

Cheer Is More Than A Box Of Detergent

by J. W. Jepson

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This article was first published in the November 27, 1988 issue of The Pentecostal Evangel.

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It was a very serious moment. Jesus was facing the ordeal of the cross. The outlook must have seemed bleak to His disciples. But He concluded His instructions to them by saying, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Our world is no less filled with trouble, uncertainty and fear. Many with abundant possessions and pleasures are still unhappy. Despondency and depression are common.

Negativeness seems to be part of human nature. Hold up a white bedsheet with a dark dot in the middle of it, and most people will say, "I see a dot." The white area is thousands of times larger than the dot, but people will see the dot.

"Are we having fun yet?" the bumper sticker mocks cynically. The world holds excitements and pleasures, but down deep the real joy of living is absent.

And that cloud—that cold, chilling, depressing fog of fear and heaviness—can seep into the family of God and wrap its icy fingers around Christians.

God never intended for believers to live under a cloud of depression, to be negative, to wallow in dark moods and self-pity. It is a dishonor to Christ. God puts us on display before the world as examples of what His grace has done and can do. We are the product of salvation. We are the living advertisement for Jesus Christ.

When someone asked a certain lady to give her heart to Christ, she replied, "No, I have enough troubles as it is." Somewhere she got the wrong message. Someone was not being a good advertisement for the Savior.

Christians are not to be frivolous and silly, of course. We are not to go through life with a trifling and giddy attitude. Discipleship is serious business. We *do* carry a deep concern for the lost.

Yet the Christian life is a balanced life. Paul expressed the principle clearly when he said that he was "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Corinthians 6:10). Paul faced problems and experienced pressure and heartache, but he refused to despair.

Some people seem to enjoy being down. They love sympathy. They ooze the blues. They are in a dark mood, and they want you to know it.

God does not want our feelings to drag us into the mud. He wants us out of "the Slough of Despond." When we feel down (and we do at times), it is important that we get hold of ourselves and shake it off in the name of the Lord.

C. S. Lewis was right when he said that joy is the serious business of heaven. Jesus Christ came to "put us out of our misery" and fill us with joy.

This does not mean that believers are to escape from reality. *That is what sinners do.* Christianity is not a crutch. In Jesus Christ we can face reality and still enjoy the blessings of life.

Jesus Christ said, "be of good cheer," in spite of circumstances. He had just told them that He was going away. He was going to die within hours. Yet, He told His disciples to be of good cheer. Our cheer does not come from circumstances. It comes from the Lord. That is the key.

So, what is cheer? Cheer is a function of the human spirit. It is joy exercising itself. Joy is an abiding quality. If joy is on the inside, it will bubble up to the surface and overflow. Cheer is the overflow of joy. It is joy having fun.

Basically, three words in the Greek text of the New Testament are translated "cheer." One is usually in the form of a command or admonition. It is *tharseo*. It is the word found in John 16:33. It means take courage perk up; cheer up. It involves an act of the will; otherwise, God would not tell us to be of good cheer.

So then, we are not helpless victims of our moods. They are not independent forces out of our control. In effect, Jesus was saying, "Make a choice. Do something about how you feel. Don't let circumstances determine your frame of mind. Don't take the course of least resistance."

Depression, especially clinical depression, can be a complex problem. Many factors can contribute to its cause. These need to be identified and dealt with properly.

However, the person who has Christ and His Word has resources above and beyond all other resources, as helpful as those resources might be. Ultimately our frame of mind is to be—and will be—the result of our relationship with God through Jesus Christ, lived daily in the power of the Holy Spirit according to His Word—circumstances from without or within notwithstanding.

What does one say to someone who cannot walk? The Lord said to the paralyzed man, "Son, be of good cheer." (See Matthew 9:2 - 8). The man could have retorted, "What do you mean, 'Cheer up'? Can't you see I'm paralyzed? I can't walk. Is this some kind of a cruel joke? Are you making fun of me and taunting me?"

