



A Prescription For You!

by Rubel Shelly

Several studies have been done on the value of a positive attitude toward life for physical, emotional, and spiritual health. A quarter century ago, for example, Norman Cousins wrote about his personal experience of recovery from a debilitating illness and attributed it to laughter. The editor of *Saturday Review*, Cousins' experience received widespread attention. He was even invited to teach on the faculty of a respected medical school.

Cousins spoke of laughter to embrace the entire range of positive human emotions. He didn't believe that laughing at dirty jokes, for example, had a curative power over heart disease or cancer. He simply observed what all of us sense about negative emotions setting the stage for illness. From that premise, he reasoned that such positive emotions as cheerfulness, hope, playfulness, humor, faith, and love could have a therapeutic value to human beings.

Now a new study from the University of Maryland Medical Center reaffirms that thesis. "We know that anger and mental stress impair the endothelium — the protective barrier lining our blood vessels," says the lead researcher. "This can cause fat and cholesterol buildup in the coronary arteries. But laughter may have the opposite effect — it may stimulate elements that protect the endothelium."

Insurance companies aren't willing yet to pay for your video rental yet or to buy you a whoopee cushion. But it is a prescription each of us can write for his or herself to laugh early and laugh often.

During the dark days of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln was criticized more than once for his use of humor. "With the fearful strain that is on me," replied the president, "if I did not laugh, I should die!"

G.K. Chesterton put it this way: "Life is serious all the time, but living cannot be. You may have all the solemnity you wish in your neckties, but in anything important — such as sex, death,

or religion — you must have mirth or you will have madness.” I suspect he was right. He who laughs, lasts.

Long before medical research verified it, the Bible said this: “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones” (Proverbs 17:22).

Are you stressed out? A good, hearty laugh could be just what the doctor ordered. And you’ll have the chance, for you’ll be with yourself all day. The ability to lighten up and laugh at your own foibles is a very healthy prescription.