

Joyful Living

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[0 : 00] Well, we are going to turn now to our Bibles and reading this evening in the Old Testament and in the Proverbs, Proverbs chapter 15.

And Paul's speaking this evening about joyful living. We were on that in a way this morning, looking at Ecclesiastes, the way of joy in life. And of course, that is the message of the Bible.

It's not just joy for the life to come. It is joy, even amid tribulation in this world and in this life. And there's so much in what we call the wisdom literature.

Some of these books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and Job and so on, often a little bit neglected has to be said in the Christian church to our detriment, I think, because they're all part of God's word for us and contain so much to help us in real practical Christian living in the way of faith.

So Paul has been dealing with some of the themes in Proverbs the last few weeks. We've got a few more weeks of that before we turn with Edward in Sunday evenings to come to a New Testament letter, 1 Thessalonians, but a little bit more in Proverbs because it's so stimulating and so different from other parts of the Bible.

[1 : 15] Tonight we're just reading a very short reading, Proverbs 15, verse 13, reading through to verse 17. So we're just going to ponder them slowly.

And Paul will be turning these over with us and opening them up to us in a little while. Proverbs 15 then, verse 13.

A glad heart makes a cheerful face, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed.

The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on folly. All the days of the afflicted are evil, but the cheerful of heart has a continual feast.

Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble without it. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fatted ox.

[2 : 30] And hatred with it. Amen. May God bless to us. This is his word. Help us to ponder and understand, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest God's word for us in it this evening.

Well, good evening. Please do turn back in your Bibles to Proverbs 15, which Willie was reading for us earlier. We'll be thinking about these few verses. Proverbs 15 and verses 13 to 17 there.

Now, we give away more than we realize with our faces. And I can see many faces here this evening. And as I'm saying these words, everyone's suddenly smiling.

But our faces are bigger windows into our realities of our heart than we often like to admit. We give away more with our faces than I think we're often prepared to admit.

And verse 13 that we read earlier poses a question. What are our faces revealing? And it offers also a solution for those seeking a better complexion.

[3 : 45] Verse 13 is the Proverbs equivalent of a cosmetics advert. Here is the secret for looking good. Forget about oil of ole, which promises to make you look seven years younger.

Here is the key to a cheerful looking face. A glad heart, says Proverbs, makes a cheerful face. And so the answer to looking well is not the application of the latest moisturizer, but rather something far deeper is required if we're going to be cheerful in appearance.

It is, says Proverbs, our hearts. Our hearts are the key to happy looking faces. But it's not just how we look, is it?

This isn't about projecting an image that bears no correlation to the reality within. Proverbs is making the exact opposite point. This is not urging us to fix a fake grin on our faces and pretending all is well.

That is not what this is saying. I think it was John Knox who said that a happy heart leads to happy looks. Sad thoughts crush the spirit. And the thing is, our faces do in general reveal the inner state of our hearts.

[5 : 00] Try as we might, our faces give us away, don't they? And a glad heart, a happy heart, is something that we should desire as Christians.

God doesn't intend us, as his children, to be miserable and downcast throughout life. Now that's not to say that we will, as Christians, sail through life only ever experiencing positive emotions, never struggling, never sad.

That would clearly fly in the face, wouldn't it, of our own experiences in this world. It would contradict much of what we read in the Bible. Much of what the Bible teaches about life in this world is about the reality.

We saw that this morning in Ecclesiastes, didn't we? There was much sadness, much perplexity, much that saddens us in this world. We face hardship. We face loss. We face illness.

Life is not always easy. But as Christians, we need to grasp all that the Bible teaches us. And we need to grapple with this little section in Proverbs because God has not saved us and brought us into his eternal family so that we would be miserable.

[6 : 14] He has not saved us for miserable life. It is not the case that life is all misery now with only joy to come in the new creation.

There is joy that we can experience in this world as God's people. We need to remember what we've been saved from, absolutely, but also what we've been saved for.

We've been saved from sin and death and from estrangement with our Creator. We've been saved from those things. But we've been saved for life and a restored relationship with our God and with each other.

