]. See there are little lesions form in the rubber. And bacteria gets in and grows things, and your child - he or she has a big with a pacifier squirted up against his teeth drools down his clothing and he reeks also.

And I hated it.

And you might think Well for heaven's sake by a new one! I mean he would have absolutely nothing to do with the new one. And I pondered this for a long time. I thought why would a normal child reject a brand new, smooth, clean-smelling rubber pacifier? Jeff did. Now there's a reason for this and I studied it because I was desperate. I couldn't stand the smell of my child [laughter]. And as I studied it I would watch him put that pacifier in his mouth [inaudible] and he would twirl it around his little thing went [clicking sound]. It would click in, and I went that's it! The old pacifier has ridges. It's a custom job custom fit for his little mouse. That's what I had to do. We've got to get ridges in the new pacifier in order to switch on him so he will be happy with a new pacifier. But how are you going to get me it a new pacifier if he refuses to touch the new pacifier? [laughter]

Well there's about only one way that I can think of since Jeff would have nothing to do with the new pacifier [laughter] and since ridges simply had to be formed in the new pacifier. And since I was the most interested that ridges be formed in the new pacifier it seemed as if I was elected. And so I determined I would suck on the new pacifier until I get ridges in and I could switch with Jeff and he will never know.

Now you know I think everything that is negative - and this certainly did loom up as a negative - and everything that had negative has a corresponding positive. And I determined I will look at the positive side of this wretched experience and think about what I can get out of this that was

good. Okay I thought now probably Jeff and I will experience a new level of camaraderie as we suck on our mutual pacifiers going about the day and mother-son companion ability.

So the morning upon which I decided to begin this venture Jeff pulled himself up on the couch to watch Captain Kangaroo and I walked in and I sat down on the couch to watch Captain Kangaroo and I too like that. Now it took a while for Jeff to notice me. But then when he did notice me he was horrified.

And then grab it they threw it down on the floor and he yelled and he shouted "No!" I thought well that's a rather violent response for camaraderie here. And so I reached down and I picked it up and I said "yeah this is mommy's pacifier. Mommy's going to suck on her pacifier and you are going to suck on your pacifier. He didn't buy that! I put it back in my mouth, sat back down on the couch and he pulled it out repeatedly and I realized you know what, this is not going to bring us closer. I could see him 20 years from now talking to some shrink and saying it all started when I saw my mother with a pacifier in her mouth. So I thought the only way I get ridges in this pacifier is to do it when Jeff is put away. So when I thought he was out of the room I'd quickly stick it in my mouth and suck on it like that. Well he got so upset he would skulk about the house in an attempt to catch me.

And then when he would he would yell at me and try to reach out and grab and he'd have a fit.

All right now this is going to limit my time I determined that I'd do it when all of us are going to go to sleep [inaudible] two months. Oh that's what I would do. That evening I was reading the paper and Ken was on one couch and I was on another and he said something of interest to me so I dropped the pacie in response to what he was going to say and he looked at my mouth in absolute horror and he said what is in your mouth?

I explained to him my dillema, I had already been complaining about Jeff's smell but he really hadn't internalized much and thought about it much I said [inaudible] ridges in his pacifier.

He said Well certainly you're not gonna sit around the house like that in the evening? I said well Jeff isn't here. He said but I am! So that night going to bed couldn't sleep. I reached over and I grabbed the pacifier [laughter] within a few moments Ken had rolled up on one elbow and he said [inaudible] munching.

I had no idea but I was audibly munching.

I how can get this done? Obviously I can't do it at this point. I can't believe I can't do it when Jeff's around so that limits me to just two naps a day. But I was determined. Within a couple of weeks I was beginning to get ready and I was vacuuming when morning Jeff is asleep. I was sucking on my pacifier and there was something about noise that apple of my brain that addled my brain. I thought I heard a [knocking noise] on the door.

I was by the front door so without turning off the vacuum. I held it in one hand and I reached out with my other hand and opened I the door. And they're standing there was a man whom I had never seen in my life. With a Khaki colored shirt and khaki colored pants. With a [inaudible] "T" on his shirt. And he looked at me an absolute horror [audience laughter].

I realized of course what he was seeing. So I quickly unplugged the pacifier as well as the vacuum cleaner and I said "wait a minute, This isn't mine. Well what I mean is it's my little boy's. I only suck on it when he's asleep [laughter]. You see it bothers him when I suck on it when he's awake and my husband won't let me suck on it when he's around. So I have to do it when he's asleep".

