

Discipling The Sick

Memory Text: Matthew 15:30, 31: “And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them: ³¹ Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.”

Introduction: Someone said the world is like a hospital. Sickness and disease has and will always be with us. Consider the following statistics from the World Health Organization.

While the world has made significant progress in reducing the number of child deaths (ages 1-5) by 40%, around 7 million still died in 2011. Almost 75% of child deaths are caused by just six conditions: neonatal causes (preterm birth, birth asphyxia and infections), pneumonia, diarrhea, malaria, HIV/AIDS and measles.

Between 1990 and 2011, the proportion of overweight children doubled in the WHO African Region as well as in the WHO European region, which has the highest proportion (12.5%) of over overweight children. Overweight is often linked with heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, etc.

Almost 10% of the world's adult population has diabetes. People with diabetes have increased risk of heart disease and stroke and are 10 times more likely to need a lower limb amputation than people who do not have diabetes. It is one of the leading causes of renal failure, visual impairment and blindness.

In 2011, an estimated 1.7 million people died from AIDS-related causes worldwide – 24% less than in 2005. New infections have also declined but not enough. In 2011, an estimated 2.5 million people worldwide were newly infected with HIV. Around 34 million people living with HIV worldwide, 23 million (70%) of them are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Also consider these top deadly diseases of the developing world, some of which have already been mentioned (figures from 2007): 4 million die annually from lower respiratory infections, 1-5 million from malaria, 2.2 million from diarrhea, 2 million from tuberculosis, ½ million from measles, 2-300,000 from whooping cough, ¼ million from tetanus, 174,000 from meningitis, and 157,000 from syphilis. The infection rate of each of these diseases is of course much larger.

You should try it if you haven't already – www.healthmap.org. A team of researchers, epidemiologists, and software developers at Boston Children's Hospital teamed up to create an online disease monitoring and real-time surveillance

program of emerging public health threats across the globe. The site brings together disparate data sources, including online news aggregators, eyewitness reports, expert-curated discussions, and validated official reports. Just yesterday I discovered the following happening in _____: _____.
We are surrounded by the threat of disease, and disease itself.

Not to overwhelm anyone, but add to these figures the following concern: Noncommunicable diseases (also known as chronic diseases, not passed from person to person) kill more than 36 million people each year. Cardiovascular diseases account for most NCD deaths, or 17.3 million people annually, followed by cancers (7.6 million), respiratory diseases (4.2 million), and diabetes (1.3 million). These four groups of diseases account for around 80% of all NCD deaths. They share four risk factors: tobacco use, physical inactivity, the harmful use of alcohol, and unhealthy diets.

Our world is ripe for an authentic, Biblical ministry of healing to the sick, as it was when Jesus came, in the “fullness of time,” about 2,000 years ago to be man’s Savior and Redeemer. “The bodies of human beings, made for the dwelling place of God, had become the habitation of demons. The senses, the nerves, the passions, the organs of men, were worked by supernatural agencies in the indulgence of the vilest lust. The very stamp of demons was impressed upon the countenances of men.” (The Desire Of Ages, p. 36)

That’s why, “during His ministry, Jesus devoted more time to healing the sick than to preaching. His miracles testified to the truth of His words, that He came not to destroy, but to save. Wherever He went, the tidings of His mercy preceded Him. Where He had passed, the objects of His compassion were rejoicing in health and making trial of their new-found powers...As He passed through the towns and cities He was like a vital current, diffusing life and joy.” (The Ministry Of Healing, pp. 19, 20)

Sunday – The Healing Messiah

Let’s briefly review the magnificent healings that took place during the ministry of Jesus (22 recorded events in the gospels):

