

A MERRY HEART

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are those who smile and laugh a lot.
But what about when we face negative situations?*

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Have you ever noticed that often the healthiest people you know are those who smile and laugh a lot – not those who frown and complain all the time? God’s Word tells us that a cheerful attitude has a positive effect on our health.

Proverbs 17:22 says, “A merry heart doeth good *like* a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.” Let’s look more closely at this verse.

First of all, the word “merry” means “glad” or “joyful.” The word “good” has a broad meaning and is therefore properly supplied. The word “medicine” is more accurately translated “cure.” It comes from the Hebrew word *gehah*, which means to thrust away a bandage that is no longer needed. Another translation of this verse reads, “A merry heart makes the body healthy...”

Proverbs are usually structured in parallel sentences, and in this case, a merry heart parallels a broken spirit. The word “broken” means “wounded or smitten.” In this context, the emphasis is more on being disappointed, downcast, or discontented as a general state, as opposed to being hurt by a single event. The word “drieth” is used literally of wet things that dry up. It is also used metaphorically of sapping strength and vigor. The word “bones” is singular, not plural, in the Hebrew. We know that blood, which contains the soul life, is manufactured in the bone. The entire verse properly reads, “A glad heart makes the body healthy, but a wounded life saps the strength from the body.” Rotherham’s translation has it, “A joyful heart worketh and excellent cure, but a stricken spirit drieth up the bones.”

Isn’t that a terrific verse to know? A merry heart works an excellent cure, making for a healthy body.

We want to look at a few examples in God’s Word of people with a merry heart. We’ll see how important our attitudes are in getting this merry heart.

Luke 12:16-19

⁶ And he [Jesus] spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

¹⁷ And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

¹⁸ And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

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¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, *and* be merry.

But what did God say? God has the final word, right?

Luke 12:20-21

²⁰ But God said unto him, *Thou* fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

²¹ So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

If we want to be “rich toward God,” we need to have the right attitude. We can see in this parable that the rich man thought only of himself and that he would be in charge for the next few years. But God had a different answer for him. We should live our lives being rich toward God. We see that it is the attitude, respect, and reverence toward God that is important, not material increase.

Remember the parable of the forgiving father in Luke 15? The younger son asked his father for the inheritance due him, which was quite legal to do in that culture; so the father divided it to him and the son went into a far country where he wasted all his inheritance. A great famine arose in that country, and having no funds left, he was forced to take the most degrading job in the Judean culture – a pig feeder. Formerly living like a rich man’s son, he now found himself eating with pigs. Suddenly he became aware of where he was and the state he was in.

Luke 15:17, 20, 22-24

¹⁷ And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

²⁰ And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

²² But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put *it* on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on *his* feet:

²³ And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill *it*; and let us eat, and be merry:

²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

Isn’t that a wonderful occasion for having a family together and having that merry heart?

From these two records in God’s Word – the rich man and his storehouse and the parable of the forgiving father – we have two examples of a merry heart. One man had a merry heart because he was rich for himself; the other because he was rich toward God. For our lives to be fulfilled and our hearts to be truly merry, we must be rich toward God in our attitude of heart.

When things are going well it is easy to maintain a merry or joyful heart. But what about when we face negative situations? I think especially of a parent’s concern for his child’s health. When a parent becomes fearful, he has reached a dangerous point. We know from the Power for Abundant Living class that fear is wrong believing which issues in wrong results. The account of Job vividly illustrates this point. Job was a parent who feared for his children’s well-being. His fear was the “hole in the hedge” (Job 3:23) of his believing, bringing on negative results. By claiming the promises of God and acting upon God’s Word, Job received deliverance from mental and physical pressures. We must do the same.

We know that if we have any kind of fear, we have to get rid of it. We can claim God's promises and take positive action upon His Word. As believers, we never react negatively to a situation because we know we are in control. We have these promises in God's Word (3 John 2; Romans 8:37; 2 Corinthians 2:14; 9:8) – what do we do? We don't have a passive attitude, and we don't go to the doctor thinking he is going to do it all. Many people have been disappointed by that kind of action. We decide the action we need to take to have that merry heart restored again. It is important to our well-being. We must keep a cheerful heart, a merry heart, a quality of mind which will take the weight off us.

Running out of energy, money, and time are three things I know of which can weigh us down. I know that I had a tendency to be late. I used to think, "How am I going to get over this?" I would always be running out of time, which eventually made me late for meetings. Sometimes I would be ready to go out the door, and the phone would ring or somebody would come by. I had to learn to organize my life. I started leaving home early enough so that those last-minute phone calls didn't happen – I was not there to answer them. As for running out of energy, many times we have things we need to do but, because we are tired, we don't have a positive outlook on handling the situation. We can't let ourselves get into these situations where we run out of time, energy, or money. We prevent them by planning ahead. We take action so that these things which could weigh us down, which could keep us from having a merry heart, don't happen.

Laughter is a great key in maintaining a merry heart. I've seen numerous articles written in magazines that deal with laughter as a key to healing. One such article that a believer lent me says:

Laughter may indirectly aid in decreasing pain in inflammatory conditions associated with such physical problems as arthritis, for instance. Evidence is beginning to suggest that laughter sends a message to the brain requiring that it produce more alertness hormones called catacolomines. The release of this alertness chemical then stimulates secretions of the body's own painkillers, which are the endorphins, and the perception of pain decreases. The bottom line is that laughter may be a painkiller and the increase catacolomines has been linked to a decrease in inflammations. There is also evidence that laughter is one method the body employs to relax. When you laugh heartily and the humor spasm stops, your pulse rate drops below normal and skeletal muscles become deeply relaxed. The body is revitalized. The relaxation response has been found to last approximately forty-five minutes after the last "Ha." The greater the intensity of laughter, the larger the decreasing tension and the more long-lasting the effect. Laughter also allows the muscles to go limp and is an effective agent for reducing stress.¹

A joyful heart worketh an excellent cure and has a definite effect on the body. It is interesting to note that science is catching up to what we already know from God's Word.

In the past two years, Dr. Wierwille and I have had difficult physical situations to face. At these times I would know I had to restore my merry heart because I didn't want the adversary to steal from me. I turned to God's Word, and one of the things that I put in my mind and in my life was Psalms 94:19.

¹ See also Norman Cousins, *Anatomy of an Illness* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1981), pp. 39 and 40.

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Psalm 94:19

In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.

I would think about the comforts that are mentioned in God's Word. I would think, "Well, what is going to delight my soul from God's Word today?" I would think about Exodus 3, verse 14: "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM..."

Our Research Department has taught that this verse means: "I shall become what I shall become." God is going to be there to take care of us in every situation. We rest in the Word of God we know. We can relax and believe it and let it happen. God will take care of the rest.

There are always different verses I give to people when they call me on the phone. I know that ministering healing to them is what will help them, but they also must have something to put in their minds. I tell them, "Read Romans 8 or Ephesians 1." Ephesians 1 reveals what God has already done for us.

He has made our bodies so that their nature is to heal themselves. As we claim the promises in God's Word and act upon them, we can truly have a merry heart.

Exodus 15:26

... I *am* the LORD that healeth thee.