

## Feast or Famine Proverbs 15:13, 15

Do you make it a habit of finding the humorous in everyday life? I thought I would begin today by sharing some rather obscure laws you may not be aware of in Michigan as way of warning you just in case they were on your mind to do in the near future.

A woman isn't allowed to cut her own hair without her husband's permission.

In Detroit alligators may not be tied to fire hydrants.

Willfully destroying your old radio is prohibited.

It is illegal for a man to scowl at his wife on Sunday.

In Grand Haven no person shall throw an abandoned hoop skirt into any street or on any sidewalk, under penalty of a \$5 fine for each offense.

In Harper Woods it is illegal to paint sparrows to sell them as parakeets.

And in Kalamazoo it is against the law to serenade your girlfriend.

Our passage today is a very important one. It tells us to look at the bright side. Let me remind you once again, as I have done so periodically through this series that we are considering ancient proverbs for modern times. Each proverb is a series of comparisons or contrasting principles that help us see the reality of choices we face. While very much Biblical in nature, they are very practical and take the commands of God and isolate individual behaviors.

If we choose one course of action we demonstrate wisdom. They are principles that lead us to peace and happiness, with ourselves, with others and with

the Lord. They are principles founded on the practicality of God's commands. Right living leads to a rewarding life.

On the other hand, if we choose to ignore sound advice and solid principles following our own path then we can expect certain consequences to fall on us. The choice ultimately lies with us.

Our passage today is one of those wisdom principles. We can wonder why the Lord included it in Scripture because it doesn't seem to fit any one particular command, but digging deeper we can understand His wisdom. Perhaps the underlying principle really stems from whether or not we are willing to trust the Lord in all situations.

In Sunday school we considered only **v. 13**, but for the sermon we are going to look at **Proverbs 15:13, 15**. Please turn there with me.

*A sorrowful heart*

*A singing heart*

### **I. A SORROWFUL HEART – v. 13, 15**

Notice in verses 13 and 15 these statements:

**“heartache crushes the spirit.”**

**“All the days of the oppressed are wretched.”**

**NLT “every day brings trouble.”**

How many would say amen to those statements.

You have been there yourself. You know what it is like to have a crushed spirit from some heartache.

The word heartache or sorrow originally had the idea of worrying or being sick, and has come to mean mental suffering caused by loss, disappointment; sadness, grief, or regret.

We're disappointed in poor choices our children may make and so we have sorrow.

A loved one dies and we are saddened or grief stricken and so there is heartache.

The consequences of some sin we did fills us with regret and we are weighed down with sorrow.

In that sense the word means repentance or

contrition. We see it in Psalm 51 when David

recognizes that what the Lord wants is a broken spirit or heart over sin followed by repentance. What affects the mind affects the heart. If we dwell on negative stuff you'll deepen your heartache. What a person is inwardly has a lasting impact.

The verse we are looking at could refer to remorse over sin, a heavy heart that results when we acknowledge a wrong action and are broken over it. But here it has more to do with life events or circumstances that are overwhelming or downright discouraging. Something happened to you or someone you know that has you downcast.

In their masterful work *Commentaries on the Old Testament*, Keil and Delitzsch write that "in this state (of sorrow) 'spiritual functions are paralyzed; self-confidence, without which energetic action is impossible, is shattered; he appears discouraged. The heart as the oneness of thinking and willing, thus the seat of determination, which decides the intellectual – [natural] life expression of the man communicates to self.'"

What they are saying is that when heartache comes along, and we allow that situation to become the focal point of our thoughts, that event or the combination of any number of events can drain us emotionally, spiritually, and physically. We get to a point where we lose interest in things that previously brought us joy. We lose interest in socializing with others. We may not want to eat or we may only want to eat. We don't want to go out. We aren't interested in reading our Bible or going to church or praying. We start to blame God for what has happened to us. The event casts a dark, foreboding shadow over us that paralyzes our desire to think and act positively.