Now I don't know why I felt compelled to explain this to this man who was not AT ALL understanding. He just kept taking one step farther and farther back! I know I wanted to explain myself to him for some odd reason and so I started in on the importance of forming ridges when

he lifted up both hands, and said "wait a minute, wait a minute. I don't know what you're doing and I don't care you but you've made my day!" and he left!

And prior to leaving he had gone into one of those awful laughs where he would laugh and cough and laugh and cough - you know that time you think I'm gonna have a heart attack? I'm like what for heaven's sake! He caught me in a most intimate moment in my life. He refuses an explanation. He has the audacity to laugh and then he leaves without hearing the full story.

Now you know I had not found that experience funny while it was happening. I was irritated with his "Dual T" man. I was embarrassed that I had been caught and it wasn't until that night what I was telling Ken and he fell all over the drain in the kitchen, and I thought well I guess that is kind of dumb.

You know I've gotten a lot of mileage out of that story and I love to tell it because it invariably makes people laugh because you can hardly imagine anyone doing something so really stupid. But desperation prompted it. And incidentally I was able to switch on Jeff and he never knew it and I threw the old one away. So see sometimes [inaudible] I tell you that story because as I said it often will provoke a bit of laughter. And the book I'm writing is about laughter. And I think it is so important that we on occasion laugh.

It is so good for us to laugh. There are times when you need a respite from the responsibility to be serious. From the responsibility to be responsible. Now I am not implying in the slightest that you have now a mandate to go out as college students and be irresponsible.

But there is pressure in your world.

There is pressure in my world there is pressure on everyone in the world and a good man can alleviate that pressure perhaps for just a moment but at least for a moment you've had a respite. [inaudible] the writings of Leo Descalio. He wrote in a Los Angeles Times last April. He said what's wrong with people today? [inaudible] all the pompous rulers of the world come and hear a talk about this our American economy. Why don't we instead send our viewers - every single country - send their best comedian? Get them together. Let them laugh about the problems of the world. It'd be a nice switch a good break. laughter after all is the universal language. Let everybody laugh a little bit. Now of course he goes on to admit the impracticality of that suggestion. There is nothing funny about nuclear war or starvation or man's perpetual inhumanity to man.

But every now and then a little break from the incredible seriousness of life is good for us.

I'd like to talk about three arenas in our lives where I would suggest laughter is going to help.

First of all if I can laugh I'm in control. By that I mean if you can laugh about your situation that puts you in control of your situation instead of your situation in control of you.

Let give me an example of that. Perhaps you remember the story that Joyce Landau tells upon herself when she was asked to be the keynote speaker at a conference. Well it was not a conference. It was a kickoff for the campaign for the Billy Graham Crusade. And she was going to be speaking before all of the pastors' wives and the pastors and the many many people who worked on committees in preparation for the Graham Crusade. And Billy Graham was introducing her that made this honoring time the most important woman of the hour. And having introduced her he invited Joyce to come up from the front row where she was sitting on up to the platform of the podium.

Upon that introduction Joyce stood walked toward the platform where there were four steps that she had to navigate. For some odd reason, her heel got caught in the hem of her long dress. And she fell all over the drape. Of course everyone was horrified. And Billy Graham in characteristic graciousness rushed over trying to help her out but he couldn't because he was in the hem of her dress and she just stumbled again. She couldn't seem to reach the heel and they're both down there fumbling trying to get her heel over the hem of her dress. Finally that was accomplished

and she wobbles over to the platform. And she says well in front of a crowd of a thousand. I have publicly fallen for Billy Graham.

The people loved it. They laughed with a relieved laughter because they put themselves in her position and thought, "I'd die". I would absolutely kill myself. I would go under the platform and stay until the return of Christ.

[inaudible] this enviable ability to turn a situation into a moment of humor and then it seems a little less serious and at the conclusion of her address a minister's wife came after he said "You will never know how much it meant to me for you to do what you did tonight when you fell". She said "you know I have always taken myself too seriously. It is something I have worked on all my life. But I'm always afraid that people are watching and that I could do something wrong and to see you fall and then laugh about it and be so casual and not take yourself so seriously meant the world to me".

