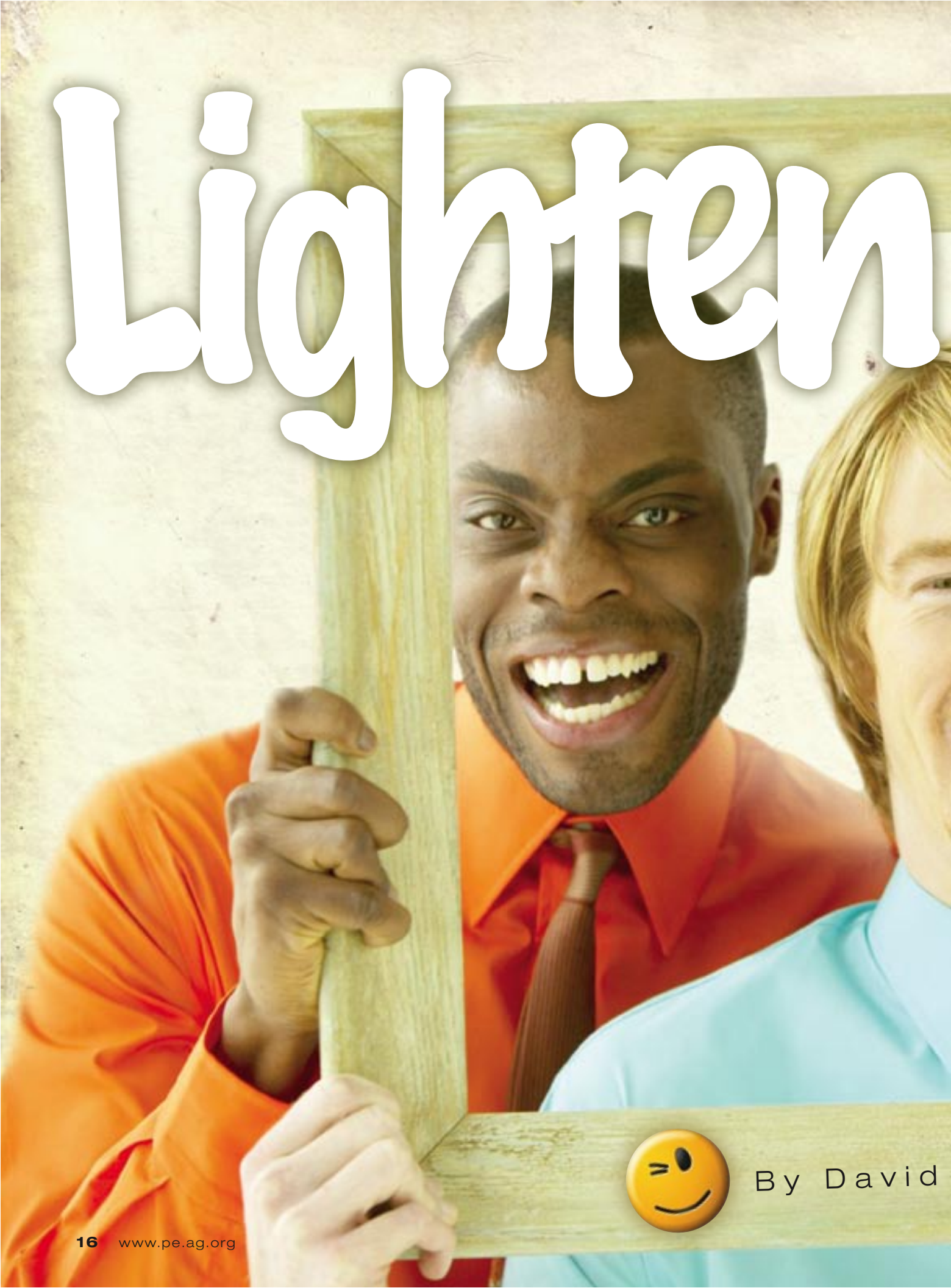




# Lighten



By David

# Up!



The old city was covered in dirty slush, but spirits were high as the tour bus plowed its way down a side street. I was 13, away from home with a youth orchestra, enjoying my first delicious taste of freedom in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

B. Crabtree

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# Just for fun

From Art Linkletter to Bill Cosby, from *Candid Camera* to *America's Funniest Home Videos*, nationally recognized entertainers have discovered that kids create irresistible humor at the most unexpected moments. That holds true when youngsters at Assemblies of God churches participate in Bible Quiz tournaments. Here are a few rib-tickling answers from kids at Junior Bible Quiz meets.

