

THE HEALTHY SOUL, PART 3: REJOICING

2 Corinthians 13:11, Romans 8:28, 38-39

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Eighteenth century English pastor and missionary George Mueller was considered an eccentric man in his day. He would not have considered that an insult. He would have agreed with what A.W. Tozer later wrote, that being "well-adjusted" is not a Christian virtue. The world is badly out of adjustment, and if we are well-adjusted to the world then we are out of adjustment with God. Mueller would have agreed that to be in "adjustment" with Christ automatically makes one eccentric in the world's eyes.

Mueller pastored the same church in Bristol for sixty-six years. At the age of 28 he founded The Scripture Knowledge Institute for Home and Abroad to accomplish five things: establish schools to teach Bible knowledge to children and adults, distribute Bibles, support missionaries, distribute tracts and books, and establish Christian orphanages. He did all these things in his long life, but he is best known for the orphanage work. He established five of these and cared for over ten thousand destitute children. He inspired many others to do the same in England and elsewhere.

He prayed in millions of dollars for the orphanages and never asked anyone for money. He took no salary for the last 68 years of his ministry. He never took a loan or went into debt. He trusted God to do it all. His own words describe why he went about his ministry in this way: "It needed to be something which could be seen, even by the natural eye. Now, if I, a poor man, simply by prayer and faith, obtained, without asking any individual, the means for establishing and carrying on an Orphan-House: there would be something which, with the Lord's blessing, might be instrumental in strengthening the faith of the children of God besides being a testimony to the consciences of the unconverted, of the reality of the things of God." ("George Mueller's Strategy for Showing God" by John Piper, Resource Library, www.desiringGod.org, p. 6). The whole point was to encourage people to take God at his word. That is the "why" of this dynamic of faith in the life of George Mueller. The "how" is the story of a healthy soul.

CONTINUAL REJOICING

Listen to how Mueller states the first part of his faith logic: "According to my judgment the most important thing to be attended to is this: above all things see to it that your souls are happy in the Lord. Other things may press upon you, the Lord's work may even have urgent claims upon your attention, but I deliberately repeat, it is of supreme and paramount importance that you should seek above all things to have your souls truly happy in God himself. Day by day seek to make this the most important business of your life. ...The secret of all true effectual service is joy in God, having [the personal experience of] acquaintance and fellowship with God himself" (Piper, p. 12).

Notice the implication of his statement: You and I can choose to have a soul which is truly happy. Mueller squarely positions the possession of a healthy soul in the arena of the human will. We can choose to be inwardly healthy--if we will adopt the disciplines of the healthy soul. We will take up that point later, but a glaring question arises: George Mueller's opinion about such an important matter is

only that of a man. Does God in fact say that the continual rejoicing of our souls is in the arena of free choice?

Indeed he does! Paul the Apostle concluded his instruction to his beloved children in the faith in Corinth with these words: "**Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you**" (2 Corinthians 13:11). Those of you reading the King James Version, the NKJV, or the NIV will not have the word "rejoice," but something like "farewell." It is true that the Greek word for "rejoice" was sometimes used in greeting or parting in the first century, but even in the King James it is translated "rejoice" 62 times, and as a greeting only 12 times. This is a translation issue, not a textual one.

The key point is that the word is a command in a list of commands! We can choose to rejoice! There are other Scriptures which say the same such as 1 Thessalonians 5:16: "**Rejoice always.**" George Mueller's life and faith illustrate that Paul's command to rejoice is not just a silly wish for good feelings. The Bible uses the word "laugh" to indicate spontaneous feelings, though usually in the sense of scorn. Laughing is not a clear sign of a healthy soul, but rejoicing is. The choice to rejoice in the Lord, even in the face of present difficulties, redirects the energy of the soul to a positive end and brings inward health.

REASONS TO REJOICE

But if not for the second part of George Mueller's logic of faith rejoicing would indeed be foolish. The healthy soul must have sound reasons to rejoice. What Mueller knew was that personal "acquaintance and fellowship with God himself" through faith in Christ provides overwhelming reasons to rejoice every day no matter what. The bulletproof nature of these reasons to choose to rejoice all hinge on the sovereignty of God. If he is all powerful, and in his supremacy he can tell us reasons to rejoice, then we are not all a bunch of idiots for doing so. The following list hits some of the main points, but there are many others.