I would suggest to you that as the semester progresses this year they're going to be times when you will be taking yourself very seriously. Things will not seem funny but if you can find a moment of levity that puts you in control. Don't let your semester control you. Be responsible. At the same time find a moment to laugh. Be in charge. Be in control. [inaudible name] said that if I can laugh, my body can heal. And this is an incredible truth.

Perhaps you acquainted with the story of Norman Cahill. He was the editor of The Saturday Review magazine. And he was living a very stress-filled life and at the conclusion of a trip he had taken overseas he came home and he wasn't feeling well. And upon further investigation and medical tests he realized that he had an incurable disease that would ultimately leave him completely rigid and immobile and in horrific pain.

They did everything they - the medical scientists - did everything they could but there wasn't any relief. And so with the cooperation his doctor he put himself on his own program. And that program included massive doses of intravenous vitamin C, an all natural diet of natural foods, and what he called laugh therapy.

He got into his hospital room and then he finally had to leave and go to a hotel because he made so much noise with it. He brought into his hospital room initially candid camera with Marx Brothers [inaudible]. On he laughed and laughed and laughed. Now here is the amazing truth of what occurred from there. He found that with 10 minutes of sustained laughter, he would have two hours of relief from pain. That's mind boggling! And ultimately was proven to be medically verifiable because science was revealing that upon laughter the brain releases endorphins which are natural body pain killers.

And you know that Cahill ultimately cured himself and he is now a consultant at UCLA Medical Center helping doctors recognize the importance of laughing [inaudible comment and laughter]. Imagine being cured in essence from those things that we mentioned but particularly with laughter.

When God said thousands of years ago in Proverbs 17 - a merry heart is good medicine - He knew what he was talking about because He is the one who created the capability of producing in our bodies our own natural painkillers. [inaudible] The possibility of laughter as a benefit for us has to do with our faith. If I can laugh my faith is real. It gives testimony to the reality of what I believe. If I can laugh in a world like this one, it is evidence that I believe in a God who has it all control and share with other people and it is in this arena I want you to rest in for a moment this morning.

Many of us give off very cheerful demeanors. Many of us give off a cheerful demeanor because we have within our hearts the sure knowledge that God is in control that he does [inaudible] and that He does have a plan. But some of us have that little niggling voice that says "I don't know that God is in control. I don't know that God really has a plan for my life. Or that God really loves me".

And when those kinds of thought enter into our spirit it undermines our faith. And what happens to their cheerful demeanor? What happens to that Joy? It begins to disappear and become increasingly infrequent. Because our fate is on your mind. I'd like to talk about what can bolster our faith. Faith is bolstered when joy returns. When joy returns so does our smile. So does our ability to laugh. There's a wonderful verse in the book of Jeremiah. The 29th Chapter.

"For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord plans for welfare and not for calamity, to give you a future. And a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you. Seek me and you will find me when you search for me with all your heart".

You will at times wonder if God has a plan for you. Perhaps you find yourself here at this juncture in your life thinking "I don't know what to do with myself. I don't know what my life is going to hold. I don't know what I'm supposed to be or where I'm supposed to go". God says he had a plan for you not a plan of calamity but one that will give you a future and hope. You and I are not on a haphazard course of our own poor choosing. God says in Psalm 16:11 God will make known to me the path of life. You are in a position right now in your life where God is going to make known to you His path. Does that not bolster your faith a bit? Does it not remind you that I am indeed under a direction and under a purpose because God said so. I also think that if we're going to believe that God has a plan for us we have to be convinced that he even knows about us.

And there are times I think when we think. How can I know about me. How can He even be aware of me? I don't feel it. I know the Bible says so but sometimes I they don't see it.

Sometimes they don't experience it. I think one of the most exciting stories in scripture that is not only an illustration of God's grace but illustration of God's individual awareness of us as persons is found in the book of Joshua and the life of Rahab.

Rahab is one woman living in one of the most wicked cities in the world. Given that every kind of sexual perversion and idolatry and wickedness and is known around the country. And yet she - just one woman without the benefit of teaching or instruction. Hadn't heard about Jehovah God. And she began to believe. And God was aware of her. And He through Joshua - inspired Joshua to send his people into Jericho and the city of Jericho [inaudible]. Amazingly a member of the group found himself was in the one home in Jericho that would welcome them. Isn't that a coincidence?