We become depressed which literally means a bowed down state, to be pressed down or pushed/pulled down; our spirits are low and we have a very gloomy outlook on things.

Several years ago we had a bunch of our lilac bushes that had died. I began the task of cutting out the dead bushes and branches that created piles of brush. It all needed to be hauled back to the burn pile. I made over 20 trips hauling brush. At first I had a lot of energy and scooped up huge piles and hoisted them on my shoulder and carried them back to the pile. By about the 10<sup>th</sup> trip they no longer made it up on my shoulder, I carried them under my arms. By the 15<sup>th</sup> trip the bundles were smaller and the steps were shorter. I would look at the remaining pile and wonder how many more trips I had and how many more trips I had in me. My steps to and from the brush pile were more labored. I wasn't sure I wanted to finish the job. I was ready to wait for another day. I was bowed down.

That's what heartache can do. It incapacitates you from wanting to go on, from wanting to do anything else. You can lose all desire. You don't want to eat, you only think about sleeping or you can't sleep because it weighs so heavily on your mind and heart, you don't want to do chores, you tend to be negative and critical.

While chaplain for hospice our bereavement coordinator was working with a man who was in his mid 50's and had lost his wife. They had only been married 5 years, but it struck him hard. Every day he would go out to the gravesite and sit by the grave all day spending about 8 hours or more grieving over the grave. He didn't eat, he didn't go to work. Heartache was his only companion. He was bowed down.

Solomon is right when he says that "**heartache crushes the spirit**" and that "**the days of the oppressed are wretched.**"

Add to this the words of **Proverbs 17:22** "**a crushed spirit dries up the bones.**"

What affects the mind and heart affects the body. Understand that the spirit is referring to the entire make-up of a person, his or her whole being – body,

mind and spirit. As Scripture speaks here about the heart, it is referring to person's inner life in such a way that what happens to the inner life affects the person's entire well-being. An evidence of what is happening to a person's mental state can be clearly seen in both their spiritual and physical well-being.

Half of our senior trip in High School took us to New York City. I remember walking down one of the very busy streets on our way to some tourist place looking into the faces of many of the people that passed me and thinking how sad and lonely many of them looked. Without saying a word there countenance revealed heartache and pain, a burden of some kind they were carrying. Who knows what it was or what they were doing about it. Heartache is real and it crushes the spirit. It feels broken, unfixable, and incapable of being mended. To crush literally means to press between two opposing forces so as to break or injure, to squeeze together.

At Christmas time growing up we would get a bunch of unshelled mixed nuts in our stocking: walnuts, almonds, Brazil nuts, hazel nuts. We would get out the nut cracker, place the nut between the jaws of the tool and squeeze. If we applied too much pressure the whole thing would get crushed.

A person who is experiencing heartache feels like they are being crushed.

Think back for a moment at just this past week. Pick a day, any day and chances are you could find something in each day to be heavy hearted about, something that may have made you cry, something that made you sad, something that made you depressed or discouraged, something in which your heart ached. They are the things that maybe caused you to lose your joy or peace.

Your freezer went out.

You get a phone call and your daughter was in an accident.

The call from the doctor's office finally came but you can't get in to see him until mid-August.

The heat keeps you awake until 1a.m. when you finally fall asleep but the phone rings at 4:30 in the morning. Your wife is calling to tell you that you need to run upstairs and shut the windows because there is violent rain on that side of the house.

You got stuck at yet another red light late for an appointment.

Unemployment ran out.

Your niece is pregnant and she's not married.

We could fill pages of notebook paper of the stuff that brings heartache.

It doesn't even have to be an event or circumstance that happens to us. It might be the poor decision a child made, or maybe it's a son or daughter who has wandered from God.

There are many things that bring us heartache.

For those of you who remember the old HeeHaw show, they had a segment where the men would sing "gloom, despair and agony on me; Deep, dark depression, excessive misery. If it weren't for bad luck I'd have no luck at all, gloom despair and agony on me."

