

## BELLY LAUGHS By Danetta Ferguson

Just recently I was reading through an old journal...reminiscing and being reminded of how faithful the Father really is. I came across something that spoke to me and ministered to me just as powerfully that day as it did the day I wrote it several years prior. I had written this particular journal entry while in a season of trials and life had been somewhat chaotic. I didn't seem to have any peace and stayed 'tied up in knots' all the time. I don't remember any one thing being terribly wrong, but I was in a wilderness of oppression and experiencing feelings of defeat.

Because I was tense and 'tied up in knots', I had made myself an appointment to get a massage to 'work out some of the kinks'. If you've ever had a massage you know that when you walk into that room, the setting is very calm and peaceful. The goal is obviously to relax. The massage therapist I used would play Christian music and that always made things nice. Soaking and massage...sounds wonderful, huh? However, when I walked into the room this particular day I knew it was more than getting rid of a few 'knots'. I just had a feeling Jesus was going to show up. I love it that He loves us so much that He will choose a massage appointment as our meeting place!! Oh, how He loves us...for real!!

When the massage therapist came in the room, I actually asked her to not talk to me because I really needed this time to be quiet. She graciously honored that request and went to work on me. I laid there for quite a while just enjoying the atmosphere; soft lights, beautiful worship music, relaxing massage oil, warm towels...just focusing on Jesus. All of a sudden...really out of nowhere...a picture invaded my mind of my oldest son laughing. Now most of you don't know my oldest son, but let me tell you, when that boy laughs, he laughs all over. It's one of those laughs that make everybody around him laugh just by watching him. It's a jolly laugh...a good old belly laugh!! The word 'boisterous' would adequately describe it. For just a second I was kind of irritated at myself because here I was in this quiet room getting a wonderfully relaxing massage focusing on Jesus...and then a rowdy belly laugh blows in like a storm. Before I could think too much about it, I saw another picture and my younger son had joined in the laughing. His laugh is much different but amazing just the same. The two brothers, both grown men, were laughing just as hard as they could physically stand to laugh. I

watched this picture in my mind for a time, totally engaged in what I was seeing when I realized tears were just falling from my eyes. To see and hear my boys laughing, just in a vision, broke through all that oppression. Tears fell for quite some time as I was being beautifully delivered. The massage therapist asked if I was okay and I assured her it was just Jesus! The oppression just melted away.

After quite a while, the tears dried up. Still on the massage table, the Father began to speak to me. "Danetta," he said, "do you see how watching your kids full of joy and laughter mended your heart and made you smile?" I told Him that I did see that. He continued to remind me that He's a parent, too. He is a good, good Father who loves to see His kids full of joy and laughter. I saw how it grieves His heart when He sees us oppressed and tied up in knots. That's not at all how He intended us to live. It's certainly not what Jesus died for us to have. A flood of scriptures begin to roll through my mind as He spoke; verses like, "the joy of the Lord is our strength", "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control", "peace that passes all understanding", "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost", "a merry heart does good like a medicine", "oil of joy for mourning" and on and on. The Father is a perfect picture of all these things and He wants nothing less for us. He even speaks to us of 'joy in persecution'. Jesus endured the cross for the 'joy set before Him'.

Life has a way of sucking the joy right out of us. We get caught up in busyness, stress, jobs, chores, conflicts, bills, and even good things involving kids' schedules, family and friends. We can become so focused on 'life' that we forget to laugh. That's what had happened to me. Remember I said that there was nothing in particular that was wrong. I had just allowed myself to become consumed and overtaken with life instead of being consumed and overtaken with the Spirit. I believe He set up my massage appointment so that I would be quiet and still in order to be set free (Isaiah 30:15).

One of my favorite ways that Holy Spirit comes upon us is when He overtakes us with laughter. Some refer to it as 'holy laughter' because it really is supernatural. I've seen and encountered many times oppression being destroyed off of a group of people (and off of me personally) when He invades the room with laughter that can't be explained...and can't be stopped!

I've experienced the release and refreshing that comes with those encounters. And why wouldn't He appear to us in this way? He is HAPPY! He is JOY! He is GLADNESS! He is GOOD and He pours out His love on us. We love to see our children and grandchildren laughing, why wouldn't He?

If you really want to see what the Lord thinks of these things, I challenge you to do a little word search in scripture. Search out joy, gladness, laughter, happy, merry...and any other synonym you can think of and see what He says. We were created to be full of joy, and He truly delights in seeing us that way. Yes, life is serious. Jesus was serious about life when He walked the earth and was very intentional to be about His Father's business. However, Jesus realized that part of being about the Father's business was being full of joy. I wonder just how often Jesus had a good old belly laugh with His disciples. How often did He laugh boisterously with the children that came to Him? I'm sure when He was hidden away with the Father in prayer, they laughed together. I believe Jesus loves to laugh! Because we are still here on this earth, we have to make time for jobs, meals, chores, and schedules...its just life. But in the midst of life, don't be afraid to laugh. It really does bring restoration and refreshing to the soul.

