

episode-206

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Occasionally on our podcast we invite special guests to come on to talk about a topic or a book or something that's on their heart. I've been looking forward to this interview for a while, so Chonda Pierce, welcome to the Got Questions podcast.

Chonda Pierce

Thank you, Shea. This is a privilege. It really is because, to be honest, I listen to you guys occasionally. Don't you just love podcasts, though? That was a word I never heard growing up. Never understood it, didn't know what it was. Now I've got the whole podcast app and I just listen to a million different ones.

Shea Houdmann

I don't think I listen to quite a million, but since we started doing this podcast, I've had to increase my listenership, so to speak.

Chonda Pierce

I tell you which ones to not listen to, the ones that are about serial killers or something. One time I turned that on, I had a long trip to drive and it kept getting darker and darker and then I was listening to that and I was like, I've got to turn this off, I'm terrified.

Shea Houdmann

My wife, MeLissa, really enjoys listening to the true crime type of podcast.

Chonda Pierce

Yes, it's crazy. I know. What is that about us? The curiosity or the, you know, and then you find out it's like a guy that was the guy next door and it's like, oh my goodness, now I'm terrified of my neighbor.

Shea Houdmann

I have enough trouble trusting people that I don't know you need to listen to something like that.

Chonda Pierce

Exactly.

Shea Houdmann

For those who may not know Chonda Pierce, you probably guessed by now that Chonda Pierce is a Christian comedian and has been doing this for decades, right? And just recently, soon coming out is her new book, *Life is Funny Until It's Not*. So I know the typical question that people ask you about this book is, so Chonda, what led you to write this book? But essentially the book is your life story.

Chonda Pierce

It is.

Shea Houdmann

Let's put a different spin on the question. What did you learn about yourself as you wrote this book?

Chonda Pierce

It's a great, great question. I don't think anybody's asked me that yet. I will tell you this book has probably saved me hours of therapy because I just gave it to my therapist and said, here, read this. That'll save us a lot of time. It was hard. It was probably one of the hardest books I've ever written in my life. And I've written a lot of books. And in many of those books, I tell life stories and mostly funny things. This one, I just decided before I end this career, which is 32 years long, and I do think about retiring, even though I don't think there's any retiring in the kingdom of God.

Chonda Pierce

But when I do think about getting on the road less, I wanted to have it all said. What I mean by that is, in every concert, every video, I've always known how I want to end the night. And usually, after a couple of laughs and some songs, we always end the night on a very serious note of what God is doing in my life, what I'm walking through. And by that, I mean, if I'm walking through something, I feel like I'm an average woman. Somebody out there is doing the same thing. They're going through a tough time with their husband or they're struggling with menopause or they're, you know. And so we really talk about the reality of things, of the tough things, even though we love Jesus.

Chonda Pierce

And so I decided that sometimes down through the years, there's probably been gaps in the story that left people curious. And I decided to get it all said and say, this is it. There's some things I can't talk about. And I was honest about that. There are things that happened to me that I probably will never

share on a stage, that it's much easier in an intimate setting of reading it off of a page. But I feel like I accomplished something that my family and my children can read years from now and really catch the flavor of who Mama is.

Shea Houdmann

One of the things you said in your book was you'd like your tombstone to say there were a lot of elephants in the room and she talked about them. Tell me more about that.

Chonda Pierce

I grew up in a church structure that we really don't, we never really talked about the real stuff. You know, we, everything was, you know, come to know Jesus and life will be great. And that's, that's such a lie, you know, because then when life isn't great, you think you've either one, Jesus doesn't care, or you never really had Him to begin with in your heart.

Chonda Pierce

And, and the truth of the matter is life is messy. Life is messy and hard and full of ups and downs. And sometimes in the church, I remember, for example, like it was early eighties that we finally got a divorce care group in our church. And I remember chuckling because I'm always looking at, you know, the funny side of things. And I go, you know, this should have come about 15 years ago because everybody's already divorced. You know, we were always late to the trauma game in the church. I don't know if it's because we wanted to make God look good, you know, and so we don't talk about our alcoholism. We don't talk about, you know, the abortion we had in college. We don't talk about, you know, we just don't talk about things.

Chonda Pierce

When I feel like in the church is where we should talk about everything. So that one, we prepare our young people to say, life is still going to be hard, but here's what Jesus can do during the tough stuff. And, and I think that's what this book is about. It's here are the good, the bad and the ugly of me. And the thread that's common through all of it was Jesus was always there.

Shea Houdmann

And one of the things I've most stood out to me as I read through your book is just Chonda, you've had a rough life.

