

Faith *and* Healing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 3:8–10, Ps. 118:6, Prov. 17:22, Matt. 6:27–34, Heb. 13:6, 1 John 4:18.*

Memory Text: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee” (*Isaiah 26:3*).

Convinced that he was the victim of an evil spell, a patient came to a physician with symptoms unrelated to any known disease or syndrome. The doctor placed before the patient two glass tubes, one filled with hydrogen peroxide, the other with plain water, though both looked identical. He then drew blood from the patient and mixed it with the hydrogen peroxide. The mixture immediately started to bubble and fizz, which the patient believed was the work of the evil spell.

The doctor then gave the patient a simple saline injection, telling him that this would break the spell. After a while, he then drew blood from the patient and mixed it with the plain water in the other glass. There was no bubbling or fizzing, proof that the spell was broken. The patient left feeling cured, so much so that he brought all his friends to the doctor to be cured, as well.

This story shows, indeed, how powerful an influence our mind has on our bodies, the subject for this week's lesson.

The Week at a Glance: Faith and trust in the Lord's goodness can have very positive health effects.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 8.*

The Fear Factor

For a few seasons, TV watchers were subjected to a show called *Fear Factor*, in which contestants would be placed in various fearful situations: from sitting in a pit filled with scorpions or rats to walking through a building that was on fire—all in order to see how well they would deal with fear.

Of course, one doesn't need to manufacture fear. Life itself, in this fallen world, is full of things that cause us to be afraid. A seventeenth-century British political philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, wrote that fear was the prime and motivating factor in all human life and that humans created governments for the main purpose of protecting us against those who would do us harm. No matter who we are, where we live, how good and safe we might feel, we all face things that cause us to fear.

Fear, though, in and of itself, isn't always bad.

What are ways in which fear can help protect us? What are things, in fact, that we should be afraid of?

Fear is a natural and necessary emotion that helps humans cope with danger and helps them survive. This emotion and instinct is necessary in a world subject to accidents, crime, disease, terrorism, and war.

What can we learn about fear from the Bible's first mention of it? *Gen. 3:8–10.*

Sure, there are many things to make us afraid in this world. So often, though, we find ourselves fearing things that never come to pass. Fear is a very stressful emotion, one that can take a powerful physical toll on our bodies. In other words, fear is not merely limited to what it does to our minds; it can have a very deleterious effect on our physical health, as well. No matter who we are, where we live, or what challenges we face, fear is an ever-present part of our lives. The question for us, then, should be, How are we to deal with it?

What are your fears? How have they affected your life? How can you better take advantage of the promises of God in dealing with things that make you afraid?

A Man Said to the Universe

A man said to the universe:
 “Sir I exist!”
 “However,” replied the universe,
 “The fact has not created in me
 A sense of obligation.”—Stephen Crane

Read the poem above. What is the message there? How should we, as Seventh-day Adventist Christians, differ in our view of our place in the universe from the idea presented here? What is the main reason for that difference?

Think for a moment: suppose there were no God, no Creator, no Divine Power who created us. Suppose, instead, we were what many folk claim we are: highly advanced apes, nothing more; just beings who arose amid a godless universe that cares nothing about us at all. Suppose we were at the mercy of mindless forces that have no interest or concern about us or our well-being. What kind of world would that be?

In contrast, that is not what we as Christians believe. We believe, instead, that God created us, sustains us, and cares for us. Because of this, we of all people should have reasons to be able to deal with the fears and trials that beset all humanity.

Look up the following texts. What hope and comfort, even amid fearful times, can you draw from these texts? *Ps. 118:6; Prov. 3:5, 6; Luke 12:6, 7; Rom. 8:38, 39; Heb. 13:6; 2 Tim. 1:7; 1 John 4:18.*

There is no question, even as Christians who believe in the existence of God, that we face a scary world out there, a world where anything can happen. With our knowledge of God, however, we have a context, a background, to help us better understand the world as a whole and our place in it. And thus, ideally, we can have hope and comfort even amid the most trying times. This does not mean we do not face bad things or things that can cause us to fear. It means, instead, that we have a firm foundation upon which to meet and deal with those fears.

The Power of Faith

“A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones” (Prov. 17:22, NKJV). What does this text tell us about the link between the mind and the body?