**Q: What gifts were given to Jesus by the Wise Men?**

**A: Gold, Frankenstein and myrrh**

**Q: What two cities did God destroy with fire because of their great wickedness?**

**A: Sodom and Gotham**

**Q: Which commandment protects the sacredness of marriage?**

**A: Thou shalt not kill.**

**Q: Which commandment protects the sacredness of marriage?**

**A: You shall not admit adultery.**

**Q: What feast did God institute to commemorate the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt?**

**A: Leftovers**

**Q: What two appointments will all people keep?**

**A: Christmas and Easter**

**Q: What strange gift did King Herod give to his stepdaughter?**

**A: The face of John the Baptist**

**Q: By what miracle did Israel leave the land of Egypt?**

**A: The parting of the Red River**

**Q: When did David say life begins?**

**A: At retirement**

**Q: Who were the three sons of Noah?**

**A: Ham, Jam and Bread**

**Q: Why were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego thrown into the fiery furnace?**

**A: Because they would not bow down to the chocolate bunny**

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# Lighten up!



Raised a preacher's kid, I had led a pretty sheltered life. Now I was free, except for the presence of my 15-year-old sister. She was part of the stuffy, fluffy, sophisticated string section ensconced in the first eight rows of the bus — near the conductor, of course.

I was fourth-chair trumpet, lounging at the back of the bus with the brass and percussion guys. They were worldly, loud and crude, a breed apart from the ever-so-proper string section. I sat back, wide-eyed, taking it all in.

Our first-chair trumpet was a streetwise 16-year-old named Peter. He smoked and cussed and bragged a lot, looking pretty cool to this 13-year-old preacher's boy.

I'm not sure what was in the worn hip flask Peter pulled from inside his coat. He claimed it was "sour mash whiskey." With a wicked grin he took a big draw, shivered for a moment, snorted and then passed it around our little circle. Only two other guys dared to take a little pull. I passed (honest, Mom!), as did two of my friends.

When we balked, Peter questioned our manhood and took the rest of the flask straight down. He hooted and leered and teased us mercilessly up until the moment the whiskey turned him into a human volcano.

Peter exploded.

At once, the bus erupted in screams and shouts. A clueless chaperone ambled down the aisle to assist this poor boy who had obviously had a "touch of motion sickness." Poor Peter looked as though he was trying to turn himself inside out.

My friends and I were paralyzed with laughter ... the kind that cuts off your air. We couldn't look at each other without being seized by violent spasms of joy.

We were still laughing as the bus pulled to the curb for our first concert at a nameless junior high school.

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I saw her before I stepped off the bus, a street preacher of sorts with a severe beehive hairdo and a 25-pound Bible. She was ranting and raving about our mortal souls, the Last Judgment, and sin.

I wanted to introduce her to Peter, but he was still moaning at the back of the bus. But then I figured Pete was already convinced of God and the Great Tribulation by now anyway.

Somehow, the street preacher keyed in on our grinning crew. I'll never forget her nasty snarl.

"It's a long, chilly swim over Jordan, boys," she said as she shook her Bible in our direction.

I grabbed my horn and slogged through the slush to the school.

Somewhere between the steps and the door I rejected two role models. I didn't want to be like Peter, so cocky and stupid, but I didn't want to be like the sanctimonious prophet of doom outside the bus either — all anger and judgment. If the street preacher was a prime example of the

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# Lighten up!



Christian faith, I wasn't signing up. Neither were the other 38 kids in the orchestra.

In 24 years behind the pulpit, I've met a few folks like that street preacher — dour, harsh, bitter, self-righteous people who look down long noses at those who dare to enjoy life.

Yes, there may be a bit of coarse jesting and silly banter to be found among us. Humor can overflow the banks of appropriateness unless we exercise restraint. But to lock down any and all joy is to rob us of one of God's choice strengthening agents.

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When joy puts on its street clothes, it steps out dressed in smiles and laughter. People are drawn to a warm-hearted smile. They want to know the reason for the hope and joy we share and wear.

The Bible says, "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). Joy is not a secret emotion, submerged beneath funereal sobriety. Joy caused the angels to shout at creation's dawn (Job 38:7). Joy caused David to dance with all his might (2 Samuel 6:14). Joy and gladness marked the Early Church in dark days of persecution (Acts 2:46). Joy caused Paul and Silas to celebrate in spite of incarceration (Acts 16:25).

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# SILENT NIGHT OR HOLY NIGHT?

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# Lighten up!



Grumpiness is not a spiritual gift — it's an absolute impediment to the advancement of the kingdom of God!

Lighten up! Someone is looking for a bright spot against a black night. We are called to shine like the stars (Philippians 2:15).

The street preacher was gone. A fresh blanket of snow painted the world white when we emerged from the junior high school gymnasium. I slumped into my seat at the back of the bus and stared out the window at four little girls making snow angels. They were all smiles — pure joy. They left their impressions in the snow and giggled down the sidewalk as we pulled away from the curb.

What impressions are we leaving as we make our way through life? Life is hard. If we leave the impression that the Christian life is harder, who will follow? If we leave the impression that Christ is Joy, who can resist? ■

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