We've been given many, many good gifts by our Father in Heaven. We are part of his eternal family. And we live now with the bright light of the faint dawn of eternity beginning to peer up over the horizon.

We can see it, can't we, as we look up? In the future, we are seeing our future with him forever. Proverbs 4 verse 18 reads this, The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.

[7 : 31] Isn't that a wonderful thing? The path of the righteous is like the light of the dawn, which shines not dimmer and dimmer, but shines brighter and brighter until one day we'll feel it in all its blazing glory.

That is where we're headed as God's people. That is where we are going. Eternity with him in the new creation. That is a wonderful reality to look forward to. And we experience something of that joy here and now as his people.

We live today with the light of eternity, with the joy of eternity, the joy of being part of God's eternal family. That is something we begin to enjoy and experience now.

We anticipate that eternity with our Father in the new creation, a world free from sin and suffering and death. That is our destination.

That is our sure hope. And so we can live now with that future reality, coloring our present experiences. We're not saved to be miserable, but rather we're saved to be glad of heart, cheerful.

[8 : 43] James Philip put it this way in his comments on these verses. He said, Most people look better and many are transformed when they smile. If we are rejoicing in Christ with the merriness of heaven, it should be showing in our faces, which are a pretty good reflection of the real thoughts of our hearts.

This does not mean, he says, that we will have a fatuous grin on our faces all the time, but there will be something about the way we look that will convey the deep springs of joy within us.

This is not trite joy we're talking about. This is not just fixing a grin on the face. This is not put on happiness. This is a radiant joy that has solid and deep foundations in our souls.

And you can tell sometimes, can't you? You can spot someone who has this joy in their hearts. You can spot a Christian because of the way they look. There is something about them.

You can't quite put your finger on it, but you know, don't you? Perhaps you move to a new street or you start a new job. I've had this experience. And you meet someone and you just have the suspicion that they're a Christian.

[10 : 00] The way they look communicates something. And sure enough, later on you discover they are in fact a Christian. There is a radiant joy that is deep and solid in our souls.

And this deep joy, it will permeate all of life. We will find greater satisfaction, greater happiness as we pilgrim through this barren land towards eternity.

Derek Kidner makes the point. Our prevailing attitude of heart affects not only our faces, our personalities, but also our whole experience.

And makes life, look at verse 15, the cheerful of heart has a continual feast. So a joyful heart affects not just our personality, but the way we experience all of life.

We'll see life as a continual feast. I don't know about you, but that sounds good to me. And by nature, I'm probably, this will surprise many of you who know me, but I'm probably more of an Eeyore than a Tigger.

[11 : 07] But the thing is, I am a child of the King of the Universe. And so are you, if you're a Christian here this evening. And God desires that we be glad of heart and not unduly sorrowful.

It's not to say there won't be sorrow, there will be. There will be many moments where there will be tears to be shed. But deep down, we will have an unshakable joy in our hearts. Remember Jesus' prayer for his followers in John 17.

He said, And we are warned against the lack of joy too.

Deuteronomy chapter 28. We're commanded to joy and we're warned against lack of it.

So then, what does Proverbs teach us about the joyful heart that we see here in chapter 15? And we'll think about three things this evening. First, what is the heart?

[12 : 23] What does it mean to have a heart that is joyful and cheerful? What is the heart? That's the first thing we've got to think about. And it's key that we know what Proverbs is talking about when it mentions the heart.

The heart is referred to several times in this short section. You have it twice in verse 13. And again in verses 14 and 15.

The heart. It's a very important Bible word. One writer says that it's the most important anthropological term in the Old Testament.

But the English language has no equivalent. There's no direct translation that we can use. It's used over 46 times in Proverbs and a total of 858 times in the Old Testament.

This word heart. So it's important we know what it means. So what is the heart in Bible terms? Well, the heart controls the whole body.

[13 : 26] Facial expressions. As we've seen in our passage. It controls also our tongues. All other parts of our bodies. Our heart is the very nerve center of our psychological being too.

Our intellect. Our wills. They're shaped by the heart. It is the inner forum where decisions are made. And our heart is the center of our spiritual lives as well.