A first reason to choose to rejoice is that nothing can stop God from loving you. Paul wrote this to his beloved brothers and sisters in Rome: "**For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord**" (Romans 8:38-39). I have seen people say and do desperate things in the search to love and be loved. I have seen married couples look at each other with no love in their eyes. I have seen children yearning for love from cold-hearted parents. The only possible satisfaction for this essential human need is to know God's love which never falters or disappoints.

This is among the great poetic passages of Scripture because God's attributes exhaust the ability of language to explain. How can one describe a love which is able to leap every barrier we could ever imagine? But if there is such a love--and there is--it would be a reason for continual rejoicing. Look around at the Christians, family members, and friends around you--even your pastor. Their love will fail, but Jesus never fails.

The second reason for rejoicing is that no one can stop God from giving you eternal life. Jesus spoke these words during his earthly ministry: "**For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them**

life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. ...Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:21, 24). Notice that the promise of eternal life does not begin after death, but at the moment you believe in him. What does that mean? It means that eternal life is not just the extension of life, but the energy of divine life within us even as we live among the ruins here on earth. It is a life-force within us which communicates to us his very character, as Christ prayed shortly before his crucifixion: **"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent"** (John 17:3).

One of the definitions of the sovereignty of God is that he is the master of your opportunities, as he spoke to some beleaguered Christians in ancient Philadelphia: **"Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut..."** (Revelation 3:8a). God has the capacity to offer you the opportunity for eternal life and no one can stop him. This is the greatest privilege on earth, God has the power to give it to you, and no one can take it from you. So rejoice!

A third reason for a life pattern of rejoicing is that this divine life principle within you does not stop at your physical death, but continues forever. No one can stop God from raising you from the dead! Jesus taught us: **"For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day"** (John 6:40). The belief that we will be resurrected enables us to look any dire circumstance in the face and smile.

The 2006 Denzel Washington film entitled *Déjà Vu* mixed time travel and detective themes. A well-respected detective gets recruited to assist a government agency which uses secret technology to look into the past to solve crimes. As the detective becomes involved in his work he discovers that the technology allows him to look into the life of the woman whose murder he is investigating. He learns that not only can the technology allow him to look back in time in order to solve crimes, he can actually go back in time to stop crimes. And he has fallen for this beautiful murder victim who, incidentally, is a Christian.

With a sense of desperation to save her he risks his life to go back in time to try to stop her murder. He meets her, convinces her that he is not a lunatic, and they begin running from place to place to prevent her violent murder. Everything he does seems to help at first yet still leaves her life in danger. Is it her fate to die, one way or another? The detective finally realizes that there is, in fact, one way to save her life: if he dies in the effort. In a moment of blinding insight he realizes that he is probably still alive on the other time line. The detective discovers the odd fact that he can rejoice both in the knowledge of saving his loved one and also rejoice in the hope that, in the twisted logic of time travel, he will be alive to be with her on another time line. And so he dies, rejoicing, saving another.

The resurrection of the body is not a science fantasy movie plot for the believer in Jesus Christ. We can rejoice in the face of our impending death or any suffering short of it, not because we are insane but because we know that nothing can stop God from raising us from the dead. Jesus faced the cross in this way and offers us the ability to do the same. The healthy soul can have victory over even the fear of death.

A fourth reason for an act of the will to rejoice every day is that God has promised to care for our earthly needs, as Paul wrote to the Philippians: **"And my God will supply all your needs according to**

His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). This is a reason for us to have **"the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension"** (Philippians 4:7), that is, the peace which makes no sense from a rational, earthly evaluation. But the provision of God is not from earthly sources! If God will supply all of our earthly needs, then we can go beyond peace to rejoicing right in the teeth of a need which has no apparent fulfillment.