**Isn't that how we feel?** Life can be a downer. It always seems to rain on our parade. Some days it seems like heartache stacked upon heartache. We feel like joining Job on the trash heap.

Chances are there was plenty of reason in this past week to be heavy hearted. Thinking back over the past week I'm sure we could each find something in the day that brought varying degrees of sorrow. Even today there may still be remnants of heartache that has the spirit crushed.

Now, think again over the past week and each day of that week and ask yourself if you can remember something that made you laugh, something that tickled your funny bone. As Uncle Johnnie used to say "dollars to donuts" I'm willing to guess that some days you don't remember any time you laughed. Why do we remember the heartache and not the joyful times

Unresolved, heartache leads to greater degrees of stress. Heart disease is a common result if left untreated. Some deal with heartache through impulsive actions like eating or shopping. For just a little while the pain is gone.

Others make hasty decisions that can lead to greater heartache or stress. You impulsively go out and buy a new car or big screen TV and for a while the pain may go away and make you feel cheerful only to realize a month later that you can't afford the payment.

Sorrow lowers the activity of certain chemicals in the white blood cells that help in defending against illnesses, thus lowering the immune system. That's why after some kind of loss or some event that causes sorrow you may experience getting a cold or other illness.

We can clearly see a direct link between body, mind and soul. When we are either unwilling or incapable of dealing with some emotional issue that is causing the sorrow an imbalance is created then in both the physical and the spiritual components of one's life.

A troubled heart quenches our spirit and takes away our energy and desire to go on, for some even the desire to live. While sorrow is an emotion the Lord gave us and can be a cleansing time, Solomon is speaking here about heartache and sorrow that we continue to dwell on. Rather than seek the Lord and trust Him through these difficulties, we dwell on questions like "why me" or "why now" or "why not someone else." It results in bitterness of spirit, resentment wells up inside further compounding the heartache. The spirit of a man is the wellspring of life, and when the spirit is broken, it means you've lost your zest, your enthusiasm, and you're tempted to give up. Have you been in that wretched place?

I have painted a pretty glum picture. That is a very depressing condition to be in if that were the only hope we had. I am grateful that Scripture gives us

another alternative to consider rather than lingering heartache. Many hearts are sorrowful hearts. But it doesn't have to be that way. We can have a singing heart.

## II. A SINGING HEART – v. 13, 15

**"A happy heart makes the face cheerful."**

**"The cheerful heart has a continual feast."**

**Proverbs 17:22 "A cheerful heart is good medicine."**

**Have you found that cheerfulness is contagious, especially cheerfulness that comes from within a person?** True cheerfulness is not contingent on external circumstances or events. It doesn't have a thing to do with your age or your occupation or your bank account or which side of the tracks you live on or the size of your house or how much you own or where you shop or what country you live in or your education, your good looks or even the circumstances of life.

Cheerfulness is an attitude of choice. It is a matter of the heart and it all boils down to whether or not you are willing to trust God in all things. If you do, then there isn't anything that will rock your boat, things that happen to you or what you might have or where you are in life won't crush your spirit because your confidence is in the Lord, which gives you a cheerful disposition. We have come to believe that everything is in God's sovereign plan to help us become more like Him in character. To develop us into the person He wants us to be. We recognize that **"all things work out for His good, to those who love Him and are called by His name."** It is in that state of recognizing God's sovereign power over us and in us that we are joyful.

In the story of Esther, you will recall that Haman had conspired to kill the Jewish people throughout the kingdom on account of his hatred for Mordecai.

The law was signed by the King. Mordecai petitioned Esther to go to the king. She eventually went and the king was delighted to see her. She invited he and Haman to a banquet just for them. Let's pick up the story in Esther 5.

