

A CASE FOR HAPPINESS

Proverbs 17:22: "A merry heart does good, like medicine; but a broken spirit dries the bones."

Proverbs 15:13,15: "A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken." ... "But he who is of a merry heart has a continual feast."

INTRODUCTION:

1. "One of the decisive conditions of bodily health is a strong integrated personality stemming from a Grand and Gay, Hardy and Handsome Mind. A cheerful heart is a good preventive and a good corrective treatment - better than medicine. A contented and pleasant disposition protects one against disease; for the mind has a powerful influence over the body."
2. Psychic Influences Have a Decided Power in Producing Illness.
 - A. Fatigue. Much of man's fatigue is due to psychological reasons. Physicians report that the most common complaint they hear from their patients is, "I'm so tired." A chronic fatigue afflicts millions of people where there is no evidence of either physical malfunction or insufficient rest.
 - B. Halitosis. Halitosis may be produced by many physical factors: dehydration, sinuses, teeth, lungs, stomach and intestines. But when nothing physically wrong can be found, halitosis may be due to strong emotions." Bitter hate, fiery anger and undisciplined worry produce an unpleasant breath.
 - C. The list of diseases related to the emotions is a long one:

"Asthma, hay fever, sinusitis, headache, peptic ulcer, ulcerative colitis, constipation, diarrhea, hiccoughs, rheumatoid arthritis, backache, angina pectoris, hypertension, hives, eczema, cerebral strokes of apoplexy, hyperthyroidism, glaucoma, and many others. Of course, we ought not to assume that the emotional factor is the only cause in the development of any of these diseases."
3. Solomon Has Well Said:
 - A. "And also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor-- it is the gift of God." (Eccl. 3:13).

- (1) Brownlow has well said,

"It would be a dark hour if we should decide that we cannot achieve a reasonable degree of happiness. Life would become a mere plodding toward the grave in which there is little more than the lifting of one foot in front of the other" The tune in one's heart helps to determine the tone of one's health."

Again,

"Music gives a kind of romance to an army on the march. It neither shortens the road nor throws out the rocks, but it saves the soldiers from tiring so quickly. The sound of music has a tendency to make them less mindful of the trying ordeals ... So it is with joy; it is music in the heart which makes man less heedful of the stress of the journey."

4. In This World of War and Hate, There Must Be a Formula for Happiness and Contentment.

- A. Of all people, preachers ought to be the happiest people on earth. But this is not the case. There is general agreement that most of them are not very happy. Members of the church are not happy in their church life, on the job, nor at home. Brethren, if we do not possess joy, peace, contentment, and a "peace which surpasses understanding", there is something tragically wrong. Let us see if we can find out why and the remedy.

I. THERE ARE CERTAIN BASIC PRINCIPLES WE MUST OBSERVE IF WE ARE TO FIND CONTENTMENT.

- A. Permit me to read in your hearing the story of a farm widow:

"Several years ago, a farmer passed from this world leaving his widow and five little children. One world had ended for them, but she opened up a new one with the view that they had God above them, the soil beneath them and each other at their side; and thus with this combination, she concluded that they would make it. The years passed and they more than made it. Each child made such a mark in the world that it attracted wide attention. As interest grew in this intriguing story of success, mothered and nurtured in the hills, a magazine sent a reporter to interview the gracious and God-fearing, humble and hard-working mother to learn the secret of her accomplishments, to ascertain how she with so little gave her children so much. She answered the question by saying, "Being I don't have much education, I just had to use my head." She had never had a course in psychology, but, in using her head, she taught

them by word and deed the graceful and stalwart conditions of health and happiness, well-being and joy.

She cultivated the following:

1. Love. She had love in her heart which she manifested toward them. In turn, they loved her and each other. She had no hate toward anybody nor harbored any bitterness because of the blow that had befallen her; and they, too, grew up free of animosity and resentment.
2. Cheerfulness. She was cheerful and happy in her tireless toil. They could see it because she sang much as she worked. And there was play too. Life was held in balance with the right proportion of each. There was an old organ which was often the focal point as they gathered in the parlor to play and sing. But that house was filled with a sweeter melody than any organ music - the music of their hearts.
3. Work. She knew no rule for success would work unless they did. She put inspiration into her children and took perspiration out of them. They had to work to live. She had read in her Bible "that if any would not work, neither should he eat." She believed in work and so had her parents before her. Work came naturally just like breathing, and a willing mind lightened it. There was neither grumbling nor complaining nor self-pity. They did not feel that fate had slapped them with an unkind hand by demanding work. The day was a period of glad labor and the night a time of sweet rest. Rest is pleasant only to those who pay the price of work for it.

