**Faith and Cheerfulness**

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*A cheerful look brings joy to the heart. Good news makes for good health. Proverbs 15:30 NLT*

This past week the word “cheerful” or “cheerfulness” has shown up randomly. In my scripture reading—but also in Facebook feeds. I read a friend’s post about her time at LabCorp. (I am sharing the story as I remember it. Some specifics may be different). She was waiting with several others for her blood draw. Everyone was quiet and somber. Nobody is usually excited to get their blood drawn, are they? In walks this 92-year-old woman. She is smiling and cheery. Apparently, she takes her time and goes around the room, complimenting every individual. The atmosphere changes. People smile and actually talk with one another. Then, in walks a young woman who has many tattoos and ripped clothing. There is a pause as everyone waits to see what will happen next. This older woman does not ignore her, or belittle her, but compliments her on her smile as well. Then she tells her, I imagine you are quite a fun person! This young woman also smiles and the two begin a wonderful conversation.

This older woman came with a cheerful heart and changed everyone’s day for the better. As I read that story, I thought, “I want to be like her” and become an “atmosphere changer!” Having a cheerful heart is potent. The Bible encourages us specifically to be cheerful in two areas: giving and hospitality. *You much each decide in your heart how much to give. And don’t give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.*2 Corinthians 9:7 I’ve discovered, cheerful giving of anything, begins in my heart. It is not just a feeling, but it is something we can choose. We can choose to joyfully and cheerfully give not only of our money, but of our time, talent and ourselves. It involves a decision to put off self absorption and put on concern and thoughts for others. Not easy.

Over the past several years, I have noticed I can actually make this choice, and when I do, my life gets better. My world opens up and I can celebrate with others or mourn with them if I need to. It is the opposite of catering to my own happiness, but when I cheerfully serve others, my own happiness increases. Have you discovered that incongruity?

1 Peter 4:9 states: *cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay.* My God’s grace, I have had the privilege of sharing our home with many people. I admit, it is not always easy, nor have I always done it with cheerfulness. However, the blessing of having the time to spend with people is priceless. We have seen God move and change lives because of an open home which begins with an open heart. I know our American culture has shifted, so many people don’t cook for themselves anymore, much less for others, but you can still share a meal. Plan—get take out if you must. Use paper plates if you don’t have enough to share…but try it. Don’t get nervous, just choose to focus on your friends. Do it in faith and see what God will do in and through you. If you are concerned about your home—plan it at a park or beach. Do a picnic. Open up your creative self and ask God for inspiration.

I admit, since I have been single. I have been reluctant to invite couples over. But I am asking God for direction and courage to change that! It is hard to greet the guests and serve as well. But most of my concerns are probably in my own mind. Our Life Group meets at my home every week. We have a wonderful time. My home cleaning schedule gets it done by group time! It takes a change in our perspective from “it’s too hard”, “I’m too tired”, “I don’t know how”, “they won’t want to come” to simply releasing our faith and making it work.

My Bible reading for today included 2 Corinthians 9:6 and actually defines the word cheerfully in the footnote. Cheerfully, *hilaros*; Strongs #2431: Willing, good natured, joyfully ready. The word describes a spirit of enjoyment in giving that seeps away all restraints. I really like these defining words. It is something we can ask ourselves both about our giving and our hospitality. Are we willing in our heart to share ourselves or our material goods with others? If not, why not? What can we do to change our heart? Take time to look at Jesus and the Father. Do you think they were cheerful when they sent Jesus to earth? Good-natured. Hmm, am I kind, friendly and patient? What about joyfully ready? Have I put away my selfish ways and prepared for others?

Friends, we don’t know what God will do when we choose to serve him cheerfully. This includes parenting, loving our spouses and our friends. Do we feel interrupted when the phone rings? Or a text comes through? Let us ask God for his perspective. I think he wants us to answer the phone, cheerfully. It will change the atmosphere, it takes faith, but it does work.

*Father, I thank you* *for helping us with all these matters. Help us give of ourselves, our money, our talents into your hands. Please spend us as you will; for we can trust you. I ask that you help us incorporate cheerfulness into our lives like never before. People are attracted to cheerful people, and we want to attract others to you. In Jesus’ Name, amen.*