

WHEN YOU HAVE A HEAVY HEART

Introduction

He received a phone call at 1 a.m., requesting him to come to the hospital as soon as possible because a new kidney was awaiting him. By 4 a.m. he checked into the Milwaukee hospital, and spent the entire day undergoing tests and preparation for the kidney transplant. The next morning at 7 a.m. they came to take him into surgery. If all went well, within a few hours he would have a new kidney, he would be released from dialysis treatments, he could assume a more normal and healthy life.

But all did not go well. Shortly into the surgery the doctors discovered a problem: his body would not be able to receive the new kidney; to go on with the surgery would be life-threatening. They had to bring it to a halt, sew up the incision, and return him to his room. Some time later, after he had awakened from the anesthesia, when he found himself back in his room, his doctor came in. "Bob," he said, "I am sorry to inform you that we were unable to perform the transplant."

What a disappointment! A bitter disappointment! Patiently waiting for a new kidney—waiting for months—then the long awaited telephone call, the preparation, the anticipation, ... and now this: "Bob, I am sorry to inform you that we were unable to perform the transplant."

That kind of news is enough to make you break down and cry. That is the kind of news that gives you a heavy heart. Shattered hopes and bitter disappointment, that is one acute cause of a heavy heart. Other causes may include the loss of a job, ... deep grief over the unexpected death of a loved one or the death of a life-long companion, ... the excessive weight of a demonically incited oppression.

A popular song writer expressed our susceptibility to heaviness of heart in these words:

Song sung blue, everybody knows one.
Song sung blue, every garden grows one.
Me and you are subject to the blues now and then ...
Song sung blue, everybody knows one.
(Neil Diamond)

Our next topical study from the Book of Proverbs deals with the subject of heaviness of heart, and directs us to some remedies both for ourselves and for those to whom we must minister.

I. When You Have a Heavy Heart, Remember that the LORD Knows Your Plight (Proverbs 15:13; Proverbs 18:14; Proverbs 15:15; Proverbs 14:10)

A happy heart makes the face cheerful; but a sorrowful heart causes the spirit to be broken. (Prov. 15:13)

The state of your heart regulates and governs the disposition of your life. As the Old Testament commentators Keil & Delitzsch express it: The condition of the heart leaves its stamp on the appearance and the activity of the man. (*Commentary on Proverbs*, Vol.1, p.323.)

“A happy heart makes the face cheerful.” If your heart is filled with joy and peace, it brightens your whole personality and that brightness radiates from your face. ***“But a sorrowful heart causes the spirit to be broken.”*** If a weight of disappointment, grief, or spiritual oppression is laid upon your heart, it is enough to break your spirit; i.e., it is enough to cause you to be crushed by a sense of depression.

A man’s spirit will sustain him in his sickness, but who can bear a broken spirit? (Prov. 18:14)

If your spirit is sound and whole—that is to say, if your heart is filled with joy and peace—it can sustain you even if your body is plagued with infirmity. By way of example: A man was afflicted with a painful back injury that rendered him immobile, but the LORD graciously granted a peace and joy to his heart that was more than able to sustain him.

But if your spirit itself is broken, then there are no human resources to sustain you; note Proverbs 14:13, ***“Even in laughter the heart may be sorrowful, and after mirth there is heaviness of heart.”*** Men may turn to entertainment and a good time in an effort to alleviate a broken spirit and a heavy heart, but to no avail. Even in the midst of the good time the heart is not relieved, and after the mirth an oppressive heaviness weighs down all the more upon the heart. The only recourse is for the LORD to put you on a “divine life support system” until He mends and restores your broken spirit.

All the days of the oppressed are wretched; but he who has a cheerful heart has a continual feast. (Prov. 15:15)

When a man is suffering with a broken spirit and a heavy heart, all his days, indeed, all his hours, are melancholy and bitter. His experience is like that described in Deuteronomy 28:67a, ***“In the morning you will say, ‘If only it were evening!’ and in the evening, ‘If only it were morning!’”***

When one is subjected to such a state he finds that nothing can pull his heart out of its gloom; on the contrary, he finds that his heart tends to pull everything into its own gloom. His heavy heart swallows up the joy of the day like the seven lean cows swallowed up the seven fat cows in Pharaoh’s dream and still were lean as ever!

The heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger cannot share in its joy.
(Prov. 14:10)

There is a personal and solitary experience of bitterness (be it due to sorrow, grief, or spiritual oppression,) the depths of which cannot adequately be communicated to others, nor comprehended or alleviated by our fellow man. But even the deepest and the darkest of those depths are known by our Lord Jesus Christ. In the messianic prophecies of Isaiah our Lord is described in these terms:

He was despised and rejected by men; he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we did not hold him in esteem. ⁴Surely he has borne our afflictions and carried our sorrows; but we regarded him as one who was stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted [as an evildoer]. (Isa. 53:3-4)

In the garden of Gethsemane our Lord Jesus told His disciples, *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me"* (Matt. 26:38.) Literally, *"My soul is engulfed, or surrounded, with sorrow (περιλυπος.)"*

If you have a heavy heart, remember that the LORD knows your plight: *"Then Jehovah said, 'I have certainly seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and I have heard them crying out because of their taskmasters. I know their sorrows'"* (Ex. 3:7.) You must allow the Lord Jesus to minister to you when you experience a heavy heart. Our human tendency is to struggle for a sure footing and try to climb out of the depths of the dark pit, but to do so is like a man struggling in quicksand; the more he struggles the deeper he sinks without finding solid ground. Our human tendency is to distrust our Savior and fear relinquishing control to Him, but only when we trust Him will we find Him restoring us in His way and in His time. We must heed His counsel: *"Be still, and know that I am God"* (Psl. 46:10a.) We must follow His example: on the cross the Lord Jesus cried out, *"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"* (Lk. 23:46.) We must take comfort from His Word:

Then Jehovah said, "I have certainly seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and I have heard them crying out because of their taskmasters. I know their sorrows. ⁸I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey ..." (Ex. 3:7-8a)

The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. (Deut. 33:27a)

We must allow the Lord Jesus to minister through us when we are called upon to help a friend and fellow Christian who is experiencing a heavy heart. We should be ready to provide a silent and sympathetic presence, as did Job's friends when they first encounter him in his suffering:

*When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the calamity that had come upon him, they each came from their own home and, meeting together, they agreed to go to console and comfort him. ¹²When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. They began to wail and to weep; each one tore his robe, and they tossed dust into the air and upon their heads. ¹³So **they sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights. No one spoke a word to him, because they saw that his grief was very great.** (Job 2:11-13)*

We should be prepared to demonstrate gentleness and kindness, as Job urges his friends to do for him: *"To him who is ready to faint, kindness should be shown by his friend; or else he might forsake the fear of the Almighty"* (Job 6:14.)

We should be faithful to employ the ministry of prayer, as Paul is confident that the Philippian church will do on his behalf:

I know that, through your prayers and the help provided by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the result of all this [Paul's present trial] will be my deliverance. ²⁰This is in keeping with my heart-felt expectation and hope that in no circumstance will I be put to shame; on the contrary, I have all confidence that as always, so now also, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. (Phil. 1:19-20.)

Paul is confident that in response to the prayers of his Christian brethren the LORD will supply him with the ministry of the Holy Spirit, this will result in his deliverance, with the final outcome bringing glory to Christ.

II. When You Have a Heavy Heart, Resort to the Remedy Prescribed by God (Prov. 15:23; Prov. 12:25; Prov. 14:30; Prov. 13:19; Prov. 13:12)

BE WELL-ACQUAINTED WITH THE WORD OF GOD.

A man has joy when he receives an answer to his question—and how good is a timely word! (Prov. 15:23)

Proverbs 15:23a literally reads, *"A man has joy from the answer of his mouth"*—it is referring to a situation in which a man has received an answer to the question that has come out of his mouth. The point is that when a wise, appropriate, true, biblical answer is given to a perplexing, troubling question of the soul, that answer is a cause for great joy and relief and satisfaction to the soul.

Proverbs 15:23b emphasizes the blessing of a timely, appropriate, biblical word, whether it be a word of encouragement, or comfort, or counsel, or warning, or rebuke. We must become well-acquainted with the Scriptures, so that the Holy Spirit can minister to us and use us to minister to others.

KNOW HOW TO HANDLE ANXIETY.