Once a wealthy woman visited Mueller's Institute for Bible Knowledge to consider giving him a sizable gift. At the same moment he was aware of tens of thousands of hungry orphans in a nation with no government program to care for them. He was aware of the millions of lost people in Great Britain and around the whole world who desperately needed to hear the good news. He was aware of missionaries doing God's work on very modest support and often facing various issues which could have been relieved with better funding. But he refused to ask the woman to give a gift. Instead, he visited with her graciously and answered her questions. After she left, he asked God to make her so happy to serve him that she would delight to give to the Institute. And so she came to give the equivalent of tens of thousands of dollars. If God is omnipotent, and he has promised to supply all of our needs, then we can rejoice in the face of the vagaries of earthly provision.

A fourth and most important reason to rejoice every day is that no one can stop God from being good to you! Paul wrote: **"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose"** (Romans 8:28). One of George Mueller's favorite verses was penned by the sons of Korah: **"For the LORD God is a sun and shield; /The LORD gives grace and glory; /No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly"** (Psalm 84:11). George Mueller read this verse to his wife as she lay dying. He later wrote about his prayer for her to be spared: "Therefore, if it is really good for me, my darling wife will be raised up again; sick as she is. God will restore her again. But if she is not restored again, then it would not be a good thing for me. And so my heart was at rest. I was satisfied with God. And all this springs, as I have often said before, from taking God at his word, believing what he says" (Piper, p. 4). Do you really believe that God is always good to you? Trusting him opens the door to continual rejoicing in him.

PRACTICAL WAYS TO MOVE INTO REJOICING

Once we have believed in Christ, what are the practical ways to pursue a healthy soul which rejoices in him all the time? First, Mueller advised: "It is absolutely needful in order that happiness in the Lord may continue, that the Scriptures be regularly read. These are God's appointed means for the nourishment of the [soul]... Consider it, and ponder over it... Thus have my peace and joy increased more and more" (Piper, pp. 14-15). Does God's word say the same? Psalm 19:8 says: **"The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart..."** The treasure of joy is granted to the treasure seekers. The word of God is that treasure because it gives us the knowledge of God.

No one can do this for you because it is personal—your soul being personally nourished by your heavenly Father. Will you shut out the "cataract of nonsense"—the tidal wave of meaningless communications thrust on you by a fallen world—long enough to drink from God's pure stream? Buy a new Bible if you need one. It will cost about one trip to a good restaurant, but will give years of blessing to your soul.

Secondly, Mueller traced his own impact in ministry to a thing which he commends to every believer, that we "take God by his word and rely upon it" (Piper, p. 6). Mueller's great pastor's heart was distressed that so many believers live in a condition of upset and harassment by worries because they have not trained themselves to trust in the Lord. Unblinking trust in him will revolutionize our lives!

Part of this is accepting the word of God as the final authority in your life. This does not mean that you understand every part of it or are comfortable with every part. It does mean that you adopt the practice of following God all the time by following the word of God. If you wait to arrive at a final conclusion on the debate between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism you will never arrive at the place of simple followership. There is neither peace nor joy for those who read the Bible and yet are constantly evaluating whether to follow it or not.

A third practical measure to bring rejoicing to our souls is to qualify for God's blessing by "walking uprightly" as the psalmist wrote. Stop polluting your soul! We fear that we will lose the enjoyment of life if we withdraw from dubious pleasures but the health of our souls depends upon it. It is time for the Christians of our day to face the challenges of holy living with the conviction that there is no other path to joy. There is no more miserable person on Earth than the willfully sinning Christian. He or she can never be happy either in the lost world or in the Lord.

And most of holy living is not merely avoiding bad things but voluntarily choosing to do holy things. That is the testimony of George Mueller's life. He had the healthy soul of a man who attempted great things for God, and God was pleased to make it possible for him to do them by faith. For in that way, God gets the glory. And that is the most joyful thing of all, for the Lord blesses those who glorify his name.

I invite you to get on the path to a life of rejoicing. Why would you walk any other path?

The first step is to make sure that you have received forgiveness for your sins from Jesus Christ and become his follower. There is no hope of a healthy soul without him!