A young child lay dying in a hospital bed when his teacher visited him and gave him some schoolwork to do. “Here, Michael,” he said, “are lessons on verbs and adverbs. Do the best you can.” The teacher, though, could not help but sense the futility of it all, because the child seemed so lethargic, so empty, so resigned to death. Yet, right after that, the child had a remarkable turnaround. Before the prognosis was not good, and he now seemed well on his way to recovery. When asked about what happened, about why the schoolwork seemed to have changed him so much, he replied, “They wouldn’t give a dying boy work on adverbs and verbs, would they?”

No question, the link between our mind, our attitude, and our bodies is very powerful. Though science cannot fully explain how that link works, it recognizes that the link is there, and this can make a world of difference in our overall health.

And here is where faith in God and trust in His love and His goodness can make such a difference. How much easier to be calmer and less stressed when you know the reality of God’s love and His care for you! Studies from around the world have shown that religious faith brings with it clear health benefits, that those who believe in God tend to live longer, to suffer less depression, and to deal better emotionally with traumatic events. And while we certainly can’t rule out the supernatural and miraculous power of God to bring healing in our lives, that is not necessarily what is only involved here. Instead, the peace, the assurance, the hope that faith gives believers no doubt can bring about mental attitudes that will impact our overall health. A merry heart can, indeed, be like medicine—even better, because so often medicine can come with deleterious side effects.

Read Matthew 6:27–34. What is Jesus saying to us here? How can you apply these words to whatever is causing you fear and worry now? Are any of those fears too great for the Lord to handle? Is anyone beyond the loving reach of God? How can you learn to surrender these fears to the Lord and have the peace that He promises?

Stressing Out

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:13, NKJV). How can you learn to better claim these promises? What attitudes or actions are holding you back?

One of the greatest health challenges we all face has to do with stress; it does not have to be with major traumas in life but with life in general, with the daily pressures that we so often face.

Doctors report that up to 90 percent of patients they see come with stress-related complaints. Science has shown that when we are stressed, we release certain hormones that can affect various organs in our bodies. Over long periods of time, the organs can be weakened by these hormones, making them more susceptible to disease. Stress, for instance, can release adrenaline, which causes the heart to beat faster and more powerfully, leading to palpitations. Some stress hormones cause the blood vessels to constrict, causing hypertension. Stress can induce shallow and rapid breathing, even hyperventilation. Stress can result in the diversion of blood from the stomach, causing digestive problems. (Who has not felt what fear, anxiety, and worry can do to the stomach?) Stress can cause an increase in blood glucose, which in some people can lead to diabetes. Stress also is known to have a negative impact on our sleep, which in turn can have a negative impact on our overall health. Stress has been shown, too, to affect negatively our immune system, our body’s frontline defense against disease.

The list can go on and on. And so the point should be clear. We need to learn to handle stress. Here is where faith in God can have such an important role, because knowing and experiencing for yourself the reality of God’s love can have such a calming effect, greatly reducing stress and the negative health consequences that often follow it.

Just being religious, in and of itself, is not the answer. What is most important is having a personal relationship with Jesus, knowing for yourself His love and care. This can be done through daily reading of the Word, through prayer, through talking to the Lord as if with a friend, and through contemplating His character as revealed in nature and Scripture. How much time do you spend getting to know the Lord for yourself? Might you need, perhaps, to spend a little more time with your Lord and Maker?

Faith and Miraculous Healing

Even a superficial reading of the Gospels shows that much of Jesus' ministry involved miraculous healing: the sick, the blind, the dying, even the dead—all were healed through the supernatural power of the Lord. In many cases, too, faith is treated as a prerequisite to the healing itself (*Matt. 9:2, 22, 28, 29; 15:28*).

In contrast, in some cases, disbelief was a deterrent to healing, as in Nazareth (*Matt. 13:58; Mark 6:5, 6*). In one case when the disciples were unable to perform a healing, Jesus said it was because of their unbelief (*Matt. 17:14–20*).

The fact, however, that faith is such an important component in these miraculous healings has led some to believe that if an attempt at healing through prayer fails, it is because of a lack of faith on the part of the one who is sick. Yet, this is a very superficial and false understanding of faith and healing.

Read the following texts in which Jesus miraculously healed people.

What do the texts say about the faith of those who were healed?

What lessons can we take from these examples? *Matt. 12:9–13, Luke 13:11–13, 14:2–4, 22:47–52.*

In none of these texts is there any mention of faith on the part of those who were healed. This is not to diminish the role of faith in the question of miraculous healing; it is just to show that expressed faith is not always a crucial component.

