



Carstairs-Bancroft United Church
August 4, 2021
DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT
DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC
By Rev. Maria Szabone Berces



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Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

Today's Inspiration in one sentence

“When anxiety was great within me, your consolation, [God], brought me joy.”

(Psalm 94:19)

Did You Know?

- We can date the book of **Proverbs** for primarily during Solomon's reign 970-930 BC; however, some important parts were compiled and edited 715-686 BC, at the time of king Hezekiah. This was a time of spiritual renewal led by the king.
- In first King 4 we can read about Solomon's ability to produce proverbs. This passage attributes to him 3000 of these teachings! (The NIV Study Bible).
- The purpose of the book is explained in chapter 1, which includes: **“gaining wisdom and instruction ... giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young”** (Proverbs 1:2; 4)
- “Acquiring wisdom and knowing how to avoid the pitfalls of folly lead to personal well-being, happy family relationships, fruitful labors and good standing in the community.” (The NIV Study Bible)

Personal Insight

I don't know how you are with it, but I appreciate wisdom, and definitely prefer a happy heart over a crushed spirit. Yet, I also experienced that it is not as black and white as the writer put it: *“When life seems dark, choose joy.”*

The Wisdom Literature – possibly written by the same King Solomon – expresses that **“There is a time for everything ... a time to weep and a time to laugh,”** (Ecclesiastes 3:1; 4) Yes, there are times when we just can't smile, when our hearts are sad and shattered.

The Good News is that even in those days we can count on God's support. We can lean on the Divine Presence, which holds us up and carries us through pain and loss. When we cry out to the Holy One in these situations, we may experience what the Psalmist did: **“When anxiety was great within me, your consolation, [God], brought me joy.”** (Psalm 94:19)

Besides, we are definitely called to stand by one another in these situations. Sometimes by providing a kind smile, at other occasions just *being with* the one who suffers. In some cases, no words are required, just our supporting presence. We can pass the Good News of God's love to one another through acts, words and smiles, which eventually **“gives health to the bones”** (Proverbs 15:30) as well.

Grace and Peace to You All,

Rev. Maria



The Joy God Provides

A cheerful heart is good medicine.

Proverbs 17:22

READ Proverbs 15:13–15, 30

When Marcia's out in public, she always tries to smile at others. It's her way of reaching out to people who might need to see a friendly face. Most of the time, she gets a genuine smile in return. But during a time when Marcia was mandated to wear a facemask, she realized that people could no longer see her mouth, thus no one could see her smile. *It's sad, she thought, but I'm not going to stop. Maybe they'll see in my eyes that I'm smiling.*

There's actually a bit of science behind that idea. The muscles for the corners of the mouth and the ones that make the eyes crinkle can work in tandem. It's called a Duchenne smile, and it has been described as "smiling with the eyes."

Proverbs reminds us that "a cheerful look brings joy to the heart" and "a cheerful heart is good medicine" (15:30 NLT; 17:22). Quite often, the smiles of God's children stem from the supernatural joy we possess. It's a gift from God that regularly spills out into our lives, as we encourage people who are carrying heavy burdens or share with those who are looking for answers to life's questions. Even when we experience suffering, our joy can still shine through.

When life seems dark, choose joy. Let your smile be a window of hope reflecting God's love and the light of His presence in your life. – By **Cindy Hess Kasper**

REFLECT & PRAY

The joy You provide is my strength, dear God. Help me to be a messenger of Your love to others. Amen.

What else does the Bible teach us about the joy found in God? How does inner joy contribute to a healthy mind, body, and spirit?

SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

Scholars believe the man who compiled most of the proverbs, Solomon, is the same man who wrote the next book in the Bible, Ecclesiastes. Yet the two books seem to contain contradictory messages. Proverbs says, "A happy heart makes the face cheerful" (15:13). Ecclesiastes says, "Laughter . . . is madness" (2:2), and "Frustration is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart" (7:3). Which is correct?

Ecclesiastes is written from the perspective of living for this life only; therefore, it has dark undertones. But Proverbs doesn't ignore life's complexities, for it also says, "Even in laughter the heart may ache, and rejoicing may end in grief" (14:13). There is balance in both books. The proverbs contain sound counsel for living and help us choose the life-affirming path of wisdom. And Ecclesiastes concludes, "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind" (12:13). – By **Tim Gustafson**

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