

HELP ME UNDERSTAND

Make a joyful noise...

—PSALM 100:1

Even as a child and teenager I liked quietness. So it was not surprising that I found myself getting angry one night. I was attending a Guideposts Writers' Workshop. Sixteen women from all over the United States were getting bedded down. My roommate and I had agreed not to talk, but to get some much needed sleep.

I was almost asleep when ringing laughter and loud conversation began down the hall. "They sound like a bunch of college girls," I muttered resentfully to my roommate. She agreed.

The commotion finally subsided and I went to sleep, still grumbling to myself about the noise.

The next morning I was curious about who the night owls were. But before I could find out, a shy-looking young woman came up to me. "I hope we didn't disturb you last night. In college I never could join in that sort of thing. Oh, I always wanted to, but I stayed alone in my room and was quiet. All my life I've longed to sit on a bed with a bunch of girls late at night and laugh and talk and ... belong. It happened to me last night." Her eyes brimmed with joyful tears, as she asked, "Did we bother you?"

I smiled sheepishly, ashamed of the way I had felt. "No," I said, and now I meant it, "it was sort of a ... joyful noise."

*Father, help me be willing to change some of my lifetime habits
and to understand people not like myself.*

SHARE A SMILE

A stale article, if you dip it in a good, warm, sunny smile, will go off better than a fresh one that you've scowled upon.

—NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

My friend and I were in a fabric shop buying material. I took my bolt of cloth to the saleslady. Sternly, she began snipping away at the material. I looked directly at her, hoping I could catch her eye and say something pleasant or at least smile. She appeared utterly miserable and continued looking grimly down.

When she handed the cloth to me I wanted to smile, but her dour face was discouraging and I felt my smile wither and die deep inside me. I took the material and quickly walked away.

My friend brought her material to the counter and the saleswoman gave her the same stoneface treatment.

But then, without warning, my friend's face burst into a joyful smile. Confidently and gloriously her smile continued. Then, accepting the material, she said softly, "Thank you so much."

The saleswoman seemed startled. Unexpectedly, almost helplessly, she began to smile also. Even her body language changed. She didn't look stiff anymore. Her voice was melodic as she answered, "You're welcome. Bye."

Leaving the store I peeked back. The saleswoman still smiled as she chatted with another customer, who was also beginning to smile.

I had kept my smile inside me. But my brave friend had given her smile away, even at the risk of having it rejected. And she had lighted up the whole place.

*Lord, help me share a smile with someone who looks
as if he or she needs Your love in their life.*

SHOW GRATITUDE

*Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

—EPHESIANS 5:20

One cold night I stopped by my twin sons' room to check on them before going to bed. They both appeared to be asleep. However, Jon murmured, "Cold, Mama." Checking in their closet, I couldn't find a blanket, so I slipped off my bathrobe and covered Jon with it. In the moonlight that came in through the window, I carefully tucked it under his feet and chin. He was so still and quiet, I was sure he was asleep.

The boys were nearly eleven, and I didn't often tuck them in at night. I went on down the dark hall to my bed and climbed in wearily. It had been a long, hard day. I knew I'd be asleep within minutes.

"Mama," came the call from the boys' room. I sighed, hoping Jon didn't need anything else.

"Yes?"

In a tone, soft for Jon, he said, "It was nice when you took off your robe and gave it to me and even tucked me in. Thanks."

The unexpected thanks from my son touched my heart, then caused me to smile in the darkness. My boys seldom expressed gratitude. I was always after them to say thank you.

“You’re welcome,” I answered. “Night. Sweet dreams,” I added, happily.

And then I didn’t go right to sleep. Instead, I thought about how Jon’s thanking me for such a little thing had pleased me. Prompted by his gratitude, I began to thank my Father for many little things I’d neglected to say thanks for through the day.

Father, God, thank You, thank You, thank You.

GUESS WHAT!

*The small change of human happiness lies
in the unexpected, friendly word.*

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

In the midst of my kitchen chores I was surprised to have the front door swing open. Julie, our oldest child, came in. She’d been married three months. I was still trying to get used to her living elsewhere. Sometimes I even unconsciously set her place at the table.

Julie handed me a small bunch of daffodils and said, “Guess what!” as she opened the refrigerator and bent to see what was inside. While I put the flowers in water, I answered happily, “What?”

She began telling me some small details of her new life as she made herself a sandwich. She’d learned to make pineapple upside-down cake, from scratch, and in college she was now giving injections in the medical course she was taking. We sat at the kitchen table, and I watched her eat and hung on every word.

It was a short visit. Julie had to go to work. I thanked her for the flowers and for stopping by; then walked to the door with her, waved as she drove out of the driveway.

Back in the kitchen I sat and looked at the flowers. My daughter's visit was as bright and dear as the early spring daffodils. Suddenly, I picked up the phone and dialed my own mother's number. She lived a hundred miles away. When she answered, I said, "Guess what!"

"What?" she answered expectantly. Like Julie I didn't have any big news, just little details of the day, tidbits about the children. But I'd come to understand in the last hour how precious small talk can be. Just before I hung up, my mother said, "You made my day."

Father, thank You for my mother and my children and the circle of love we're inside.



JUST ONE MORE TIME

Never give up. Never, never, never, never!

—WINSTON CHURCHILL

While my husband was recuperating from a broken arm, I assumed many new duties around the house. One was building a fire. Jerry always had made it look so easy. Even when he told me exactly what to do, mine didn't blaze up quickly the way his did.

I discovered that by fanning the stubborn, slow-starting fire with a magazine, I could sometimes make it blaze up. But one morning no matter what I did, the fire wouldn't start. I