### Esther 5

Haman had allowed circumstances to alter his mood. One minute he was joyful and happy as a lark, the next minute his spirit was broken. Cheerfulness rises above circumstances because it comes from what's going on inside. If I choose to rest my joy in events and things then I am going to experience a lot of heartache in life. My spirit will wither up and die. But if I choose to rest my joy in Christ and in what He is doing in me, then in spite of what is going on around me or to me my disposition will be cheerful, joyful and it will be seen on my countenance. My face will reveal what is in the heart even in the middle of painful events.

My Mom had a lot of reason to have a crushed spirit, yet she chose to have joy instead, she chose a cheerful heart when from a worldly perspective there was not much to cheer about. In the last couple years of her life she rarely left the bedroom and then for only 15 or 20 minutes at a time. She looked at the same walls and ceiling. She could only hear about the deer Dad would describe eating from the apple trees in the back yard. She only had one leg. She had cancer – for the third time. Some people might look at her and think her world was so small and not much to be cheerful about. Others would sit on her bed or at her side and hear about what God was doing or teaching her. If you happened to be in the living room, you might hear some humming or singing. I don't want to paint her as a saint, that she took it all in stride because there were days she struggled. Yet a spirit of joy was more dominant than a crushed spirit. Her choice was to have a singing heart.

I wish I had half of what she had. In these days that I have wrestled with back pain, especially in the

early days, there wasn't a lot of joy. At home Robyn will tell you I didn't exude a lot of cheerfulness. Pain is painful. As our passage says my days of oppression were wretched. I had little joy on the inside because I had my focus on being pain free.

As we have been working our way through Philippians on Wednesday night we have camped on a section that tells us we are not to complain about anything. In chapter 4 we read that we are to rejoice in all things. How many of you know that if you are complaining you aren't rejoicing? How many of you know that if you are rejoicing in everything you aren't complaining? I'll be the first to admit that's pretty hard.

**“Rejoice and again I say rejoice.”** Through Christ we have the capacity to be cheerful in all things.

Chuck Swindoll has this very pointed word of advice to offer: “Joy is a choice. It is a matter of attitude that stems from our confidence in God – that He is at work, that He is in full control, that He is in the midst of whatever has happening, is happening, and will happen. Either we fix our minds on that and determine to laugh again, or we wail and whine our way through life, complaining that we never got a fair shake. We are the ones who consciously determine which way we shall go...Regardless of how severely the winds of adversity may blow, we set out sails toward joy.”

A couple weeks ago I took David to see his very first Tiger baseball game. It was an oppressively hot day in the low 90's. The Tigers were leaving men on base with multiple scoring opportunities. The lackluster performance was compounded by the heat and you could feel a downcast mood as the game continued into the late innings. It was now the bottom of the 10<sup>th</sup> and surprisingly bases were loaded and wouldn't you know it, a single drove in the winning run. Everyone but the Cardinal fans were hooting and hollering in excitement. As



people filed out there was great joy, but joy based on an external factor. Had they lost the mood would have been much different.

Maybe you have lost your joy because you've been looking for it in the wrong places. We need to learn to experience joy in spite of our circumstances. We need to remember that joy, according to **Galatians 5:22**, is something the Holy Spirit develops in us as we yield to His work in our life. We need to learn that cheerfulness is a matter of the heart and it is something we share with others that comes from the Lord. Of all people Christians ought to be the most cheerful people, not because life for us is a bed of roses or because everything is going our way. We should be cheerful because we are learning that **"the joy of the Lord is our strength."** (**Nehemiah 8:10**)

In **Nehemiah 8** Ezra and the Levites are reading the Law of God to the people. When they heard the Law read, there was a real downcast mood because they were feeling guilty for disobeying God which led to their current plight, but Nehemiah encouraged the remnant of Israel in Jerusalem telling them that it wasn't a day to be sorrowful, but a day to rejoice in God's goodness to them. It was to be a day of celebration, a day to be cheerful.