Longfellow wrote:

Each morning sees some task begun,
Each evening sees it close;
Something attempted, something done,
Has earned a night's repose.

The Village Blacksmith

4. Optimism. The optimism of her heart unaffectedly and softly gleamed in her face like the warm welcome rays of light breaking across yonder hills in the east. As this farm widow broke the soil and planted the seeds, she saw nutritious bread - not wasted toil; and as clouds appeared,

she saw silver linings that would water her crops - not destructive time percentage-wise to more than justify the bright outlook. Sometimes she was wrong, but she was right enough on life. Every project was a work of hope. Each time she placed the eggs under a setting hen, she entertained the fond expectation of a good hatch of little chicks; and she and her children would discuss this expectancy with excited and vibrant anticipation. With hope standing as doorkeeper of their hearts, fear was not permitted to enter.

5. Religion. It might have been hard for this mother to eloquently define religion, but there is one thing sure - she knew how to eloquently demonstrate it. Her glory, however, consisted not in never stumbling, but in always rising every time she fell. Most of her time was not spent sitting in sackcloth and ashes, but in lighting fires in the hearts of her children. She instilled in them the idea that religion is not just a cloak to wear on Sundays, but an armor to wear every day; and it shielded them against the "slings and arrows" of opposing forces. The remarkable and victorious thing is - ironclad as they were - they hardly recognized the "slings and arrows", as such, when they came. They were poor in money, but rich in faith - faith-rich in God and man. It was their shield against the darts of doubt and dismay.

"She could have become her worst enemy, life-shortening and happiness-shattering, but crawling into a self-made prison of despondency and helplessness, gulping tranquilizer after tranquilizer which would have doctored the symptoms but not the cause. Instead, she befriended herself, prevented the cause, by helping, loving, accepting and adjusting herself."

Brownlow, *Better Than Medicine*, pp. 16-19.

6. From this story, we can draw the following conclusions:
 - (a) Help Yourself. Man is a creature of responsibility put at the helm of his own ship, to guide it as he sees fit, in life's still or stormy sea.

Wordsworth said:

"So build we up the being that we are."

From Thoreau:

"As long as a man stands in his own way,
everything seems to be in his way."

Again:

So nigh is grandeur to my dust
So near is God to man,
When duty whispers low, "Thou must,"
I shall reply, "I can."

- (b) Love Yourself: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself". (Matt. 22:39). It is a truism that a man probably cannot love his neighbor unless he loves himself.

Axel Munthe once said:

"A man can stand a lot as long as he can stand himself."

- (c) Accent Yourself: One woman said, "The happiest day of my life was the day I decided I could never win a beauty contest."

Noah in the play *Green Pastures* said "I ain't very much, but I've all I got."

- (1) Fanny J. Crosby -
 - (2) Robert Louis Stevenson - never saw a well day in his life.
 - (3) Glen Cunningham - Crippled in schoolhouse fire. Tied himself to a plow and became one of the great runners of all time.
 - (4) Sir Walter Scott - was lame.
- (d) Adjust Yourself: Some of the greatest success stories have their settings in the most trying situations. Some of the renowned works of literature were penned by men in prison, such as O'Henry's short stories and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Being able to adjust our lives to the circumstances which constantly play upon us is necessary to happiness.

B. Whether we achieve Happiness and Contentment in this life will depend upon:

First, Upon our getting out of ourselves.

1. Matt. 10:39: "He that finds his life shall lose it; and he that loses his life for My sake shall find it."

(a) We can do this by:

(1) Thinking of Others.

Phil. 2:4: "Let each one of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

(2) Helping Others.

Matt. 6:1: "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven."

(3) Esteem Others.

Phil. 2:3: "in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves."

(4) Be Longsuffering and Forebearing.

Eph. 4:2: "With all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love."

(5) Bless Them Who Mistreat You.

Matt. 5:44: "Bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."

(6) Be Forgiving.

Matt. 6:15: "But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

(7) Be Fair.

Matt. 7:12: "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

(8) Keep Free of Envy.

1 Cor. 13:4: "Love does not envy"

(9) Shoulder Your Duties.

Ecc. 9:10: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might."

(10) Refuse to Spread Gossip.

Lev. 19:16: "You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people."