Matthew 8:1 – the healing of a leper; Matthew 8:5 – the healing of a Roman centurion’s servant; Matthew 8:14 – the healing of Peter’s mother-in law; Matthew 8:28 – the healing of the wild men at Gadara; Matthew 9:1 – the healing of the palsied (paralytic) man; Matthew 9:20 – healing of the woman with a hemorrhage; Matthew 9:27 – the healing of two blind men; Matthew 9:32 – the healing of a demon-possessed man; Matthew 12:10 – the healing of a man with a withered hand; Matthew 15:21 – the healing of the Syrophenicians’ daughter; Matthew 17:14 – the healing of an epileptic boy;

Matthew 20:30 – the healing of the two blind men at Jericho, one being Bartimaeus; Mark 1:23 – the healing of a man with an unclean spirit; Mark 7:31 – the healing of a deaf, speechless man; Mark 8:22 – the healing of a blind man at Bethesda; Luke 13:11 – the healing of a woman that had an infirmity; Luke 14:1 – the healing of a man with dropsy (edema); Luke 17:11 – the healing of the ten lepers; Luke 22:50 – the healing of Malchus' (servant of the high priest) ear; John 4:46 – the healing of a nobleman's son; John 5:1 – the healing of a lame man at Bethesda; John 9:1 – the healing of a blind man

Jesus healings were indiscriminate. He didn't decide some people were more worthy to be healed than others. It didn't matter what disease, what gender, what nationality, whether people brought the disease upon themselves, or whether it was hereditary or misfortune. It didn't matter. They came to Him for healing and they received it.

Also keep in mind, that the Jews in Jesus day generally believed that every sickness was a penalty for some sin of the sufferer or his/her parents. The story of the healing of the blind man in John 9 reveals this type of strange and superstitious thinking when the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). And Jesus replied, "Neither," refuting the common false knowledge of the day.

"It was generally believed by the Jews that sin is punished in this life. Every affliction was regarded as the penalty of some wrongdoing, either of the sufferer himself or of his parents. It is true that all suffering results from the transgression of God's law, but this truth had become perverted. Satan, the author of sin and all its results, had led men to look upon disease and death as proceeding from God, - as punishment arbitrarily inflicted on account of sin. Hence one upon whom some great affliction or calamity had fallen had the additional burden of being regarded as a great sinner." (The Desire Of Ages, p. 471)

But Jesus came to reveal to the world the true nature of God – that He is love. Through His ministry of healing Jesus exemplified the generous and compassionate attributes of God, and revealed that God takes no delight in suffering, but rather seeks to relieve it. If anyone thought that God was arbitrary and unkind, they had to rethink their conclusions having witnessed the demonstration of divine love and empathy through Christ's acts of healing.

It's important for people today who question whether God truly is love to take the time to read these stories of God's healing works, and ask themselves whether God is truly the author of sickness and suffering. Jesus' life reflected the wonderful mercy and compassion of a Father Who truly cares for His creation.

Isaiah 43:2, 3: "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. ³ A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth." Jesus didn't come to push Himself on

people, but He would carefully handle (like a box that contains fragile goods) those who needed help and healing.

Isaiah 61:1, 2: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; ²To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;”

Malachi 4:2: “But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings...”

* **Matthew 8:16, 17:** “When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: ¹⁷That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.”

Under inspiration Matthew takes a passage from Isaiah that is talking about Christ vicariously taking our infirmities of sin (consider context), and makes a literal application to the healing ministry of Christ. In His humanity He was fully able to feel and express human sympathy. He felt with us and for us.

Christ has committed to us, the church, a ministry of healing - a compassionate and sympathetic ministry that knows no color or creed. And this ministry of healing is not the end in and of itself, but the means to an end – drawing people to Christ as Savior.

Monday – Healing The Body

When I think about this ministry that opens doors and hearts for the gospel (because after all, Christ’s ministry found a way to people’s hearts and it will for us too), I wonder whether I’m doing all that I can do to help and bless others. Not that I can help everyone, but am I equipped enough, do I know enough about how the body works - anatomy and physiology, and simple natural remedies to make a difference in someone’s life? What can I do...what more can we do as a church to bring whole health to those entrusted to our care?