Chonda Pierce

Yeah.

Shea Houdmann

A lot of bad stuff, scary stuff, terrible stuff that I've seen devastate other people has occurred in your life. How has Jesus helped go through that and still remain faithful, still believing in him, still trusting in him, still have a spirit of joy? And then also related to that, how has God enabled you to use humor to help you survive some of the things you've experienced?

Chonda Pierce

I think at first, I think humor is such a gift from the Lord, because at first for many comedians, your comedy becomes a deflection so that you don't have to deal with it, or it becomes a deflection of not really dealing about the pain, but let's just make a joke, you know, anyway. And so for a while, it's a defense mechanism and a survival mechanism. When healing begins in your life is when you don't let that so much anymore. You don't have to poke at that anymore, because that sore is healed, and there will be a little scar probably forever, but I don't have to make light of something. And now I have someone to run to, to talk over my problems with, to get it all out, to be angry, you know.

Chonda Pierce

And I think when you read the book, there's a lot of places where I did the wrong thing in my grief, or I did the wrong thing in my dealing with a subject or something that happened to me. I did the wrong thing often. And the only reason you would tell those things is to keep somebody from doing the wrong thing as well. I talk about going to a karaoke bar, trying to heal from my loneliness. You know, probably it was a fun thing, probably not a real healthy thing. And I want people to see that. That's not the place to go hang when you're lonely and tired. And so, you know, there's some realness to it.

Chonda Pierce

But for me in my house, I knew of Jesus before I could walk. I knew who Jesus was. I grew up, you know, in the church. I grew up a preacher's kid. Jesus was never really real to me until a tough time came. And you get on the other side of it and you realize, I don't really know how I made that through. And yeah, you do. Because Christ was there in the good and the bad and the ugly.

Chonda Pierce

Paul talks about a thorn in his flesh. David went through depression, you know, because of some of his sin and what it had brought into his life. You

know, everybody has a reaction to their trauma. But when you get on the other side of it, you're right. As a human being, I go, man, you know, until I put it all in one book and in one setting, I thought, my life really hasn't been that hard. My therapist goes, yes, it has. And it's okay to say that.

Chonda Pierce

But the theme throughout my life, as it is, I guess, in this book, is I always had a sense and an awareness that Christ was there. And I always had a sense and awareness. And I don't know if that's my mother put that in me or whatever. But you can't read the Bible and not see that there were people in the same boat. You can't turn on the news and not see that there's someone worse off than you. You know, there's some horrible tragedy going on. And so I always remained humbled by my brokenness. And at the same time, encouraged through it. Because I don't go through this by myself. There are a myriad of people that have had a much worse life than I. And I don't know how they make it without Jesus.

Shea Houdmann

When Jesus said, I am with you always.

Chonda Pierce

Yes. He meant that. Even to the ends of the earth.

Right.

Shea Houdmann

Amen.

Chonda Pierce

And I feel like I've been to the end of the earth and back a few times. Been right on the edge. All right on the edge.

Shea Houdmann

You have. And I like what you were saying earlier about how real the character portrayals are in the Bible. And that even the greatest heroes, other than Jesus, the Bible points out a flaw or a sin in everyone else's life. So to make them relatable, to help us understand, these are real people just like us who deal with some of these same struggles. And therefore, when they say, I went through this hard time, yet I'm going to trust God anyways, like David does in many of the Psalms.

Chonda Pierce

And Job. Oh, my stars. Job, yeah.

I haven't lost my children.

Shea Houdmann

It's believable.

Chonda Pierce

Right. It really does. And those things comfort me. Even when I don't feel like it, I can read the word. And so I see the facts before my eyes and I know I'm not alone. I sometimes still feel lonely or I feel very depressed or an anniversary comes along and I miss my husband terribly. But at the same time, I have the word to go to. And therefore, I know I'm not alone.

Chonda Pierce

Have you ever thought, Shea, I think, I don't know, but I just think there are scribes in heaven in a room right now with parchment or maybe I have divine computers, writing new scripture, writing new stories. And when we get to heaven, the Lord's going to go, OK, I have a New Testament version number two. Because I kept inspiring. I kept creating. I kept telling people stories so that the next generation can have it or hear it. I like to think that I don't know that I would make it to scripture. Mother Teresa probably would have a whole book in the Bible. Billy Graham would have a whole book in the Bible about his life. But I do think if God is still writing scripture, when we get to heaven, we'll have a whole new Bible and it'll be our stories. It'll be the things we're going through. And you're right. It will be how God used us even in our brokenness. He used us. To me, that's the great. To me, that I still survive and I have a career is a sign of a good God.