The heart, writes Bruce Waltke. He says it's the center of all a person's emotional, intellectual, religious, moral activity. He says it must be safeguarded above all other things.

It's the very core of our beings. It's the center of who we are. And Tim Keller puts it this way. In the Bible, the heart is not primarily the seat of the emotions in contrast to the head, the seat of reason.

Rather, the heart is the seat of your deepest truths, your deepest truths, your commitments and loves, from which everything else flows.

[14 : 32] What the heart most loves and trusts, the mind finds reasonable. The emotions find desirable. And the will finds doable. You see, our hearts, according to the Bible, is the very epicenter of who we are.

It directs everything about us. It's the core of our being. And so, if that's what Proverbs is talking about when it mentions the heart, then it's pretty important, isn't it?

It's the core of our being.

A healthy heart means a healthy person, doesn't it? Physically, that's true. But also, spiritually and emotionally, as we've seen, a healthy heart, in Bible terms, directs the whole thing. Directs our whole bodies, our whole lives.

And a healthy heart, as verse 13 tells us, produces a healthy, happy-looking person. A glad heart makes a cheerful face. A good heart is seen in one's personality.

[15 : 54] There's something about the way we look. That conveys the deep springs of joy within us. The wise and happy heart tends to lead towards cheerful emotions.

Whereas, the second half, verse 13, shows us the opposite. But by sorrow of heart, the spirit is crushed. A healthy heart means a healthy enjoyment of life.

Look at verse 15. The cheerful heart has a continual feast. A good heart is the filter through which we experience life. And the opposite is also true.

As one other preacher observes, it's not so much, he writes, that the life has a drab and drivy look about it. It's that our attitude to it makes it seem so.

It's the basic disposition of our heart that determines how we experience life. So you can have two people experiencing the very same reality and yet they have a totally different experience of it because of their underlying heart attitude.

[17 : 04] And as Christians, each of us has a fundamentally renewed outlook on life. A man in Christ sees life with new eyes.

We are a new creation. And what to other men seem like misfortunes or even disasters to the Christian, their opportunities and challenges.

James Philip, again, on these verses, says that there are two ways of looking at any situation. If we are gloomy of heart, we will be filled with foreboding.

But if our heart is resilient, we shall look at it straight in the eye, accept it as from God and make capital out of it. The choice is ours.

We can choose how we experience life. The basic disposition of our heart will determine that. And as we consider our hearts, they're not merely emotions. They're much deeper than that.

[18 : 04] It's primarily about our very deepest, settled convictions about life. And the disposition of our hearts, it will significantly determine how we experience life.

Good circumstances are not necessary for a happy, cheerful heart. We'll see that in a moment. Again, Bruce Walkie says this, the afflicted in health and wealth, in other words, those whose circumstances are less than ideal, they may have a cheerful heart that enables them to endure and to overcome their circumstances.

And the Apostle Paul attests to this reality, doesn't he, in his letter to the Philippian church, chapter 4. He said, Now we'll think more in a moment about how it is that we can cultivate, a Paul-like attitude.

But note, the outcome of a happy heart. In any and every circumstance, he's content. Plenty or hunger. Abundance or need.

Outward circumstances will come and they will go. They will change. And so to base our satisfaction, to base our enjoyment of life on those things, well, it's foolish.

[19 : 51] You see, the disposition of our heart, the very basic understandings of our heart, they will significantly determine how we experience things in this life. So take, for example, starting university.

And there's a few folk in this room in that particular position at the moment. A gloomy outlook. A gloomy disposition of heart.

And you'll see worries and troubles at every turn. Building friendships. Getting to grips with the course. Developing interests. Settling into a church. All of these are seen of problems.

Rather, looking at these with the steady eye of faith. Because you know you belong to your heavenly father. Because you know that he is sovereign over all things.

You can see these things not as problems to run from. But rather as challenges. As opportunities to take on. And to thrive through. See, a glad heart produces a steady joy.

[20 : 57] A settled contentment seen in our personality. But also how we experience life. A glad heart is something worth having, isn't it?