I thank God for books like *The Ministry Of Healing* and *Counsels On Diets & Foods* penned, not by leading physicians or nutritionists, but by a little lady who received very little formal education, however was led by God to help people understand the true nature of healthful living and to avoid the misinformation circulating in her day, as well as ours. What Ellen White wrote was 100 years ahead of their time, making these books extremely relevant today.

Just knowing what is written in these books will not only help an individual know how to properly care for their personal health, but also provide a framework to

know how to assist others in need of care. I'm not advocating for bypassing doctors or dealing carelessly with this information, but what I am saying is a person will be literally blessed if they make an application of the counsel offered at the hand of inspiration. After all, it is an act of spiritual worship to take care of the bodies God has entrusted to our care.

Psalm 139:14: "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well."

3 John 2: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth."

Romans 12:1, 2: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. ² And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Here Paul calls for Christians to dedicate their bodies to God. He then calls on them to dedicate their intellectual and spiritual faculties, because we are not comprised of separate, independent entities, but we are a whole person, each aspect of our makeup affecting the other.

*** 1 Thessalonians 5:23:** "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." True sanctification is the dedication of the entire being – spirit (mind), soul (emotions and desires perhaps), and body to God. We don't believe Platonic theory that asserts that there is an immortal soul that will live on after the body dies. As a result ancient Greeks didn't care for their bodies. These were two separate entities – one living forever, the other dying. The one that died wasn't important.

God asks us to care for the bodies He's entrusted to our keeping – what we put *in* them and what we do *with* them. Why? The health of our body is intimately linked to the health of our minds, and the health of our spirituality. I've never met an overworked man who is a patient man. *Visits to hospitals & overate.*

When Jesus healed people, He healed their whole person. Physical healing was a means to an end – to save the person for eternity. No point making a person healthy just so he can go to hell. Jesus made the person healthy for heaven. When the paralytic was brought into the presence of Jesus he was both physically helpless and spiritually hopeless. He realized that it was his own sins that were responsible for his sufferings. He knew he had violated nature's laws and as a result he sought both physical and spiritual healing. Knowing this, Jesus told him that his sins were forgiven (Mark 2:5) which provided both hope and help to the man.

A friend of mine works as a medical missionary. He told the story of a couple he was working with to aid them with some necessary lifestyle changes to avoid hospitalization. He did everything he knew he could do for them – exercise, total vegetarian diet, establishing a routine, etc. One was improving, the other wasn't. When he dug deeper he discovered there was resentment in her life – unresolved hard feelings with a family member that was just eating away at her. After taking her through steps to accept God's forgiveness and to forgive her family member, her health drastically improved.

Tuesday – Healing The Mind & Body

“A great deal of the sickness which afflicts humanity has its origin in the mind, and can only be cured by restoring the mind to health.” (Counsels On Health, p. 349)
Through physical as well as mental restoration did Jesus make disciples. Remember, restoring physical and mental health was not the final objective in Jesus ministry. His goal was always discipleship. *Story of demon-possessed man in Gadara* (Luke 8:26-39). He was sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind. Afterward Jesus sent him home to his family to testify of his deliverance.

How might the principles taught in the following verses relieve anxiety, guilt, and shame that underlie many mental illnesses? After all, the relationship between mind and body is well established by medical science. Anxiety predisposes some to stomach problems. Worry causes sleep disorders (as does excessive coffee drinking). Unfettered anger factors into heart disease.

Matthew 6:33, 34: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. ³⁴ Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

1 Peter 5:7: “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”

2 Corinthians 4:7-10: “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. ⁸ We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.”

Philippians 4:4-7: “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. ⁶ Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are

just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. ⁹Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.”

* **1 John 3:20-22:** “For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. ²¹Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. ²²And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.”