Shea Houdmann

Absolutely. And so, yeah, I don't know whether we'll call it scripture. But one of the things I'm looking forward to in eternity is just to meet people.

And we'll have eternity. And there's some people in the Bible and there's some people even contemporary who I would like to know a little bit more of their backstories.

Chonda Pierce

One of my stories, somebody asked me, who do you want to talk to when you get to heaven? Besides Jesus, of course. I said, I want to meet the guy that when Peter, or maybe it was Paul was preaching, fell out of the window and died.

Shea Houdmann

Euthychus, yes.

Chonda Pierce

Yeah, yeah. I said, I want to know, was he bored and fell asleep? Was it a bad sermon and he fell asleep? Because they brought him back to life. And I think it was not just, you know, to bring him back to life. I think it was so no one will know how boring the sermon was.

Shea Houdmann

Or even like Lazarus, who is dead and he was in paradise, presumably for three to four days and then gets brought back. It's like, dude, I was just fine where I was. Why did you bring me back here?

Chonda Pierce

And he never got ticked off. You know what I mean? We don't know that he did. Maybe he did afterwards, after he hugged Jesus and his sisters, he might have said, okay, I know y'all miss me, but I was really doing great.

Shea Houdmann

Now I've got to die again at some point. I already did that once. Or like Elijah in the Old Testament, where he just gets done defeating hundreds of prophets of Baal in the big confrontation. And then Jezebel says, I'm going to kill you. And he runs away. It's like, what were you thinking?

Chonda Pierce

Exactly, exactly.

Shea Houdmann

God could handle, protect you. It's 400 other prophets. Why did a threat from one woman, why did that scare you so much?

Chonda Pierce

And what was Jezebel's exact words? Because I could use those.

Shea Houdmann

Good point.

Chonda Pierce

Get rid of somebody. That's right.

Shea Houdmann

So the title of your book, Life is Funny Until It's Not, at what point as a comedian by trade, and I've always found you to be hilarious in an encouraging and edifying way. But at what point is it time to stop being funny, to take something seriously? Because humor, as you said, can be a deflection.

We don't want that. We don't want it to prevent us from actually dealing with the issues. We want it to assist us to see the issues in the right way.

So how do you find that balance?

Chonda Pierce

You know, therapy, wonderful counselors, down through the years of sorting through what's going on in your head. I have seen comics, stand-up comics, in a myriad of different places. And once in a while, you run across one that has a real angry kind of a delivery. You know what I mean? They're just loud and got a scowl on their face. I mean, hilariously funny. But I want to go up to them and throw my arms around them and ask them, who hurt you? You know, who hurt you so bad that you're still working it out in your comedy? Instead of allowing comedy to be this beautiful, fun, and healing thing. And yet, I've been guilty of it.

Chonda Pierce

I used to tell a story all the time, Shea, about two little ladies that came up behind me and whispered, you know, this is one of our preacher's daughters. She's not very P-R-E-T-T-Y. And I turned around and said, no, but I'm real S-M-A-R-T. You know, and everybody would laugh. They thought it was a cute little story. And I quit telling it because, for one thing, it really did happen. Two little old ladies did say that, which is horrible for a seven-year-old kid or a nine-year-old kid sitting at the water fountain at church, that was horrible. And we as Christians have a tendency, because we're in the sanctuary, we think we can get by with saying anything to anybody. And it's very painful. And so I wrote the punchline. And the punchline was really kind of for me, because that's what I wished I'd said. But that was comedy. The truth of the matter is, I left and got teary-eyed and told my mama, Sister So-and-so says I'm not very pretty.

Chonda Pierce

So all that to say, healing comes along in stages in your life, and you realize you don't need that anymore. I don't need that crutch. And I think deep down in my heart, I was probably hoping those ladies were still alive so they could hear. They would hear that bit on the radio and feel bad about themselves. And then I don't need that anymore. I don't need for them to know that they hurt my feelings. It doesn't bother me anymore. Now I look at it and go, that was a funny little idea I had, but I don't need it.

Chonda Pierce

I think that happens with a lot of comedians. They get to a place and go, I really don't need that zinger. I don't need that. You do that cleaning up your comedy. A lot of comics come to know Jesus, and they're trying to figure out how to clean up their language, and they slip up. And as time goes on, you realize, wait a minute, I didn't need all those dirty words to make this story funny. And so you let go of what you just don't need in your arsenal anymore.

