

Discipling *the* Sick



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 53:4, Matt. 8:17, Mark 2:1–12, Phil. 4:4–9, 1 John 3:20–22, John 11:37–44.*

Memory Text: “Large crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel” (*Matthew 15:30, 31, NIV*).

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. Crowds were collecting around them to hear from their lips the works that the Lord had wrought. His voice was the first sound that many had ever heard, His name the first word they had ever spoken, His face the first they had ever looked upon. Why should they not love Jesus and sound His praise? As He passed through the towns and cities He was like a vital current, diffusing life and joy.”
—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 19, 20.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 1.

The Healing Messiah

Read Isaiah 53:4, Matthew 8:17, John 9:1–3. In what way are we to understand these texts? What questions do they raise? What hope do they offer us?

In antiquity, sickness was considered the result of sinful actions. (And even today, who hasn't at times—even if only for a moment—wondered if illness, either one's own or that of a loved one, wasn't brought on as a punishment for sin?) In the book of Job, Job's friends suggested that his misfortunes, which included personal illness, resulted from hidden faults; the implication was that somehow his sinfulness caused his predicament. Similarly, Christ's disciples understood blindness as the punishment for someone's sinfulness. This suggests that sickness required not diagnosis or medication but atonement. Matthew references Isaiah's Messianic prophecy, stating that Christ fulfilled this prediction and that healing can be found in Him.

Various ancient pagan traditions included healing deities; none, however, proposed that gods actually took the infirmities upon themselves. Isaiah foretold a Redeemer who would assume our sicknesses and sinfulness. Other ancient traditions made provision for substitutionary atonement in order to benefit royalty. Substitutes were sacrificed in the king's place in order to satisfy divine designs against a king, thus transferring evil's punishment from one individual to another. Nowhere, however, were there traditions of kings dying as substitutes for their subjects.

This, however, is exactly what Isaiah said, and what Matthew confirmed: heaven's Royalty suffering human sicknesses. Interestingly enough, the word translated as “griefs” in Isaiah 53:4 comes from a Hebrew word that means, basically, “sickness” or “disease.”

Jesus recognized that His mission was both to preach deliverance and to heal the brokenhearted (*Luke 4:17–19*). He attracted many through the power that came from His love and character. Others followed Him because they admired His easily understood preaching. Still others became disciples because of how He treated the impoverished. Many, however, followed Christ because He had touched and healed their brokenness.

We all have our broken places. How can we learn to disciple others through sympathy in their own brokenness—a brokenness that we can understand so well because of our own?

Healing the Body

Study Mark 2:1–12. What can we learn regarding the connection between physical sickness and sinfulness? What lessons should we not take from this story, as well?

Contrary to biblical doctrine, ancient Greek philosophy separated the spiritual (soul) and physical (body) dimensions of human existence. Believing that human souls were immortal, many Greeks devalued the importance of their bodies. Because bodies were temporal, passing away with time, they were considered less valuable than was the enduring soul.

In fact, in one of the most famous texts from antiquity, Plato depicts his teacher Socrates, who is about to face death, as waxing long and eloquently on how corrupt and evil the body is, and that at death his immortal soul will finally be free to do all the things that the body has hindered it from doing.

The Bible, of course, teaches something radically different. Human bodies are the direct creation of God, who fearfully and wonderfully made them (*Ps. 139:14*). Furthermore, bodies are not separate from souls. Body, mind, and spirit are merely differing aspects of human personality or existence, not independently existent entities. Consequently, whatever affects the body affects the mind and spirit—the other interrelated aspects of personhood. Thus, whenever Christ healed, He was not merely eradicating cancer or curing heart disease; He was transforming the physical, mental, and spiritual human experience.

Jesus healed more than just bodies. Christ always healed whole persons. His holistic approach recognized that physical health was inseparable from spiritual health. Through physical healing, He effected spiritual transformation. That was, to a great degree, the whole purpose. After all, why heal people who in the long run will die anyway and face eternal destruction at the end of time?

Though sickness can result directly from sinful practices, so often people, even infants, get sick for no obvious reason other than that we are all victims of a fallen world. Why is it so important to keep this sad truth in mind when seeking to minister to anyone who is sick or who is agonizing over a sick loved one?

Healing the Mind and Body

Through physical healing and mental restoration, Jesus made disciples. Often Christ's patients suffered both mental and physical diseases. Physical restoration itself was never the final objective. The ultimate goal was always discipleship. Healing could provide twenty, fifty, perhaps seventy-five additional quality years. Discipleship offered eternal life with Christ.

