

# Taking Cheerful Views

by J.R. Miller

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*A cheerful outlook on life is a choice that can be developed through patient submission, gratitude, and faith in God's love and care.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 15:13-17, Romans 8:28, Philippians 4:4, Philippians 4:11-13

**Topics:** "Contentment", "Cheerfulness"

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## Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the importance of adopting a cheerful perspective on life, drawing from Philippians 4:11-13 to illustrate that true contentment can be found in any circumstance. He contrasts the attitudes of chronic grumblers, who focus on negativity, with those who find joy and beauty in every situation, encouraging listeners to cultivate a habit of looking on the bright side. Miller argues that this cheerful disposition not only enhances personal happiness but also positively influences those around us. He highlights that contentment is a learned behavior, requiring patience, gratitude, and a focus on the blessings in our lives. Ultimately, he reminds us that a heart engaged with God can rise above earthly discontent, leading to a life filled with joy and peace.

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## Transcript

"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in need!" Philippians 4:11-13

"A happy heart makes the face cheerful." Proverbs 15:13

"A cheerful heart has a continual feast." Proverbs 15:15

"A cheerful heart is good medicine; but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." Proverbs 17:22

One of the divinest secrets of a happy life--is the art of extracting comfort and sweetness from every circumstance. We must develop the habit of looking on the bright side. It is a magic-wand whose power exceeds that of any fabled magician's to change all things into blessings. Those who take cheerful views, find happiness everywhere; and yet how rare is the habit! The multitude prefer to walk on the dark side of the paths of life.

There are those who take to gloom--as a bat to darkness, or as a vulture to carrion! They would rather nurse a misery--than cherish a joy. They always find the dark side of everything, if there is a dark side to

be found. They appear to be conscientious grumblers, as if it were their duty to extract some essence of misery from every circumstance. The weather is either too cold or too hot; too wet or too dry. They never find anything to their taste. Nothing escapes their criticism. They find fault with the food on the table, with the bed in which they lie, with the railroad-train or steamboat on which they travel, with the government and its officials, with merchant and workman--in a word, with the world at large and in detail.

They are chronic grumblers. Instead of being content in the state in which they are--they have learned to be discontented, no matter how happy their lot! If they had been placed in the Garden of Eden--they would have discovered something with which to find fault! Their wretched habit empties life of all possible joy--and turns every cup to gall.

On the other hand, there are rare people who always take cheerful views of life. They look at the bright side. They find some joy and beauty everywhere. If the sky is covered with clouds--they will point out to you the splendor of some great cloud-bank piled up like mountains of glory. When the storm rages, instead of fears and complaints--they find an exquisite pleasure in contemplating its grandeur and majesty. In the most faulty picture--they see some bit of beauty which charms them. In the most disagreeable person--they discover some kindly trait or some bud of promise. In the most disheartening circumstances, they find something for which to be thankful, some gleam of cheer breaking in through the thick gloom.

When a ray of sunlight streamed through a crack in the shutter, and made a bright patch on the floor in the darkened room--the little dog rose from his dark corner, and went and lay down in the one sunny spot; and these cheerful people live in the same philosophical way. If there is one beam of cheer or hope anywhere in their lot--they will find it! They have a genius for happiness. They always make the best out of circumstances. They are happy as travelers. They are contented as boarders. Their good nature never fails. They take a cheerful view of every perplexity. Even in sorrow, their faces are illumined, and songs come from the chambers where they weep. Such people have a wondrous ministry in this world. They are like apple trees when covered with blossoms, pouring a sweet fragrance all around them.

It may be worth while to linger a little on the philosophy of living which produces such results.

Some people are born with sunny dispositions, with large hopefulness and joyfulness, and with eyes for the bright side of life. Others are naturally disposed to gloom. Physical causes have, no doubt, much to do with the discontent of many lives. Dyspepsia or a disordered liver, is responsible for much bad temper, low spirits and melancholy; and yet, while there is this predisposition in temperament on the one hand toward hopefulness, and on the other toward depression and gloom, it is still largely a matter of culture and habit, for which we are individually responsible. Like the apostle Paul, we can train ourselves to take cheerful views of life, and to extract contentment and enjoyment from any circumstances.

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again--Rejoice!" Philippians 4:4. This is clearly a most important part of Christian culture. Joyfulness is everywhere commended as a Christian duty. Discontent is a most detestable fault. Morbidity is a sin. Fretfulness grieves God. It tells of unbelief. It destroys the soul's peace. It disfigures the beauty of Christian character. It not only makes us soured and unhappy in our own hearts--but its influence on others is bad. We have no right to project the gloom of our discontent--over any other life. Our attitude is to be ever toward joy. There is nothing so depressing in its effect upon others, as morbidity!

Also, for the sake of those among whom we live, and upon whose lives we are forever unconsciously either casting shadows, or pouring sunshine--we should seek to learn this Christian art of contentment.

What are some of the elements of this divine philosophy of living?

One is patient submission to all the ills and hardships of life, which are unavoidable. No person's lot is perfect. No mortal ever yet found a set of circumstances without some unpleasant feature. Sometimes it is in our power--to modify the discomforts. Our trouble is often of our own making! Much of it needs only a little energetic activity on our part, to remove it. We are fools, if we live on amid ills and hardships, which a reasonable industry would change to comforts, or even pleasures!

But if there are unavoidable ills or burdens, which we cannot by any energy of our own remove or lighten--they must be submitted to without murmuring. We have a saying that, "What cannot be cured--must be endured." But the very phrasing tells of an unyielding heart! There is submission to the inevitable--but no reconciliation to it!