It colors how we experience everything that we see in our lives. So that's what a glad heart produces. A basic joy and gladness.

In how we experience life. So thirdly, here's the key. How do we attain the joyful heart? We've seen the benefits. The joys of having a happy heart.

But how do we attain it? Well, the heart's spiritual vitality. It seems to derive. Look at verse 14. The heart's spiritual vitality derives from pursuing knowledge.

Look at verse 14. The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge. But the mouths of fools feed on folly. The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge.

[22 : 03] The mouth of fools feeds on folly. Now, we consume information and ideas all the time. And these do, in a very real way, feed our hearts.

All that we take in through our eyes, our ears, that feeds our hearts. Our hearts are being fed one way or the other. And so this proverb encourages us to be thoughtful, to be deliberate.

About what we're feeding our hearts on. There is no neutral option. There is no sleep mode when it comes to our hearts.

We will either be feeding on something good and wholesome. Or we'll be feeding on folly. And given the emphasis that Proverbs places on the importance of having glad and joyful hearts and not gloomy, sorrowful hearts, we would do well to listen carefully to what it teaches us here about how to cultivate the healthy, joyful heart.

And so verse 14 commends one who has understanding. Or one who has a discerning heart. It's the discerning set against the fool.

[23 : 16] See what it says about the fool? The fool feeds only on folly. And this can be read in one of two senses. First, in terms of what the fool delights in and what he seeks nourishment in.

Folly is the opposite of wisdom. And the fool, according to Proverbs, is fixed in the correctness of his own opinions. Instead of seeking knowledge as desirable and something to be cherished and sought after, he runs the other way, thinking he knows it all already.

And I wonder if that's sometimes our posture as we come to church Sunday by Sunday. Perhaps it's not as blatant as running the other way. But even as we're sat here in the presence of other believers, in the presence of God himself, is our attitude, is it one of superiority?

Do we perhaps think we know it all? Do we easily and too quickly dismiss what we hear from the pulpit because we don't like it? Do we measure the preaching from the pulpit against the preacher on our favorite podcast or YouTube channel?

Now, I'm not at all against using good resources to feed ourselves. But the thing about the preacher on the podcast or on the YouTube channel is they're not here. He is not your pastor.

[24 : 44] He does not know about the circumstances of your life. He doesn't know the ins and outs of the Tron Church. He doesn't have to give an account for you either on the last day because he's not your pastor.

He doesn't know the pastor. The pastors here have been charged with the well-being of your soul. And so we ought to be slow to dismiss what you hear from the pulpit here in favor of some other chap from around the globe who's never met you, who's never looked you in the eyes, never seen the state of your face, never seen the joy in your eyes or shed the tears with you.

So who are you giving priority to? Someone on a podcast thing around the world? Or the pastor in your pulpit?

What are you feeding on? How is your heart being nourished? So make it a priority to start right here.

Sunday by Sunday, morning and evening, in your growth group and your release the word group. Make use of the book room. Give our book room leader, Wan, a problem. When you buy too many books, he's got to restock.

[25 : 57] What are you feeding on? The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge. We are to be a church deep in the word.

That is the only source of the knowledge we need to cultivate a joyful heart that will experience life in all its joys.

That's the first aspect of the fool who feeds on folly. The second way this phrase could be read has the idea not so much of what the fool consumes, but rather what he says with his mouth.

The fool doesn't seek knowledge, but rather finds satisfaction spouting forth his own opinions. So if you find yourself in what you might call the sorrowful of heart category, rather than the cheerful of face category, it might be worth doing an audit of your verbal word count and the content of your words.

If you are constantly speaking your own opinions, without much regard for what the Bible would teach on a matter, if you are a hard person to correct, if you are beyond challenge, if you are proud, then don't be surprised if rather than being a cheerful sort, you're rather sorrowful.

- [27 : 20] Being so quick to offer opinions leaves no space to receive and to receive solid wisdom and knowledge. So if you find yourself a sorrowful of heart sort of person, is it possible that it's because you are venturing your own opinions too much rather than receiving God's word of wisdom?