Chonda Pierce

For me, when healing really began to take place in my spirit and in my wounded soul, the comedy became such a gift. To me, it's so much fun to find the right words to put in a right group, a right little segment, and you use the right words, and it makes people laugh. That fascinates me. And so that becomes like my treasure or my test to myself, going, okay, let's see if I can make my, like I just fell off the tub edge and broke my back this week. So let's figure out how I can make that funny. The first few days it wasn't funny because I was in horrible pain. Just horrible pain. I'm still in a little bit of pain. But I told you before we started, now I have the good drugs. So now I have something to blame all my comedy on when this tour starts.

Chonda Pierce

But I will say I love that when healing comes along, comedy doesn't become your crutch anymore. It becomes a way of opening a heart's door so that you can leave them with a message. And that's what's beautiful about comedy. If you get a crowd laughing and laughing and laughing with you, you can leave a truth to them that they'll never forget. Mark Lowry used to say all the time that comedy was a way to open a heart's door so you can leave a package about Jesus outside the door. And I believe that. I've seen it work time and time again.

Chonda Pierce

Growing up, all evangelists would come and do revival at your church, and they'd always have that funny little anecdote at the beginning of the sermon or they'd have the funny little joke that got everybody's attention. And then they'd say, now open the word of God, and they'd start preaching. And I always tell people that's exactly what I do without the preaching. I just keep doing the funny stories. And my preaching is about this tall. And I can't call it preaching because I'm not Baptist.

Shea Houdann

Yes. Nice. So your book, Life is Funny Until It's Not, who is it for? And I know most authors say, oh, it's for everybody. But who in particular do you think would be blessed, would be benefited by reading your book?

Chonda Pierce

If I can be perfectly honest, it's for my children, that they would see the real meaning behind the madness of why Mom got on a bus, that they would see how Mom is still breathing even after she's been there. And not all my relationships are whole and well and wonderful. So even the people far away in my life, it's for them. It's for grandkids. That's who it's for until they read it or find it.

Chonda Pierce

It is also for a myriad of fans. I have over a million followers, and all of them have been so good and gracious to walk with me through a lot of these dark days. And so it's for that person that I always ask a question. How did you make it through the death of your husband? As a teenager, you lost your sister. Or when did you start being funny? It answers all those questions. And it needed to be said and needed to be done before I go.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah. That's awesome. I mean, people who read your book, I highly recommend it. It'll make you laugh. It'll make you cry. It'll make you think. And to me, that's a great book. So congratulations on this new book, and I truly hope it sells well because I think it will encourage a lot of people.

Chonda Pierce

Thank you. I do too. I have a mortgage. My mortgage company would appreciate you.

Shea Houdmann

As you know, GotQuestions.org is a ministry where we answer people's Bible questions. People can come to the site, ask any questions. So I've got two questions related to comedy and humor that I'd like to ask you, if that's okay.

Chonda Pierce

Perfect.

Shea Houdmann

So first one, and this is related somewhat to a question I asked earlier, but as a Christian comedian, how do you know where to draw the line in terms of what's appropriate or inappropriate to joke about?

Chonda Pierce

I don't always get that part right.

Shea Houdmann

No one does.

Chonda Pierce

No one does. And let's be honest, comedy is so subjective. What I think is, I never cared for three stooges. I just never liked that slapstick, slip on a banana peel. I just was never a fan of three stooges. I loved Carol Burnett, you know what I mean? But I just was not a fan of three stooges. In other words, there are so many different varieties of delivery and comedy. Minnie Pearl used to say, come see me, we'll treat you so many different ways, you're bound to like one of them.

Chonda Pierce

And comedy is like that. There's a million different types of comedians and the way they say things. I used to tell young comics all the time, go home and write down your favorite bit from your favorite comedian. And then take a Sharpie and mark out all the dirty words. If it's still funny, then write them a note going, you know, those words really weren't that necessary. Most of the time, it's not funny. And they had to flavor it up, you know, with the shock value and the shock treatment.

Chonda Pierce

I think clean comedy is harder. You know, dirty comedy is easy. You get in front of a few people that's had a couple of drink minimums and everything's funny, you know? So kudos to the one who's kept it clean. And there's a lot of them out there that are excellent and they're great.

Chonda Pierce

I think finding that line is hard. I have denominational barriers. What one will think is hilarious, the other's gonna think that's terrible. You know, I have United Pentecostals come to my show with no makeup and their hair up, and they just laugh so hard at me poking at them. You know what I mean? And yet then I'll have an Episcopalian sitting there with a glass of wine while I'm trying to be funny. You know, it's a bizarre world to try to keep it up.

