

Cheerfulness Radiates Strength

A Season of Cheer

The holidays are a happy time for spreading God's good cheer to one and all. What is it about the festive season that causes so many people (even unbelievers!) to be so enamored? Frankly, because it offers the respite that everyone's looking for in this crazy world: *warmth* as a respite from cold, *light* as a respite from darkness, *abundance* as a respite from dearth, *generosity* as a respite from stinginess, *friendship* as a respite from enmity, *fellowship* as a respite from loneliness, *welcome* as a respite from rejection, *sweetness and lightness* as a respite from gloom and doom. To sum it all up, ringing in the *glad tidings* we all long for called *cheer*. That should be enough to make a person feel *cheerful*, shouldn't it?

You may have heard the old adage, "Everything gives off something."

Have you ever thought about what a cheerful person gives off? Maybe you never took time to consider the impact that a cheery individual is having on you. You might have even been tempted to think of them as being somewhat oblivious. Their *positivity* might seem to come so naturally that you may not even realize that they are influencing you, but they are — and in a very healthy and restorative way.

Have you ever known someone *cheerful*?

- How would you describe their *face*?
 - [possible answers] Happy, glad, joyous, radiant
- How would you describe their *heart*?
 - [possible answers] Merry, buoyant, unfazed, unperturbed
- What was the *reason* you think they were cheerful?

- [possible answers] Focus on God, concern for others, confidence in God's supply, trust in God's protection
- What *reaction* did you have to their cheerfulness?
 - [possible answers] Contentedness, amazement, admiration, desire to be in their company

Why do you think that is?

- Because you're not just observing them, *you're receiving something from them*

What is that certain something?

- It can all be summed up in one word: *strength*.

Whether cognizant of it or not, *we each draw strength from the cheerful people we know.*

Cheer and Strength

Unbeknownst to many and underappreciated by most, there is a *relationship between cheer and strength*. The children of Israel experienced this refreshing and renewal when, after a multi-generational hiatus wandering in the spiritual wilderness, they returned under Ezra and Nehemiah to practicing the Law of God as it had first been given. In Nehemiah 8, the people had gathered and were about to reinstitute the observance of the feasts that God had originally established in the days of Moses.

It was fitting that the *Feast of Tabernacles* would be the first such feast that they observed. Also known as the *Feast of Harvests*, Tabernacles celebrated the final ingathering of crops at the end of the agricultural year, so there was *much abundance to share* at the table. Also known as the *Feast of Booths*, Tabernacles was a time to recall *God's care for Israel during their wandering in the wilderness*, when all they had

were makeshift dwellings (represented by the lean-tos or booths they were to construct for the feast).

Nehemiah 8:10-12:

Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for **the joy of the LORD is your strength**.

So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved.

And all **the people went** their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and **to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them**.

This celebration wasn't just about **physical nourishment**, but also their **spiritual nurture**, for under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah they had **rediscovered the Scriptures** and were **made to understand them** in their own language. What a cause for unbridled rejoicing and cheer! **The joy of the Lord had indeed become their strength**.

Radiance and Cheer

When we learn to trust in the Lord and rely upon Him for our sustenance and protection, we will come to realize that **the Lord is the true source of our joy**.

Where does cheer **reside**? **Inside** you, not around you.

What does cheer **give off**? **Heat** and **light**. Cheer **radiates**!

A **cheerful heart** will be reflected in a **radiant face**. While you turn to Proverbs 15, just listen for a moment as I read to you two other verses from the ESV.

Job 9:27 [ESV]:

If I say, 'I will forget my complaint, I will put off my sad **face**, and be **of good cheer**,'

Psalms 34:5 (ESV):

Those who **look to him** are **radiant**, and their **faces** shall **never** be **ashamed**.

Now let's read together in Proverbs 15 from the King James.

Proverbs 15:13:

A **merry heart** maketh a **cheerful countenance**: ...

Glad heart, cheerful face. I can get with that program!

Proverbs 15:30:

The **light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart**, ...

There's something immensely attractive about **the eye that glimmers with cheer**. You perceive that there's something overflowing there that you're inspired to partake of. As well you should! **Cheerfulness is an invitation that ought not be refused**.

Sustenance and Cheer

Speaking of invitations, God compares being **cheerful of heart** to partaking in a **continual feast**. Now that's a way to sustain yourself in this life!

Proverbs 15:15:

... but he that is of a merry [cheerful] heart hath a continual feast.

Do you like to eat? Barring all physical and material constraints, how many of you would enjoy eating all you desire of everything you like for as long as you want? That is what it is to be cheerful: “a continual feast.” Thanksgiving Day, 365 days a year!

Cheer is like nourishment. To be nourished, we must take something in. Cheer cannot come from without; it can only come from within.

Psalms 104:15:

And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine [gleam], and bread which strengtheneth man's heart.

Wine, oil and bread represent the salutary effect of the good products of God's earth on our physical bodies. In like manner, cheeriness makes for happiness, benefitting our spiritual and emotional lives. Being of good cheer makes our hearts glad, our faces shine, and our hearts strong. Sounds like a healthy lifestyle to me!

Health and Cheer

There is a definite connection between our sustenance, our strength and our health.

Consider the effect of Paul's message of good cheer to his fellow passengers who had been fearing shipwreck.

Acts 27:34-36:

Wherefore I pray you to **take some** meat [**food**]: for this is **for your health** [strength]: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.

And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat.

Then were they all **of good cheer**, and they also **took some** meat [**food**].

When we partake of food, our bodies are strengthened. When we partake of good cheer, our hearts are strengthened. The importance of a cheerful message is underscored further by Proverbs.