In Luke 8:26–39, the demon-possessed man from the Gerasene region begged to accompany Jesus. Instead, Christ commissioned him to evangelize his family and townspeople. Having been so miraculously delivered, he could be a powerful witness for Jesus.

Study Matthew 6:19–34, 1 Peter 5:7, 2 Corinthians 4:7–10, Philippians 4:4–9, 1 John 3:20–22. How might the principles taught in these verses relieve the anxiety, guilt, and shame that underlie many mental illnesses?

Physical sickness is sometimes caused by mental stimuli. The relationship between mind and body is well established by medical science. Anxiety predisposes some to stomach problems. Worry causes sleep disorders. Uncontrollable anger factors into heart disease. Teaching people about mental-health principles should highlight the importance of trusting God, naturally leading them toward personal spiritual commitment and full discipleship.

“Each day has its burdens, its cares and perplexities; and when we meet how ready we are to talk of our difficulties and trials. So many borrowed troubles intrude, so many fears are indulged, such a weight of anxiety is expressed, that one might suppose we had no pitying, loving Saviour ready to hear all our requests and to be to us a present help in every time of need.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 121.

Though a close walk with the Lord is no guarantee of good health, there's no question that the peace of mind that comes from knowing the Lord can have a positive impact on us, even physically. What are some practical ways in which we can learn to take the principles taught in today's lesson and apply them to ourselves, especially if we are prone toward worry?

The Resurrection and the Life

In a world where death always has the final word, at least for now, what great hope is found in these verses? *Luke 7:11–17, Mark 5:21–43, John 11:37–44.*

Politicians, entertainers, and athletes must necessarily offer something to generate a following. Politicians utilize hypnotic rhetoric and incredible promises. Entertainers use their abilities to generate emotion and audience identification. Athletes amaze throngs with their physical skills. Envious onlookers follow, wishing they possessed such prowess.

What does Jesus offer? Reduced unemployment? Fatter paychecks? Amazing ball-handling skills? Incredible vocal range? Tear-jerking performances? Instead, Jesus offers something no one else in the world can: eternal life in a new world. In contrast to that, what else matters?

While television shopping networks insult our intelligence with their too-good-to-be-true offers, Jesus seemingly exceeds their excesses with His deal of a lifetime: eternal life offered freely with absolutely no shipping and handling charges! Skeptics would doubtless scoff about such an unprecedented offer. Competitors would manufacture cheap imitations (such as Satan’s immortal-soul concept). Potential buyers would cautiously investigate the claims. So, Jesus provided three known demonstrations to counter the skeptics, expose imitations, and satisfy genuine seekers. Jairus’s daughter, the widow’s son, and, finally, Lazarus proved that this too-good-to-be-true offer was authentic. Disease and accidents might initially prevail, but eternal life would ultimately conquer. Healing would not happen every time it was requested, but everlasting life was guaranteed to all who made Jesus their Savior.

It’s the same with us today. As we know, many times the healing we want just simply does not come in the way that we want it. People linger and suffer for years from debilitating and painful diseases that, far from being healed, sometimes get worse. Others die from disease, despite anointing and prayer. We have no answers as to why, in some cases, healing comes now, and in others it doesn’t.

What we do have, though, is something so much better than even a miraculous healing, and that is the promise of the resurrection to eternal life at the end of the age, when Jesus will come and “the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever” (*Dan. 7:18, NKJV*).

Why is this promise—the promise of eternal life—so crucial and so important to us? Where would we be without it? What hope would you have for anything, anything at all, without it?

Christ's Healing Legacy

Review Acts 3:1–19, 5:12–16, 9:36–42, 20:7–10, 1 Corinthians 12:7–9, 28–31, James 5:13–16. How should modern Christians evaluate the importance of healing ministry to the New Testament church?

First-century disciples witnessed firsthand Christ's promise of seeing "greater things than these" fulfilled (*John 1:50, compare John 5:20, 14:12*). Miraculous healings and resurrections attended the ministries of early Christianity's most prominent disciples: Peter and Paul. These events figured significantly in the early church's growth. God's eternal presence, signified by miraculous healing, influenced thousands of religious leaders to accept Christ. Their flocks often followed.

Sometimes new disciples misunderstood the divine purpose. Simon attempted to purchase miraculous power, revealing self-centered motivations (*Acts 8:9–25*). Most, however, recognized that the significance of these miraculous wonders rested in the fact that they revealed God's presence among them. These displays of divine power proved that God existed and that He was worthy of their praise.