And as they were with Rahab she said "I know your God and I believe in Him. Please save me from the destruction that I know is going to come. Because I want to be a follower. And he made a deal with Rahab and said yes and of course we will do it for you. She lived in the city wall and so they said "drop a cord 30 feet long Scarlet red. And when we come to take Jericho they will see it and they will save you. [inaudible] when Jericho was taken an entire city wall crumbled to

smithereens with the exception of one small portion of wall. Upon which hung a Scarlett cord, upon which lived a woman named Rahab.

Now that halted the progress of 2 million Jewish people for the welfare of one woman because He knew she was a believer and He wanted to honor that faith. Quite a demonstration of God's consciousness of the heart of His children. He knows you. He knows me. And He honors what is in our heart as individuals.

Thirdly my faith is bolstered when I recognize that God is indeed Sovereign. 2 Chronicles 20 reads "Oh Lord the God of our fathers. Art thou not God in the heavens. And art thou not ruler over all the kingdoms and over all nations. Power and might are in your hands. So that no one can stand against you". Don't you love it? This is your God. This is my God. He has all the power and all the might and nobody stands against Him. Anything in your life that seems on the verge of crushing your spirit. God is in control of that.

Jesus gave evidence to the same thought when He said in John 16:33 "In the world there is Tribulation. But take note. I have overcome the world". Jesus has overcome the world. God is in control. You and I can smile, have joy, laugh because we are on the side of being [inaudible]. That bolsters my faith and my faith is bolder. I start feeling better about myself. I certainly feel

better about God. And it brings back the cheerful demeanor which every Christian should reflect as a testimonial witness of what we believe.

When Jesus said He would overcome the tribulations of the world. I think probably the greatest fear - even Christians have - and certainly non Christians. Is that major tribulation called Death. but Jesus overcame that too. We know in Scripture that with his death and resurrection He overcame death.

God says in Isaiah He shall wash away all tears on all faces. We really have overcome. Even in death. And you know what that makes me smile. That makes me feel real good. In fact I can even laugh about that one.

The thought of laughing in the face of death has a new significance to me in that in January of this past year my mother died and as I was contemplating the enormity of what had happened on the day of her death in fact I was in the shower which often serves as my sanctuary. I pray in there, I sing in there [inaudible]. I was standing there and I was thinking my mother is at this moment in heaven. What is that like? What is she experiencing? What does she see? How is that? God and my mother are in there. And as I was deeply contemplating her environment my own environment began to fade. Upon the screen in my mind emerged the picture of my mother when she was in the arms of Jesus and He was holding her as He would a child [inaudible]. And

He began to swing her back and forth slowly gently and then more and more and more and she began to laugh. And laugh and laugh. And I was shocked. I thought my goodness!.

Did I project that image? Is this real? And I thought well, why isn't a real? God said He would wipe away all tears. I hadn't seen my mother laugh or heard her laugh in two years because her illness certainly incinerated smile in six months. And it was as if God said Elizabeth there is a time to weep and a time to laugh. And now it's your time to laugh. As that image faded from my mind, I thought my word, how true. How interesting that within the life of a believer in the Jesus who conquered death we have the last laugh. There is absolutely nothing that separates us. God keeps us on this earth and that is something I forgot. How many times do we get away from there. The last laugh is ours.

Now I want you to know that I am not prone to visions. In fact I've never had a vision before. I don't even know if that was a vision. I just know that that was my experience. But there is much in life that defies explanation. I don't know how to explain that except for the fact it gave me comfort. It gave me joy. And made me laugh in my spirit. Could I suggest yes to all of you this semester this year. That as you contemplate the greatness of God. And your faith in that greatness. Maybe you can lighten up and your spirit. Trust Him. Reflect upon what He has done for you.

He has a plan. He knows you as an individual. He has overcome everything that we might experience in this world. He is Sovereign. Let us pray.

God we are at times overwhelmed and then they we are perhaps unbelieving.

As we contemplate how great you are. Lord we would ask Father that within the heart of each young man and woman in this gymnasium there might be a renewal. A resurgence of faith in who you are. That faith lifts our spirits. Creates within us a greater light heartedness, a greater capacity to actually rejoice in the Lord. May we learn to rejoice in Him. May we learn to rejoice with each other. May we learn to rejoice everything we experience in this world. Some of those things crush our spirits and weaken us and deter us. Remind us that You have overcome.

Thank you in Jesus name. Amen.