

BETTER THAN MEDICINE

"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones."
Proverbs 17:22.

"A cheerful heart is a good medicine." American Revised Version.

The Bible is amazingly practical. Here is a prescription from the long ago which is exactly what we need for many of our ills today. How many sad people there are, how many who are about to break because of their tensions, how many are dragging themselves about jaded by the monotony of the daily round, who need above all else this wisdom from the Bible.

The truth of this proverb readily presents itself to our reason. It is accord with the correct principles of physiology. The effect of contentment of heart upon the whole system is experienced at once. Digestion is promoted by smiles. Physicians will tell you never to let children go to sleep weeping; that happy children digest their food, while sobbing children do not. The truth of this proverb is also in accord with the correct principles of psychology. A contented mind and heart are invaluable. We need to laugh in order to have healthy minds. A merry heart relaxes our tensions which fray our nerves and blast our health. Dr. James J. Walsh of Fordham University says, "Few people realize that health actually varies according to the amount of laughter. So does recovery. People who laugh actually live longer than those who do not laugh." The ability to laugh is peculiarly human. Babies develop it early, but animals never do. The sense of humor is one of the finest gifts that God has given to His children. If we do not cultivate and use it, we miss the intention of our Creator and are spiritually dwarfed.

What is meant by a merry heart? The dictionaries give this word a thoroughly good character. They tell us that it expresses feelings of enjoyment and gladness; cheerfulness and light-heartedness. Its synonyms are "pleasant", "delightful" and "happy."

Merry is a good word, as healthy and wholesome as the spring sunshine or the brook that gurgles down between the hills and runs on through the meadows. It is a word that is full of music and healing. There is an indescribable charm about the merry heart. It indicates faith and hope. It is evidence of that confidence in God which permits the soul to laugh and to be glad in God's world. A merry heart furnishes the vitality, zest, enthusiasm, hope and courage which are necessary to make a life a sweet and beautiful thing.

A merry heart depends on the quality of the soul and not on the quantity of one's possessions. Christ said, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." The same is true of the merry heart. There are people who are extremely poor in this world's goods who have very merry hearts. At the same time there are people who are quite wealthy in this world's goods who do not have any peace, joy or cheerfulness. One cannot buy a merry heart, but he may have it without money and without price. Christ never comes into a human heart and takes up His abode there without making that heart merry. Whenever you see any professed Christian without a merry heart, then you may know that he is not living up to his privileges.

It is a well-known fact that the mind acts upon the body. It is a fact which no observant person would deny, that there is an intimate connection between sorrow of soul and sickness of body, and that cheerfulness of spirit tends to physical health.

There is a medicinal value in a merry heart which every physician readily admits. So strangely knit are we of flesh and spirit that the one is always reacting to the other. That is why a physician always tries to keep his patient in good spirits.

and when he discerns that the patient is weighed down by some mental burden he wisely seeks to lighten that as well as to administer remedies to the body. And when one is in good health cheerfulness of disposition tends to keep him so, whereas a depressed condition of mind makes him an easier prey to disease.

Cheerfulness always exerts a healing influence over the soul. Cheerful Christians are strong ones for the Bible tells us that: "The joy of the Lord is your strength." Nehemiah 8:10. We can do our work best when we do it gladly. In a cheerful mood we can take the widest, wisest, and healthiest views of truth. Sour feelings always lead to false estimates of the world. Cheerfulness is commanded and commended in the Scriptures. Christ was cheerful and gave His joy to His people. He said, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." John 15:11. Paul reiterated his advice to his readers saying, Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice." Philippians 4:4. God loves his children and delights in their happiness. God is blessed or happy and desires for His children a share in His blessedness, which must involve a participation in His gladness.

Some people are prone to be pessimistic. As they grow older they enjoy airing their complaints, but very few, if any, want to hear them. This is illustrated by a story in connection with Disraeli, who was prime minister of England. As he and a friend were walking along the streets of London one day they met a rather distinguished looking elderly man whom Disraeli greeted very cordially, and then inquired: "How is your old complaint?" The man replied that it was getting worse and worse, and he was sure that it was going to cause his death. As Disraeli and his friend walked on, his friend asked who the elderly man was. Disraeli replied that he did not have the faintest idea. "But you asked him about his old complaint. How did you know about that if you did not know the man?" The prime minister replied; "Almost all elderly people have some complaint, and they like to talk about it."

A cheerful heart is good medicine for the person who has it. It is good medicine for the body and for the soul. On the basis of their observations and studies, physicians, psychologists and psychiatrists will confirm this statement. A cheerful heart and a will to be well have much to do with one's recovery from sickness.