Although Christ had ascended to heaven, throngs still followed Him through the ministries of His disciples. They furthered the mission Jesus had started. They were fulfilling the vision Christ had shared.

Clearly, health was an ongoing concern and a healing ministry an ongoing function of Christ's church. Healing was listed among the spiritual gifts. Instructions for ministering God's healing grace to those afflicted by sickness were recorded in Scripture. These gifts would benefit believers until Christ's second coming, when His personal presence would render them unnecessary. Church history chronicles the dedication of believers to health ministry during many different time periods. Certainly, relieving human suffering was an important motivation. Others, however, recognized healing as the first step toward coming to know the complete gospel.

Further Study: Read Luke 18:35–43; 13:10–17; 14:1–6; John 6:1, 2; Mark 6:5–7, 6:54–56; 7:31–37; 8:22–26; Matthew 8:1–17; 12:15–23. Ellen G. White, “Our Example,” pp. 17–21; “Healing of the Soul,” pp. 73–85, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “The Divine Plan in the Medical Missionary Work,” pp. 25–29, in *Medical Ministry*.

“The paralytic found in Christ healing for both the soul and the body. He needed health of soul before he could appreciate health of body. Before the physical malady could be healed, Christ must bring relief to the mind, and cleanse the soul from sin. This lesson should not be overlooked. There are today thousands suffering from physical disease who, like the paralytic, are longing for the message, ‘Thy sins are forgiven.’ The burden of sin, with its unrest and unsatisfied desires, is the foundation of their maladies. They can find no relief until they come to the Healer of the soul. The peace which He alone can impart would restore vigor to the mind and health to the body. . . .

“In the home of the paralytic there was great rejoicing when he returned to his family, carrying with ease the couch upon which he had been slowly borne from their presence but a short time before. . . . Glad thanksgiving went up from that home, and God was glorified through His Son, who had restored hope to the hopeless and strength to the stricken one. This man and his family were ready to lay down their lives for Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 77, 79.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How can healing ministries open hearts and minds otherwise closed to the gospel? How can Christians guard themselves against the error of thinking that healing is an end in itself?
- 2 How can churches that are not connected with hospitals participate in healing ministry? How can Christians involved with healing ministry avoid association in the public’s mind with so-called faith healers?
- 3 What do we say to those potential disciples who, reading about the healings in the Bible, come to our churches or hospitals in search of a healing that does not happen? What answers do we have for them? What answers do we have for ourselves as we seek to understand these situations? What answers are found in the Bible that can help us at times like these?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Matthew 15:30, 31*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Comprehend that while sickness is always an unwelcome visitor, people afflicted with disease are often open to spiritual influences.

Feel: Desire to minister to those who are sick by serving their emotional and spiritual needs, as well as their physical needs.

Do: Help to alleviate the burdens that affect others spiritually or emotionally.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Illness Is No Indication of a Person's Spiritual Condition.

A Why was it easy for people in ancient times to blame illness on someone's displeasing God?

B How did Jesus work to counteract this notion?

C Is that mentality still noticeable in the church? If so, how? How can Jesus' example be used in our approach to overcoming this mentality?

II. Feel: Jesus Healed Spiritually and Emotionally, as Well as Physically.

A What are your favorite stories of healing in Jesus' earthly ministry? Why those?

B What clues in those stories help you understand that Jesus was interested in more than physical healing?

III. Do: Be Aware of the Suffering—Apparent and Not-So-Apparent—Around You.

A We often greet people by asking, "How are you?" And the response is usually, "Fine." How do you know when someone isn't "fine"?

B Can you remember a time in your life when you felt physically or emotionally sick? What helped you get past it?

► **Summary:** We are still learning about the intimate correlation between physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Jesus knew at a glance how to minister to the people He met. How can we do the same?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Spotlight on Scripture: *Matthew 15:30, 31*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: **Even in an age when life expectancy is on the increase and so much is known about health and healing, sickness is an ever-present reality because of evil in the world.**

Just for Teachers: **Everyone has had to experience sickness. Gone are the days in which people universally looked at sickness and disease as some kind of punishment from a capricious deity. But many people still struggle with the *why* of sickness and suffering. And rather than admit what they don't know, some Christians seek to provide answers rather than comfort.**

Opening Activity/Discussion: Throughout recorded history, people have sought relief from illness with a variety of treatments. On a flip chart or white board, if available, write the following symptoms on the left and their ancient Egyptian herbal prescriptions on the right but in a mixed-up order. When your class has assembled, have the members take turns drawing a line from the symptom to what they think the appropriate, traditional treatment for it is. Have some small gifts to give to those with the most correct answers (lip balm, sunscreen, mouthwash, et cetera). If such supplies are not available, simply name the illness and ask your class if they can guess which one of the traditional treatments or home remedies for it is. The illnesses and their cures are given in their correct order below.