Chonda Pierce

If I went into it trying to please everybody, I would be crazy. You finally get to a place where you just trust yourself and you know that you know that you know that God knows my heart. And I didn't leave my house hoping to, you know, I say butt crack every now and then. That just, you know, I get a couple of letters about that once in a while because I just think that's a funny word, butt crack. You know? And so I say it and then I'll get an ugly letter, you know, from time to time. And it's usually a little old lady that forgot she has one. And so it's hard. You cannot go out trying to please everybody. You have to go out being the very honest person that you can be. Yeah. And then trust yourself that that's funny.

Shea Houdmann

So Chonda, if we happen to get an ugly letter, can I have your address so I could forward it to you?

Chonda Pierce

Yes, go right ahead because I said butt crack on your show.

Shea Houdmann

All right. So question number two, what to you is the funniest story in the Bible?

Chonda Pierce

Well, one, we talked about the guy that fell out of the window, you know, and died. I think there's also, well, you know, Balaam's donkey is always a good one because that's how I know if God could use a donkey, he can use me, you know. There's always some really, you know, ones that everybody's always citing. There was, who was the story of the spies that hid in the toilet? I mean, they had to hide in the outhouse, you know. There's things like that, that you really get into the details of the word. You go, oh my goodness, you know. Can you imagine these two grown men hiding in the pooper? You know, so there are bizarre and hilarious stories, you know, that crack me up.

Chonda Pierce

But I think probably the Bible for me is so much more of an inspiration. You know, when Jesus said it's easier, it's harder for a rich man to get to heaven. It's easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than a rich man is to get into heaven. One, that keeps me being poor. And two, I love that he said that because for the vernacular of that day, Jesus was doing a

joke. You know, to think of a camel getting through the eye of a needle, that's exaggeration. Jesus was using words put together in a sentence to cause people to think and to chuckle and go, yeah, you're right. You know, it's ridiculous. A camel can't get through the eye of a needle.

Chonda Pierce

So I love that there's places in the Bible where you can see the humor was used and the laughing was good. Solomon said, laughter doeth good like a medicine, and it really does. The devil's perverted it a lot, you know, so that it isn't the medicine that it could be. But I think those are some of the fun stories that make me relate and go, oh, I can be funny, you know. It's okay to be funny.

Shea Houdmann

And related to that one, and I believe that he does, and I know that you do too, why do you think God has a sense of humor?

Chonda Pierce

Oh, my Lord, just look at the animals. You know, look at the way some of them were created. Look at us. You can sit in the mall and see the variety of noses in this world. And you go, he had to have a sense of humor and he just kept, you know, he put the gene pool out there and watched what those genes would create, you know. Look at the giraffe. Why would you choose something that just eats the top of the trees? And have you seen him trying to get water? I could never spread my legs that far to try to get a drink of water like that, you know.

Chonda Pierce

So it's apparent that he had a sense of humor just by looking through creation. And then you see what he chose. You know, we talked about it the other day, but it blows my mind that the almighty God, the divine, I mean, the one that deserves our reverence, that when we see, we will be in such awe that our faces will be on the ground. We will just, I can't imagine being in the very presence of God himself. And so when we see him and to know of this incredible, awesome God of the universe, and yet he makes himself available to be as intimate as you and I talking. You know, he makes himself available to be as intimate and to laugh with us. I just find that beautiful.

Chonda Pierce

I pray every night, and I say this many times when I pray before the night, that that spotlight that shines in my face when you can't hardly see the crowd because the lights are so bright and so heavy. I imagine, I pretend that that's God shining a light on me. And so I love to make him laugh every night. I have the privilege to make God laugh. It just so happens that the people in the room get to hear it.

Shea Houdmann

Thank you for sharing that. As I said, I agree with you 100%. And I would encourage, if you're not familiar with Chonda Pierce, if you've never read her books or seen her when she's on tour, please go see her. My wife saw her last year and complained for a few days about how sore her abs were from how hard she laughed.

Chonda Pierce

It's a workout. Yeah, it's fantastic.

Shea Houdmann

It's a great abdominal workout. So many benefits to reading Chonda's books and seeing her in person. Specifically the book that's coming out soon is Life is Funny Until It's Not. Highly recommend it. It's a great read. And Chonda, thank you for joining me on the Got Questions podcast. I truly enjoyed the conversation. Thanks for putting a smile on my face, both in our conversation today and as I read your book.

Chonda Pierce

Thank you, Shea. Thank you very much. It's my privilege.

Shea Houdmann

Right. This has been the Got Questions podcast with Chonda Pierce, author of Life is Funny Until It's Not. So Got Questions, Bible as Answers, and we'll help you find them.