Heaviness in a man's heart causes it to stoop; but a good word makes it glad.
(Prov. 12:25)

Proverbs 12:25a portrays a man's heart as stooped over and staggering under the weight of anxiety. In order to handle anxiety in a biblical way, we must recognize its relationship to pride: "*humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, (so that he may exalt you at the appointed time), ⁷by casting all your cares upon him, because he cares for you*" (1 Pet. 5:6-7.) Pride arises from the delusion of being in control, accompanied by a sense of arrogant euphoria. Anxiety is the realization that one is not in control, resulting in a sense of panic or despair.

In order to handle anxiety in a biblical way, we must recognize its relationship to temptation: "*Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear*" (Matt. 6:25a.) Even though the rebuke against anxiety comes to us as a command from our Lord Jesus Christ, we may be tempted to argue, "It is impossible for me not to be anxious, not to think and worry about tomorrow. It is impossible for me to live in today and not trouble myself about tomorrow." But this is not true. The fact is, every time we yield to temptation we are choosing to forget about tomorrow or leave it in the gracious hands of God, and are firmly setting our heart and mind on the present. We need to ask the LORD to realign our minds and perspective, so that we might live **in** today (as opposed to worrying about tomorrow) and to live **for** eternity (as opposed to immediately gratifying our desires by sinful means.)

In order to handle anxiety in a biblical way, we must recognize that we really can rely upon the LORD:

I am able to do all things by him who gives me strength. (Phil. 4:13)

My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.
(Phil. 4:19)

BE AWARE OF THE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF ENVY.

A tranquil heart gives health to the body, but envy rots the bones. (Prov. 14:30)

Proverbs 14:30b tells us that envy is like a cancer that eats away into your very bones; i.e., it makes your life miserable while it is in the process of destroying you. Proverbs 14:30a teaches that the opposite of envy is "*a tranquil heart,*" such a heart ministers "*health to the body.*"

What are the keys to a tranquil heart? The first key is contentment with regard to the present: "*godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷We brought nothing*

into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that" (1 Tim. 6:6-8.) The second key is confidence with regard to the future: *"the word of Jehovah came to Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram, I am your shield, and your reward shall be exceedingly great"* (Gen. 15:1.)

SEE A TASK THROUGH TO ITS COMPLETION.

An accomplished desire is sweet to the soul; ... (Prov. 13:19a)

When you stay with a given task and see it through to its completion, there is a sweet sense of satisfaction, which is itself a great reward. It is a sense of accomplishment that enhances your dignity and self-respect because you are living up to the image of God: imitating God in undertaking and completing a task.

HAVE A LONG RANGE PERSPECTIVE ON GOD'S PROMISES AND CONFIDENCE IN THEM.

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire is fulfilled it is a tree of life. (Prov. 13:12)

We want the immediate fulfillment of God's promises, the full blessing of heaven on earth: fullness of health, tranquility of mind, absence of conflict, abundance of blessing. But when the fulfillment of those promises is deferred (i.e., their fulfillment withheld to be fulfilled at a future date,) we may become discouraged or even depressed.

Proverbs 13:12b assures us that what we desire will come, and when it finally does come, it will be *"a tree of life"* (i.e.; it will be Paradise itself.) Note the word of the LORD to the prophet Habakkuk: *"The revelation is for the appointed time, and it speeds toward the end and shall not lie; though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not delay"* (Hab. 2:3.) The point is that God's promises will surely be fulfilled in their appointed time, not prematurely; therefore we can and must await them with complete confidence. By way of illustration: We tend to view God's promises as though they were an "express train," and we become impatient because they have not yet arrived at the station; when in fact God's promises are like the "local commuter train" that makes its many appointed stops and is right on time, operating according to the LORD's divine time table, not our own timetable.

Conclusion

If, or when, you have a heavy heart, remember that the LORD knows your plight:

*Jehovah said, "I have certainly seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and I have heard them crying out because of their taskmasters. **I know their sorrows.**" (Ex. 3:7)*

If, or when, you have a heavy heart, realize that relief may be found in one of the remedies the LORD offers us in the Book of Proverbs: 1) a timely word from Scripture; 2) a biblical perspective on anxiety; 3) an awareness of the adverse effects of envy; 4) the completion of a task set before you; and 5) a long range perspective on God's promises and complete confidence in them.