Let me read it to you from the Message. It's rich. **Nehemiah the governor, along with Ezra the priest and scholar and the Levites who were teaching the people, said to all the people, "This day is holy to GOD, your God. Don't weep and carry on." They said this because all the people were weeping as they heard the words of The Revelation. He continued, "Go home and prepare a feast, holiday food and drink; and share it with those who don't have anything: This day is holy to God. Don't feel bad. The joy of GOD is your strength!" The Levites calmed the people, "Quiet now. This is a holy day. Don't be upset." So the people went off to feast, eating and drinking and including the poor in a great**

**celebration. Now they got it; they understood the reading that had been given to them. (9-12)**

Scripture encourages us to be cheerful, that our joy comes from God. We aren't to go around acting like we're sucking on pickles or drinking lemon juice. It's not that we're to make light of everything, but there should be a marked difference in our spirit that is evident to others because of what Christ is doing in us, that our joy comes from Him. Our world may feel like it is caving in, but when we give it to the Lord, joy still pervades and prevails. Let people see the joy that is in you.

Last week we made a purchase but couldn't pick it up until the following day. As we were getting our items loaded, the person we were dealing with expressed how grateful she was because we were the nicest customers she had the day before. She told us that right after we left, she got a customer that was very rude and difficult to deal with and so she appreciated how easy it was to work with us. I said something like that's the Lord in us.

Joy is a choice. Be cheerful, throw a party. Verse 15 says that **"a cheerful heart is like a continual feast."** Life is to be as joyful and satisfying as a feast.

I love parties and banquets. There is a lot of joy and cheerfulness. Everyone is in a good mood. There is a lot of food. Sometime read through Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. I can just hear you say "what are you trying to do Pastor, I read those books when I can't sleep. They're dry and filled with rules and regulations. They're boring."

But here's what I want you to do. As you read notice how many times God calls them to come together for a feast. He's telling them that joyfulness should be a part of their lives. It should be a constant thing. Throughout the year there were times when they were supposed to party. They were to be reminders of what God was doing and

had done. Scripture says they were supposed to stop working and have a good time. Be joyful.

How many of you got together this past Wednesday with some family or friends and had a party? How many got together on Memorial Day and had a party? How about Labor Day or Christmas or Easter? Those and other times are festive occasions, times to be joyful. **“A cheerful heart is like a continual feast.”** We will be going to my brother’s to celebrate Dad’s 77<sup>th</sup> birthday. I’m looking forward to seeing family and my niece’s new baby, but I’m going to enjoy the burgers and the brats. There will be stories and laughter. It’s a feast. Don’t let the circumstances of life weigh you down so much that you lose perspective and forget that God has a purpose in it. Don’t let them rob you of your joy. Laugh again. Every new day is an opportunity to express the joy that is inside.

#### How many of you know the benefits of laughter?

Medical studies have shown that laughter burns calories. Use laughter as part of your diet plan.

Ten minutes of laughter a day will burn an average of 5 pounds a year according to Vanderbilt U.

It increases your breathing, your body temperature, your metabolism, and your heart rate.

It provides a good workout for your midsection and your diaphragm, boosts blood flow and increases your body’s ability to burn off more calories.

It massages your abdominal organs, improves your intestinal functioning, tones and strengthens your facial, respiratory, leg and back muscles.

It decreases the hormone that is responsible for fear, stress, hostility, high blood pressure.

There are many more physical and mental advantages to laughter.

Laughter is a gift that God gave to us to help release tension and to keep our spirits encouraged as we travel along this sin-cursed world. According to our verse it is one of the ways God keeps us healthy physically and emotionally.

I think by now most of you know that occasionally I like to sprinkle in a little humor in messages. I love to tell jokes. I love to hear jokes. When I find a copy of Reader’s Digest I scan the articles to see if there are any interesting ones, and then go directly to “laughter is the best medicine.” Proverbs is right when it says that it is good medicine. Add with that the words of Solomon in **Ecclesiastes 3:4** when he says that there is a time to laugh.

