

Proverbs 18:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?

Analysis

This proverb presents one of Scripture's most profound observations about human nature. 'The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity' (רוּחַ-אִישׁ/ruach-ish, the human spirit) indicates that inner resilience enables people to endure physical suffering, poverty, persecution—almost any external hardship. History records countless examples of those who survived horrific circumstances through inner strength. But 'a wounded spirit who can bear?' (רוּחַ-נְקֵאָה/ruach neke'ah, a stricken/crushed spirit) identifies the one unbearable condition. When the inner person is broken—through guilt, shame, betrayal, loss of hope—survival becomes impossible. This reveals humanity's fundamental spiritual nature. We are not merely physical beings who happen to have thoughts—we are fundamentally spiritual beings in physical bodies. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:4: 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God' (Matthew 4:4). Only God can heal the wounded spirit. David cried, 'A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise' (Psalm 51:17).

Historical Context

Israel experienced this truth corporately during the Babylonian exile. Physical hardship was bearable, but spiritual devastation—the destruction of the temple, seeming abandonment by God—crushed them. The psalmist lamented, 'By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept' (Psalm 137:1). Restoration came not through improved circumstances but through God's presence and promises renewed. In the New Testament era, believers endured persecution,

poverty, and martyrdom with joy (Acts 5:41; Hebrews 10:34) because their spirits were sustained by Christ. But when believers fell into unrepentant sin—like the man in 1 Corinthians 5—spiritual brokenness required urgent restoration. The early church recognized that spiritual wounds demanded the Great Physician's intervention.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. Have you experienced the difference between physical/circumstantial hardship and spiritual woundedness?
2. How does understanding your fundamentally spiritual nature change your priorities and responses to life's challenges?
3. Who do you know with a 'wounded spirit,' and how might you point them to the only One who can heal such wounds?

Interlinear Text

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ישָׁאַבְהָה:

who can bear

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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 17:22 (Spirit): A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.

1 Peter 1:6 (Parallel theme): Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

Psalms 147:3 (Parallel theme): He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.

James 1:2 (Parallel theme): My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

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 109:22 (Parallel theme): For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me.