True contentment does not chafe under disappointments and losses--but accepts them, becomes reconciled to them, and at once looks about to find something good in them. This is the secret of happy living! And when we come to think of it--how senseless it is to struggle against the inevitable! Discontent helps nothing. It never removes a hardship, or makes a burden any lighter, or brings back a vanished pleasure. One never feels better, for complaining. It only makes him wretched!

A starling in a cage struggles against its fate, flies against the wire walls, and beats upon them in efforts to be free--until its wings are all bruised and bleeding! A canary is shut in another cage, accepts the restraint, perches itself upon its bar and sings. Surely, the canary is wiser than the starling!

We would also get far along toward contentment, if we ceased to waste time dreaming over unattainable earthly good. Only a few people can be great or rich; the mass must always remain in ordinary circumstances. Suppose that each of the forty million people in the world, were millionaires; who could be found to do the work that must be done? Or suppose that all were great poets. Imagine the forty million people in the world, all writing poetry! Who would write the prose? A little serious reflection will show that the world needs only a very few great and conspicuous lives--while it needs millions for its varied industries, its plain duties, its hard toil.

Also, a large amount of our discontent arises from our envy of those who have what we have not. There are many who lose all the comfort of their own lives--in coveting the better things that some other one possesses! How foolish!

There are several considerations which ought to modify this miserable feeling of envy, which brings so much bitterness. If we could know the secret history of the life that we envy for its splendor and prosperity, perhaps we would not exchange for it our lowlier life, with its plain circumstances. Certain it is, that contentment is not so apt to dwell in palaces or on thrones--as in the homes of the humble. The tall peaks rise nearer the skies--but the winds smite them more fiercely!

Then why should I hide my one talent in the earth--because it is not ten? Why should I make my life a failure in the place allotted to me, while I sit down and dream over unattainable things? Why should I miss my one golden opportunity, however small--while I envy some other one--what seems his greater opportunity? Countless people make themselves wretched--by vainly trying to grasp far-away joys, while

they leave untouched and despised--the numberless little joys and bright bits of happiness, which lie close to their hand.

As one has written, "Stretching out his hand to catch the stars--man forgets the flowers at his feet--so beautiful, so fragrant, so multitudinous and so various." The secret of happiness lies in extracting pleasure from the things we have--while we enter no mad, vain chase after impossible dreams!

Another way to train ourselves to cheerful views of life--is resolutely to refuse to be frightened at shadows, or even to see trouble where there is none. Half or more of the things that most worry us--have no existence, but in a disordered imagination. Many things that in the dim distance look like shapes of peril, when we draw near to them--melt into harmless shadows, or even change into forms of friendliness! Much of the gloomy tinge that many people see on everything, is caused by the color of the glasses through which they look. We look out through our blue-glasses, and then wonder what makes everything blue! The greater part of our discontent, is caused by some imaginary trouble which never really comes. We can do much toward curing ourselves of fretting and worrying--by refusing to be fooled by a foreboding imagination.

We also need to learn--ever to make the best of things. There will always be cloudy days. No one can live without meeting discomforts, disappointments and hardships. No wisdom, no industry of ours can eliminate from our experience, all that is disagreeable or painful. But shall we allow the one discordant note in the grand symphony--to mar for us all the noble music? Shall we permit the one discomfort in our home--to cast a cloud over all its pleasures and embitter all its joys? Shall we not seek for the bright side? There is really sunshine enough in the darkest day--to make any ordinary mortal happy--if he only has eyes to see it!

It is marvelous what a trifling thing will give joy to a truly grateful heart. Mr. Park in the bleak desert, found the greatest delight in a single tuft of moss growing in the sand. It saved him from despair and from death, and filled his soul with joy and hope. There is no lot in life so dreary--that it has not at least its one little patch of beauty; or its one wee flower looking up out of the dreariness, like a smile of God.

Even if the natural eye can see no brightness in the cloud, the faith of the Christian knows that there is good in everything, for the child of God. There are reasons, no doubt, why no perfect happiness can be found in this world. If there were no thorns in our pillow here on earth--would we care to pillow our heads on the bosom of divine love? Our Father makes our nest rough--to drive us to seek the warmer, softer nest, prepared for us in his own love.

To each one who is truly in Christ, and who really loves God--there is a promise of good out of all things. "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God; to those who are called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28. There is a wondrous chemistry in the divine providence, which out of the commingling of life's strange elements--always produces blessing! Thus faith's vision sees good in all things, however dark they may appear--and ill in nothing! We need but living faith in God's love and care to us--to enable us to take a cheerful view of any experience.

There is another purely Christian element in the culture of contentment which must not be overlooked. The more the heart becomes engaged with God, and its affections enchained about him--the less is it disturbed by the little roughnesses and hardships of earth. Things that fret childhood, have no power to break the peace of manhood. As we grow into higher spiritual manhood, and become more and more filled with Christ--we shall rise above the power of earth's discontents! We shall be happy even amid trials and

losses, amid discomforts and disappointments, because our life is hid with Christ in God--and we have food to eat of which the world knows not!

Thus we may train ourselves away from all gloomy and despondent habits and experiences, toward cheerfulness and hope. The lesson, well learned, will repay our greatest efforts! It will bring some new pleasure into every moment. It will paint beauty for us--on the dreariest desert. It will plant flowers for us--along every step of the rugged road. It will bring music for us--out of every sighing wind and wailing storm. It will fill the darkest night with star-beams! It will make us sunny-hearted Christians--pleasing God, and blessing the world!

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