I read a story about one of the great preachers of the past and now I can’t remember who it was – either Charles Spurgeon or H.A. Ironside. As the story goes after a Sunday sermon in which he used quite a bit of humor a woman came up with a very stern look on her face and criticized his use of humor in the pulpit. She said that the pulpit and the word of God were to be taken seriously and therefore should never be the subject of humor. The use of humor is inappropriate. He responded by telling her that she would be surprised at how much he had to refrain from using more humor in the pulpit.

If it’s been a while for you dig out your copy of the movie *Mary Poppins* and fast forward to the scene where Mary Poppins and the children along with Bert visit Uncle Albert. Uncle Albert is a very good at telling jokes. They are invited to stay for tea at which time Uncle Albert and Bert start sparring with jokes. Miraculously they begin to rise to the ceiling. The premise is that laughter helps lighten any mood. The children join them on the ceiling and Michael wonders if they’ll ever get down. The hilarity ends when Mary Poppins announces they must leave for home. The overcast mood brings them back to the floor. Bert tells another joke and says there’s nothing like a good joke and Uncle Albert responds by saying “and that was nothing like joke.”

Life is too short to not to laugh. It’s too short to be stoic and gloomy all the time. **It’s too short not to be cheerful.** **“A happy heart makes the face cheerful,”** it looks like you’re having a feast.

I think God put verses in the Bible such as this text to show that laughter is important in life. It's not just to make us laugh our way through life to avoid the pain we otherwise experience because of hardship. Yes, some people use laughter as a way to mask their pain and to avoid dealing with it. In an interview with comedian Jonathan Winters, he was asked how he became a comedian. He said that as a child growing up he had a hard life. His father was harsh with him and he got picked on a lot at school a lot. To mask the harshness of his world he began to tell jokes. He found that laughter, either his own or that of others was a way to get rid of the emotional pain if only for a little while.

The story is told of a man who was deeply depressed and decided to go see a psychiatrist one day. He shared that his feelings of depression had been there for many years and wondered what he could do to overcome those intense feelings. The psychiatrist listened intently to the man and then suggested that what he needed was to laugh again. He told the man that there was a circus in town which hosted a world famous clown who had the ability to make everyone laugh and laugh and that he should go that night to see his performance. The man said, "but sir, I am that clown."

There are emotional, physical, psychological and spiritual benefits to laughter. That's why I believe the Lord gave us that emotion. That the Lord wanted us to be joyful people is evident from His own words: **"These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." (John 15:11)**

To have a truly cheerful heart, we must personally know the One who gives us joy. He wants His joy to be in us, so that our joy can become complete. What should come as no surprise is that joy results when we are obedient to the Lord. I think that's the message Solomon was trying to convey to his son through the proverbs, that if you follow the Lord, the path of wisdom, you'll find that you won't

experience a crushed spirit from circumstances, since you'll have learned to trust Him in all things. It's not that there won't be sorrow or heartache, but we'll learn that when we let God take control of our lives He will produce His joy in us.

Oswald Chambers writes: "Joy is the great note all through the Bible. We have the notion of joy that arises from good spirits or good health, but the miracle of the joy of God has nothing to do with a man's life or his circumstances or the condition he is in. Jesus does not come to a man and say 'Cheer up'; He plants within a man the miracle of the joy of God's own nature."

**Is your heart sorrowful today or is it singing?**

Don't let the things of life rob you of the joy that Christ wants you to have. Let God plant within you His nature and learn what it is to truly be cheerful. Leave here today by choice with a cheerful heart.

Keil and Delizsch write "The true and real happiness of a man is thus defined not by external things, but by the state of the heart, in which, in spite of the apparently prosperous condition, a secret sorrow may grow, and which, in spite of an externally sorrowful state, may be at peace, and be joyfully confident in God."