"A cheerful heart is a good medicine." It is a remedy that is easy to take and pleasant in its after-effects. In former days quinine and calomel were the standard remedies. The bitterness of the quinine was unspeakable and the after-effects were horrible. One can never forget the ringing in the ears. One man said he took so much quinine that folks use to stop as he passed down the street just to listen to the chimes. But a cheerful heart is a pleasant remedy and does not leave any ill effects. Furthermore, it involves no risk. There are some remedies that may cure, but they may also kill. There are times when an operation is necessary, but this is always dangerous. Of course, if the patient survives he will have something to talk about for the remainder of his life, but sometimes he fails to survive. But a cheerful heart never involves the slightest risk. And it is a remedy that never fails to help. A cheerful heart will do good.

Our text tells us that "a broken spirit drieth up the bones." There are hurts in our minds and our spirits that may well prove more serious than physical ills. There was Jacob for instance. God had richly blessed him in many ways. At the same time he had his full share of sorrows. When his son Joseph presented him at the court of Egypt, and Pharaoh asked him how old he was, Jacob made this reply: "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." He seems to have forgotten all the blessings crowded into his long life, and remembered only the evil.

Joseph said: "God hath made me to forget all my toil." Genesis 41:51. He spoke thus in connection with naming of his first-born son, whom he called Manasseh, which means forgetting.

Joseph had plenty to forget. He forgot and cast behind him all the bitterness of his experience with those brothers who had sold him into Egypt. He did not keep a private cemetery to which he frequently went and repaired to call up the injuries and wounds and sorrow and hurts of the past. Everybody has a past, and it there may be things unpleasant, bitter, sinful and sad. But in Christ it is our privilege to forget.

This good medicine of a cheerful heart not only helps the patient, but others also. It is something which we can share. We have all the discouragement we need. We rub elbows with enough kill-joys, without being one. Gloom is contagious. We can steal the blue from our neighbor's sky without any effort. But if gloom is contagious, so is joy, thank God!

How are we to avail ourselves of this remedy?

1. We must, by the grace of God, get out of our hearts what is sinful. The thirty-second Psalm shows us the way to do this. David had committed a great sin. He did not immediately repent and confess. He said, "When I kept silence (and did not repent), my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long." Psalm 32:3. All joy had gone out of life. Later he said: "I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and Thou forgavest me the iniquity of my sins." A new joy came into his life and a new song into his heart.
2. We must have a firm conviction that this remedy is within our reach. We are not being offered a pot of gold at the end of some rainbow, or a fountain of youth that we can never find. A cheerful heart is within reach of all because it is independent of things.
3. We must realize that a cheerful heart is the result of a cause. The law of sowing and reaping operates here as it does everywhere else. For this reason we cannot attain this goal by merely shutting our eyes to the grim and ugly facts of life. If we are to have real cheer, we must have inward peace. The roadway to joy is that of a dedicated life.
4. We must count our blessings.
God has given us more sunny days than cloudy ones. There are more smiles than tears in the world. There are more thrills of joy than pangs of anguish in our hearts, Let us be thankful to God for His goodness to us.
5. We must let the Lord use us.

Others are not interested in what we were last year. What interests them the most is what we can be to them in the present. Let self be used of God for the comfort and blessing of others.

6. We must live close to the Lord.

One good thing about the cheerful heart is that it gives the one who possess it an unusual power for blessing the lives of others. However, if we are to be a blessing to others, we must do so through being optimists instead of pessimists.

Paul was writing his second letter to the church at Corinth, and he proposed to make a second visit a little later. But he told them in advance that, when he came for this second visit, it would be in a different spirit than that which he had on his first visit. On his first visit he was depressed. Gloom shrouded him. His nerves were on edge. He was miserable. He was utterly depressed.

Of course, any preacher with that spirit would impart the same spirit more or less to his auditors. He advised them in his second letter, "When I come next time you need not be afraid that I will act like I did the first time. I have learned better. I have learned that pessimism is worthless." Paul said, "But I determined with this myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness." II Corinthians 2:1. He told them, "When I come next time I am coming without heaviness at all. I am going to look for the bright side, and I will emphasize that when I come back next time."

In that Paul points a good lesson for every one of us. Optimism should be the reigning habit in every life.

Cheerfulness is a duty. We owe that to other people. All about us there are people fighting their battles, climbing their hills, facing their questions, grappling with their tasks, and we will make their tasks harder if there is absent from our lives the reigning note of cheerfulness. You have no more right to unload a temper, a pessimistic, grumbling temper on a person battling with big tasks than you have the right to bring the garbage can and dump its contents on your neighbor's front porch.

We owe it to God to cultivate the habit of cheerfulness in our lives. Christianity is joyful. "Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy," was the announcement the angels brought concerning the babe to be born, the babe to be the world's Saviour. We are to show how music and song and laughter and gladness are a great part of the Christian life.

Cheerfulness is a privilege. True enough, sin is everywhere, and so is sickness, suffering, separation and sorrow. But we are to look for the bright light in the cloud. We are to look for the rainbow that spans the dark arch. We are to go through life with sunshine and with sweetness, even though often the tears fall.

Cheerfulness is power. A man may be clever and astute. But if he lacks the element of cheerfulness he has missed one of the biggest assets for the battle of life. You cannot win in this battle unless you have Christ in your heart and life. Accept and confess Him now.