(11) Be a Peacemaker.

Matt. 5:9: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

(12) Love.

1 Cor. 13:3: "If I have not love, it profits me nothing."

(13) Be Tolerant of Others.

Matt. 7:1: "Judge not that you be not judged."

(14) Laugh at Yourself.

A TEA PARTY

I had a little tea party
This afternoon at three.
'Twas very small
Just three guests in all
Just I, Myself and Me.

Myself ate all the sandwiches
While I drank up the tea
'Twas also I who ate the pie
and passed the cake to me.

(15) Give The Best You Have of Yourself.

"For life is the mirror of king and slave,
'Tis just what you are and do;
Then give to the world the best you have,
And the best will come back to you.
-Madeline Bridge

SECONDLY, If We Are to Find Contentment, Head in the Right Direction.

1. Some Trait, Desire or Purpose Must Become Dominant.

- (a) Matt. 6:33: "But seek you first the kingdom of God and His righteousness "

Helen Keller said,

"Many persons have a wrong idea about what constitutes true happiness. It is not attained through self-gratification, but through fidelity to a worthy purpose."

2. An Over-Riding Goal Puts Purpose Into Each Day of Life.

- (a) A man is satisfied, relieved and made gay when each day he puts his heart into worthy work and does his best; but what he says or does otherwise gives him no peace.

Hear a quote from the Sanscrit:

"Look to this day, for it is life. In its brief course lie all the verities and realities of your existence; the bliss of growth, the glory of action, the splendor of beauty. For yesterday is but a dream, and tomorrow is only a vision; but today, well lived, makes every yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope. Look well, therefore, to this day, such is the salvation of the dawn."

THIRDLY, Learn to Think Positive - Learn to say "I Can" and Your world Will Change.

1. The Measure of a Man Is His Thoughts.

- A. Prov. 23:7: "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.
- B. Phil. 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."
- C. 2. Cor. 4:8-9: "We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed."

If you think you are beaten, you are;
If you think you dare not, you don't;
If you want to win but think you can't,
It's almost a cinch you won't.

If you think you'll lose, you're lost;
For out of the world we find
Success begins with a fellow's will
It's all in a state of mind.

Life's battles don't always go
To the stronger and faster man,
But sooner or later the man who wins
Is the man who thinks he can.

"The sweetest joy in life is found in loving and being loved. We may suffer loss of health which weakens us, disease which pains us, sorry which wounds us, disappointments which stagger us, business failure which bankrupts us, enmity which annoys us, and betrayal which bleeds us, but as long as there is love, life is worth living."

FOURTH, If We are to Find Contentment, We Must Keep an Untroubled Conscience.

- 1. 2 Cor. 1:12: "For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you."
 - A. The author of *Better Than Medicine* has well said:

"There is something within man not of his own making which can either tranquilize or disturb him. It is a good or bad conscience. Conscience, even though it sometimes hurts, is very necessary; for without it man would be devoid of that faculty which brings his greatest joy - his own

approbation. Without conscience, man would not be man ... If man does what he thinks is right, that something within him called conscience approves and, in so doing, gives him a feeling of self-respect and peace. But if he knowingly does wrong, there is that internal witness which blames and tortures him." Ibid, p. 87.

- B. Conscience revives Memory and Brings Up the Ills of Yesterday.
- C. A Nagging Conscience has Psychosomatic Influences that can drive a person into complete disintegration.

- (1) It is a recognized scientific fact that conscience can make one sick. One cannot rest when his soul is disturbed with the horrors of guilt. There is no comfort for him when he lays his head on a pillow of thorns. An ill conscience can make a person sick in both mind and body.

- (2) The Unhappiest Man on Earth is One Whose Conscience is not at Peace with God.

- (a) 1 Tim. 1:5: "Now the end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, ... "

- (b) 1 John 3:21: "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God."

- (c) Rom. 14:22: "Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves."

"To thine own self be true,
And it must follow as the night the day,
Thou can't not then be false to any man."
-Shakespeare

CONCLUSION:

1. We must choose to inherit heaven. We must let this be the overriding goal.
2. We must place our trust in the providence of God to take care of us in the storms of life which bear upon each of us.

3. We must be faithful to the charge of responsibility to God, our homes, and our world.

As Cowper has so well said:

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps on the sea
And rides upon the storm.

4. If we are unhappy people, if we lack contentment - We are likely out of step with the Master.

("O Master, Let me walk with Thee, in lowly paths of service.")