Jesus was trying to get this man's mind off his circumstances and onto the sufficiency of God's power. Cheer up. By faith rise above the situation into the realm of the operation of the power of God!

The Master said the same thing to the woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years. "Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well" (Matthew 9:22). Here we see that Jesus deals also with the human spirit. Sickness ravages the spirit as well as the body. As we have watched people suffer chronic and debilitating illnesses, we have seen the deterioration of their spirit as well as the devastation of their body.

Jesus was not being frivolous. He saw this woman's faith. In effect He was saying to her, "I see your faith. Get ready for your miracle."

We do not have to accept heaviness. No matter what the situation might be, in the name of the Lord we can rise above it, take courage, take charge, and cheer up. Our joy is not determined by circumstances. God's power is present and ready to meet our needs, Jesus came to give us life more abundantly. Hallelujah!

The crowd said it to blind Bartimeus (Mark 10:49): "Cheer up, man, Jesus is calling for you." He had been crying out to Jesus, and for a while the crowd tried to hush him up. In other words, "Just stay in your place and do the best you can with your situation. What do you expect, a miracle?"

But when Jesus called for him, the crowd said, "Cheer up." That means, "Jesus is here and He's calling *you*. This is the moment of your miracle."

The same is true in our lives. No matter what your situation, Jesus knows your name and He is calling you. He is here to take away your spirit of heaviness and clothe you with the garment of praise. He is here to give you life more abundantly, with a joy that breaks out in cheer.

We now look at Acts 23:11. Paul had been attacked, taken into custody, and was to be brought before the council. During the night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul." He was almost killed by the mob. Now he was a prisoner and was about to face a hostile crowd. And God said, "Cheer up, Paul." Yes, God is still God. Cheer up.

Another word translated "cheer" is *euthumeo*. It means to be confident, optimistic. When Paul stood before Felix (Acts 24:10), he said, "I do more cheerfully answer for myself." He was the happiest person there, and he was the prisoner! You cannot defeat somebody like that.

Later, Paul was on board the ship, and the storm was raging. He and his team were surrounded by ungodly men. And what did he say? In essence he said, "The Lord just spoke to me—He sent an angel—and guess what? Things are going to get a lot worse. The ship is going to sink (how many of you can swim?). But cheer up [he said it twice]. We are all going to survive."

Take heart. Be of good cheer (same word—*euthumeo*). No wonder some people think Christians are crazy! Doesn't this guy know where we are? Doesn't he know what's going on?

No, believers are not crazy. We just know something they don't know.

"Then were they all of good cheer" (Acts 27:36 KJV). Their courage was restored. Cheer is contagious. Paul "exposed" everyone on the ship, and they all "came down" with a good case of cheer. God wants us to start an epidemic of cheer. Infect everybody.

James used the same word. "Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms" (James 5:13). Thank God for the ability to sing. When the enemy tells you that you are supposed to be just as depressed as everyone else, refuse to allow his poisonous fog to seep into your spirit. Get a song and begin to sing the praises of God.

The third word translated "cheer" is *hilaros*. It means readiness of mind, promptness, enthusiasm. "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). If you are going to be a

Christian, be a happy one. Put your heart into it. And be sure to tell your face. Don't go around looking as though you were baptized in vinegar!

So no matter what your situation, God wants your human spirit to be liberated, unshackled from depression, despondency, and self-pity. "Be of good cheer." Refuse to allow circumstances and feelings to dominate your mind and your life. You can have cheer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Child of God, the Lord Jesus Christ says to you, "Cheer up." The joy of the Lord is your strength (Nehemiah 8:10). Let that joy exercise itself. Let it permeate your personality and so radiate from you that others will want your Savior. And when you are going through the same experiences they are going through and experiencing the same sorrows they are experiencing, instead of doing what they do—escaping from reality, running to the bar and trying to find cheer in a bottle—you hold a steady course with a smile on your face and a song in your heart!

Jesus said imperatively, "Be of good cheer!"