The fact is that we do not understand why in some cases we can see what is obviously a supernatural intervention of the Lord for healing. In other cases, healing comes from natural processes, in which we justifiably can believe that the hand of the Lord is working in behalf of the sick through these means. And there always are those cases where, for reasons we do not understand, healing does not come as we have prayed for and would wish for. The good news for us as Seventh-day Adventist Christians, however, is that even in these latter cases, we still can trust in the love, mercy, and goodness of God, even amid the inexplicable tragedies that always are part of a fallen world.

How can we learn to trust in the Lord and in His love for us, even when prayers for health and healing have not come as we would have liked?

Further Study: “In true science there can be nothing contrary to the teaching of the word of God, for both have the same Author. A correct understanding of both will always prove them to be in harmony.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 258. See also *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 462 and *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, vol. 12, pp. 751–783. In light of this understanding, there should be no hesitation in seeking God’s help through true science—which is a revelation of His natural laws.

“The sympathy which exists between the mind and the body is very great. When one is affected, the other responds. The condition of the mind has much to do with the health of the physical system. If the mind is free and happy, under a consciousness of right doing and a sense of satisfaction in causing happiness to others, it will create a cheerfulness that will react upon the whole system, causing a freer circulation of the blood and a toning up of the entire body. The blessing of God is a healer, and those who are abundant in benefiting others will realize that wondrous blessing in their hearts and lives.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 60, 61; *Counsels on Stewardship*, pp. 345, 346.

“We all desire immediate and direct answers to our prayers, and are tempted to become discouraged when the answer is delayed or comes in an unlooked-for form. But God is too wise and good to answer our prayers always at just the time and in just the manner we desire. He will do more and better for us than to accomplish all our wishes. And because we can trust His wisdom and love, we should not ask Him to concede to our will, but should seek to enter into and accomplish His purpose. Our desires and interests should be lost in His will. These experiences that test faith are for our benefit. By them it is made manifest whether our faith is true and sincere, resting on the word of God alone, or whether depending on circumstances, it is uncertain and changeable. Faith is strengthened by exercise. We must let patience have its perfect work, remembering that there are precious promises in the Scriptures for those who wait upon the Lord.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 230, 231.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What is the role of medical science in the healing of the Christian? Does seeking health and healing from medical science mean we don’t have faith in God?
- 2 What has been your experience regarding the link between attitudes and emotions and physical health? What have you learned that could help others use the power of the mind to benefit the body?
- 3 Do you know someone in your church who is sick and in need of healing? How can you, either as an individual or as part of a class, help that person in the healing process?

A Thousand Ways

by ERIC KOFI BOADI-AGYEKUM

I'm from Ghana, West Africa. I wanted to study in a university, but I didn't know which one. Someone told me about Valley View University (VVU), a Seventh-day Adventist school. I had never heard of the school or of Seventh-day Adventists before, but after I asked a lot of questions, I decided to go see the school.

When I walked onto the campus I was amazed. Everyone was so friendly, so helpful, that I wanted to be a part of this institution. I called my brothers, who lived abroad, and they encouraged me to apply. They even promised to help sponsor me. So I applied.

But on the day that I received my acceptance letter from VVU, my brothers told me that they couldn't help me. I was so disappointed. I prayed and fasted about this decision, and I was sure that God wanted me at VVU. Then suddenly I had no way to pay my school fees.

I talked to my church, and the members agreed to help me the first year. So I enrolled.

I come from a charismatic home, and the worship style I knew was far different from the worship services at Valley View. But I felt God's presence in the school's worship, and I realized what a deeply spiritual school this was.

When help from my home church ran out, I had to earn my own school fees, a difficult thing in Africa. I was not a baptized Seventh-day Adventist, but I applied to be a student literature evangelist to earn a scholarship. I was accepted and sent to Nigeria to work. I loved working for God and being a part of the action. I didn't earn enough to pay all my school fees that summer, but God led me to a government worker who helped me.

The next summer I returned to Nigeria to canvass. I earned half my school fees, and I feared that I would have to drop out of school. But again God provided in small ways, and I could stay.

That semester I gave my life totally to God and was baptized. When I took my stand for Christ, the people who helped me withdrew their support. When I thought I had exhausted every means of paying my school fees, I learned that God has a thousand ways to provide. I've learned the importance of trusting Him for everything, for with Christ standing beside me, Satan cannot prevail.

Your mission offerings make Christian education possible. Because of you, I found Christ.

ERIC KOFI BOADI-AGYEKUM *has graduated from Valley View University and is working in Ghana.*

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