The heart of him as understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on folly.

That's the basic instruction this passage gives us for cultivating a joyful heart. What are you feeding on? What are you listening to? What are you reading? And verses 16 and 17, they bring a bit of color to what it is to pursue knowledge like this.

And two things we notice in verses 16 and 17. The first is the fear of the Lord, verse 16 and second, is love for others, verse 17. Better, it says, is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it.

Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it. Do you see what it's saying? The heart's spiritual condition is of greater importance than material well-being.

- [28 : 52] It is better to fear the Lord and have little than to have great treasure and trouble. It is better to have good relationships where there's love and eat a meager meal than it is to have a great feast with those that you don't get on with.

You see, the world will teach us the opposite, won't it? The world will tell us that great treasure, great feasting, will deliver happiness and cheerfulness and joy.

Our adverts on the TV are always selling us that. Here's what you need to be cheerful and joyful in life. The next car, whatever it might be. Material things.

That's the world's answer. But the writer of the Proverbs says to us, don't strive after those things. Rather, fear the Lord and love others.

In other words, be in right relationship with the Lord and with those around you. You see, we have been saved for joyful living as God's children for eternity and for today.

- [29 : 59] And so to enjoy life with a cheerful heart and not a gloomy one, it will require us to prioritize what is truly of greater importance and what will truly nourish our hearts.

Namely, serving God, loving God and seeking after Him. Serving and loving those who He's placed around us. We must prioritize those things over material things.

See, these relationships, according to verses 16 and 17, they are more vital than luxury and comfort and good food. And don't we so often strive after those things, thinking they'll make us happy?

Verse 13 says, a glad heart makes a cheerful face. It does not say great treasure. makes a cheerful face. Verse 13 does not say a fattened ox makes a cheerful face.

It's not to say we can't enjoy those things, but those things can never be the source of true contentment and happiness, can they? No, it's a cheerful heart that makes a cheerful face.

- [31 : 17] And a glad heart comes only through feeding on the good food the Lord gives us in His Word and by cherishing our relationship with Him and by loving those who He's put around us.

It is profoundly other-centeredness that produces and delivers true joy. It is being in right relation with the God who made us through salvation in Christ alone and how that plays out on the horizontal with those He puts around us.

We must love them. Loving God and loving our neighbor is the key to a joyful, glad heart. It is not material things. They cannot deliver.

And that is constantly our pull, isn't it? I constantly fall into that trap of thinking, if only I had this thing, that would deliver happiness. But it never works, does it? verse 15, look at it.

The cheerful of heart has a continual feast. Verse 15 does not say the possessor of great treasure has a continual feast. It doesn't say that.

[32 : 27] It doesn't say the possessor of a fattened ox has a continual feast. No, the cheerful of heart has a continual feast. See, it's our thoughts, our attitudes shaped by our relationship with God, not our circumstances which are decisive when it comes to our joy in life.

And we always fall into that trap, at least I do. I always think it's my circumstances. But that's not the case. It's our relationship with the God who made us and with those He's put around us.

That's the key. And you see, God intends us. He wants us to be a joyful people. He has given us abundantly, hasn't He? We have life, eternal life, where there used to be death.

We have an eternity to come. We belong to the King and the Creator of the universe. And we have in our hands, each of you has in your hands this evening, His instructions for living well and wisely in this world and for all eternity.

We have every reason to have cheerful faces and to see life as a continual feast. Not cheap, trite, fake cheerfulness, but rather deep, solid, unshakable joy because we belong forever to our Father in Heaven.

[33 : 52] well, there's the key to a joyful, happy face and a joyful life. Well, let's pray, shall we?

Father, we thank you that your word does not give us cheap, easy answers to living in this world, but rather it gives us realism and it gives us true hope and lasting joy.

joy. So, Lord, help us, all of us, to be a people marked, not by superficial cheerfulness, but rather a deep, a deep joy joy, which is unmovable because it's a joy founded in you and you alone and in your promises which are unshakable.

So, help us together to be a joyful people, to be those of cheerful faces. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.