Ultimately we should trust God and His precious promises. Sing when you’re stressed or sad; pray when something bothers you or you need direction; rest in God’s care when you don’t know what the outcome will be; and know without a shadow of doubt that God loves you and has your best interest at heart.

Wednesday – The Resurrection & The Life

Two things you can count on in life – death and taxes (roadwork in the summer). We’ve reviewed Jesus awesome miracles of healing, but we didn’t stop to review 3 incredible stories that provide the follower of Christ with hope beyond the grave: the raising of Jarius’ daughter (Matt. 9:23), the raising of the widow’s son (Luke 7:11), and the raising of Jesus friend Lazarus (John 11: 38).

Although Christ brought healing to people, eventually they would die. But in the acts of raising the dead, Christ offers much more than good health here and now, but eternal life there and then. Disease and accidents might initially prevail, but eternal life will ultimately conquer. Healing might not happen every time it is requested (and we’re not always sure why), but everlasting life is guaranteed to all who make Jesus their Lord and Savior.

Later Jesus would rise from the dead and in 1 Cor. 15:20, 21 Paul would say, “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits [or the pledge] of them that slept. For since by man came death; by man came also the resurrection of the dead.”

This is so much more wonderful than merely being healed (as good as that is). Sometimes we gather to pray and anoint someone for healing (as instructed in James 5:13-16). I always tell that person that Christ will always heal, if not miraculously, then through right living and/or medicine. If not through right living and/or medicine, then at least when Jesus comes back again and we all get brand new bodies!

Thursday – Christ’s Healing Legacy

As Christ had a healing ministry, He gifted and equipped the church with a healing ministry as well.

Peter and Paul healed a lame man by the Gate Beautiful (Acts 3:1-11); Luke writes that “by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people...and they were healed every one.” (Acts 5:12-16); Peter’s shadow apparently healed some folk (Acts 5:15); Dorcas was raised from the dead at the hand of Peter; and Eutychus was also raised from the dead, but this time through Paul (Acts 20:7-10).

The gifts of the Spirit included “gifts healing” and “to another the working of miracles.” (1 Cor. 12:7-9; 28-31) And these gifts would be in the church until the return of Christ for the furthering of the work of the gospel.

Contrary to strange displays of healing witnessed in some churches today, God outlined a simple, yet special ritual that can be performed for anyone who was sick seeking God’s miraculous intervention. This didn’t mean that they should do this every time someone caught a cold, nor should they do this only when a person is on their deathbed.

*** James 5:13-16:** “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. ¹⁴ Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: ¹⁵ And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. ¹⁶ Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

Why don’t we see more miracles today, like in Christ’s day? “The way in which Christ worked was to preach the Word, and to relieve suffering by miraculous works of healing. But I am instructed that we cannot now work in this way, for Satan will exercise his power by working miracles. God’s servants today could not work by means of miracles, because spurious works of healing, claiming to be divine, will be wrought.

For this reason the Lord has marked out a way in which His people are to carry forward a work of physical healing, combined with the teaching of the Word. Sanitariums are to be established, and with these institutions are to be connected workers who will carry forward genuine medical missionary work.” (Selected Messages, Vol. 2, p. 54)

“God’s Word declares that Satan will work miracles. He will make people sick, and then will suddenly remove from them his satanic power. They will then be regarded as healed. These works of apparent healing will bring Seventh-day Adventists to the test. Many who have had great light will fail to walk in the light, because they have not become one with Christ.” (Selected Messages, Vol. 2, p. 53)

So it is through the health message that God wants to work...NEWSTART. We do have assurance of divine intervention at His discretion through the Bible anointing service outlined in James 5. But for now God works primarily through natural means, not always the spectacular.

Appeal: What a privilege to be teamed up with Christ in the ministry of healing. We each have a work to do for others in this area. It's not to be left to our hospitals, as grateful as we are for the work they do. It's the one on one ministry that will truly make a difference for the kingdom of heaven.

"Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'

There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice.

Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit." (The Ministry Of Healing, p. 143)