

Proverbs 17:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.

Analysis

This proverb connects emotional state to physical health: 'A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.' The 'merry heart' (lev sameach—joyful, cheerful heart) produces beneficial effects comparable to medicine (gehah—healing). Modern medicine confirms the connection between mental/emotional health and physical wellbeing. Conversely, 'a broken spirit' (ruach nekhe'ah—crushed, discouraged spirit) causes physical deterioration—'drieth the bones' suggests weakening one's core vitality. This wisdom validates the profound interconnection of body, soul, and spirit, recognizing that spiritual and emotional health affect physical health.

Historical Context

Ancient medicine lacked modern understanding of psychosomatic connections, yet experiential wisdom recognized that joy and sorrow affect physical health. Biblical anthropology views humans holistically—body and spirit intertwined, not separate compartments. Greek dualism would later separate physical and spiritual, but Hebrew thought maintained their integration. This proverb reflects that holistic perspective.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What spiritual or emotional burdens are you carrying that may be affecting your physical health and vitality?
2. How can you cultivate a 'merry heart' rooted in joy in the Lord rather than mere positive thinking?

Interlinear Text

לִבָּשׁ	שְׁמַמְתָּן	יְיַצְּרָבָה	גָּבָהּ	וְרַם	בְּכָאָה	תִּיבְשֶׁת
heart	A merry	doeth good	like a medicine	spirit	but a broken	drieth
H3820	H8056	H3190	H1456	H7307	H5218	H3001

גָּבָהּ
the bones
H1634

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 15:13 (Spirit): A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.

Proverbs 12:25 (Good): Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.

Proverbs 18:14 (Spirit): The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?

2 Corinthians 7:10 (Parallel theme): For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

2 Corinthians 2:7 (Parallel theme): So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.

Psalms 22:15 (Parallel theme): My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.

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