Proverbs 12:25:

Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but **a good word maketh it glad**.

Turn back to Proverbs 15. Here we see that **a cheerful message from a cheerful messenger is refreshing** to our entire being.

Proverbs 15:30:

The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart: and **a good report** maketh the **bones fat** [good news refreshes the bones].

Our skeleton is what supports our whole body. When we're cheerful, we radiate a message of good news that resonates and registers in others at the deepest levels, promoting good health emotionally as well as physically.

Chapter 17 offers a similar truth for our consideration.

Proverbs 17:22a:

A merry heart doeth good like a medicine [cure]: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.

Anyone who reads about current affairs has probably heard about the detrimental effects of osteoporosis, or the weakening of the bones. But how much have we read about the [beneficial effects of a cheerful heart on our physical constitution](#)? Yet cheerfulness is one cure that God Himself endorses.

Vigilance and Cheer

[An aspect of a cheerful attitude that has gone largely unnoticed is its connection with vigilance.](#)

The early days of the Church in Jerusalem, while dogged by persistent persecution, were not as yet convulsed by violence. Threats of incarceration were carried out, but with no loss of life. All that changed when Stephen was martyred. Then, some seven years later Herod executed James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John.

Imagine what a great shock James's death must have been to the believers. This was the first slaughtering of one of the original twelve, and one of the most prominent ones at that. To make the situation more dire still, Herod captured Peter and put him in hold for imminent execution.

It is in this context that we see the believers gathering for round-the-clock prayers entreating God for Peter's wellbeing and release. Intercessions were being offered at the home of Mary the mother of John Mark, a woman who was a cousin of Barnabas and apparently a widow of some means.

Astonishingly, it was under the duress of these threats that an angel of the Lord came and walked Peter right out of prison in the middle of the night. The escape was so unexpected that Peter himself thought it must have been a dream. It was only after the angel had taken him all the way out of the city and suddenly disappeared that Peter realized what exactly had happened to him. His first thought was then to proceed to the place he felt sure that the believers would be gathered praying for him: Mary's home. Whether the rest of the ten remaining apostles were with them that night, we do not know.

Acts 12:13-16:

And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel [servant girl] came to hearken, named Rhoda.

And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.

And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.

But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.

But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James [the Lord Jesus's brother], and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.

One person stands out in this record as the [true sentinel for God](#), and that is [Rhoda](#). A servant girl likely brought to Jerusalem from the family homestead in Cyprus, she had no status within the society. No one would have thought her to be [the person best prepared](#) that day, but she was.

Just think for a moment about the knock on the door that night. How do you think the garrison captured Peter — maybe with a knock on the door in the middle of the night? If you had been a believer gathered at this midnight prayer meeting under these circumstances, what would have been your first reaction to a tap, tap, tap sound? A typical human response might be at the very least a little apprehension, if not a knot in the pit of your stomach. What was cheerful Rhoda's reaction? Elation! "Oh my God, it's Peter! I can't believe it!". It's easy to see why others might have thought she was a little crazy. They weren't as rooted and grounded in the faith as she was.

Besides her good cheer, what are some of the other godly [qualities that distinguished Rhoda](#)?

- Rhoda was [listening](#).
 - She was taking in all the prayerful entreaties to God that she was hearing.
 - She was alert and ready to hear a knock at the door.
 - She recognized Peter's voice when she heard it.
- Rhoda was [expecting](#).
 - She knew the group gathered in the home that night were praying for a reason, and she fully anticipated they would receive an answer from God.
 - Her focus was not on the severity of the challenge, but on the expectation of deliverance.
- Rhoda was [upbeat](#).
 - Her persistent optimism became unshakeable joy when she realized that her deeply-held expectations had now become reality.
 - She was able to recognize that it was Peter at the door because she did not discount God's ability to surmount all obstacles.
- Rhoda was [resolute](#).

- Unfazed by the accusations leveled at her by unbelieving believers, she refused to be intimidated.
- Certain of what she had seen and heard, she would not refute it for anyone.

In short, Rhoda remained *cheerful* in the face of fearful circumstances, and thereby proved how *strong* she really was. Maybe that's why God chose to call her out by name in this record.

This is the only mention of Rhoda in the Bible. The name Rhoda means *rose*, a lovely name for a lovely person. She may have been disrespected by her masters and elders, but she wouldn't let it get her down. She was ultimately vindicated as the one person who was ready to receive Peter when he showed up so miraculously and so unexpectedly.

Would you say Rhoda was cheerful? Would you say she was strong? Her actions tell the story. The angel wasn't the only one God sent to cheer Peter's heart that night.

May we have a cheerful Rhoda waiting to receive us when we come in from the cold in the dark night of the soul. What a servant, what a welcoming committee of one! We should aspire to do as well in our walk with the heavenly Father.

Exultation and Cheer

On the night of Jesus's birth, we see some other godly sentinels who had cause for great cheer: the shepherds of Bethlehem. And like Rhoda, they did not miss out on the greatest event of the day. The angels who appeared to the expectant shepherds brought them "good tidings of great joy" which God had prepared for all the people.

Luke 2:10:

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, **I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.**

What made this good news so unrivalled?

Luke 2:11:

For unto you is born this day in the city of David **a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.**

The Savior who would be born to them would not only be the Christ, he would also be their Lord. What message could bring greater cheer than that?

Indeed, **with the coming of the Christ** God provided for His people love, light, peace, joy, hope, sustenance and health. Every bit of this bounty we have today derives from the work of our Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **Truly we too can be of good cheer, both now and forevermore.**