- Pain relief—thyme
- Diuretics and laxatives—dill, balsam, apple, onions, parsley
- Asthma—sesame, honey and milk, frankincense
- Digestive aids—garlic, sandalwood, juniper, mint
- Breath freshener—mint, caraway
- Chest pains—juniper, mustard seeds, aloe
- Headaches—aloe, poppy seeds
- Wound dressing—honey (a natural antibiotic)
- Anesthetic—poppy seeds (also used for insomnia)
- Burns and skin diseases—aloe
- Epilepsy—camphor
- Vomiting—mustard seeds to induce it, mint to stop it

(Source: Robin Fowler “Egyptian Medical Treatments,” Suite 101, <http://suite101.com/a/egyptian-medical-treatments-a20616>, accessed June 19, 2012.)

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Which of these ancient remedies is still used today? In the Bible, sickness was often used as a metaphor for sin. Who is the only remedy, and why?
- ❷ What are the ways in which Christ seeks to heal us today emotionally, spiritually, and mentally, as well as physically?

► STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: One reason Seventh-day Adventists are deeply invested in developing healing ministries within our hospitals, clinics, and medical schools is because we have a good understanding of the relationship between health and spirituality. Though we don't fully understand the relationship between the two, we can't completely appreciate spiritual things and live the "abundant life" if we're suffering from a physical ailment or impediment.

Bible Commentary**I. The Healer and His Helpers** (*Review Mark 2:1–12 with your class.*)

When word began to get around about Jesus' healing powers, people who hoped for relief from their physical suffering were brought to Him. This particular story is interesting for several reasons:

First, the man was powerless to bring himself; he had to rely on the kindness of friends to take him to Jesus. The man apparently chose the right friends, because when they discovered their approach to Jesus was blocked, they refused to admit defeat. They went up to the living space on the flat roof, opened a hole in it, and lowered the man so he could be close to Jesus.

Second, Jesus saw a man obviously in physical distress. But instead of healing him, Jesus' first words were, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (*vs. 5, NIV*).

This, of course, prompted the following response from the teachers of the law: "Why does this fellow talk like that? . . . Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (*vs. 7, NIV*).

But just to show that He had the power to forgive sins, Jesus said to the man, "Get up, take your mat and go home" (*vs. 11, NIV*).

On some level, people who are sick often suffer from some level of guilt; they wonder if there's a reason they are suffering. Unfortunately, we can't predict if or when God will choose to heal. All we can do is trust in God's willingness to do what's best and surround ourselves with friends who will do whatever they have to do to keep us close to Him.

Consider This: Which friends came through for you when you were in physical or emotional distress? What did they do? What have you found most effective in easing the suffering of those around you? What tangible form does comforting take?

II. The Ultimate Cure *(Review John 11:1–44 with your class.)*

The story of Jesus and Lazarus is significant for a number of reasons:

The Bible mentions Mary, Martha, and Lazarus more than once. And it's been suggested that Jesus used to stop by their home in Bethany whenever He was in the area. So, it's kind of surprising that after Jesus had been notified that Lazarus was sick (*vs. 3*), He stayed where He was another two days (*vs. 6*).

Anyone who's ever wondered about God's timing should notice this. Jesus and His disciples could have traveled to Bethany as soon as they heard Lazarus was sick, but they didn't. When they finally showed up, it was too late.

Both Martha and Mary reminded Jesus of the consequences of His delay, as though He were unaware of what He had done. But the reminder gave Him the opportunity to make this well-known and encouraging statement: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies” (*vs. 25, NIV*).

The miracle of the raising of Lazarus, exceptional as it was, is complicated by the fact that, with the exception of Jesus' description of him as “our friend Lazarus” (*vs. 11*), we don't know much about him. We know he had sisters, Mary and Martha; we know that he lived in Bethany; but we don't know what he did for a living or how he came to be acquainted with Jesus.

The point is we don't have to be talented, famous, or rich to be raised to life. Jesus' promise—“I am the resurrection and the life”—applies as much to us as it did to Lazarus.

Consider This: What lessons can we learn from Jesus' delay in answering the request to heal Lazarus? How close to Jesus do you feel at this moment? As close as Lazarus did? Do you think that Jesus would go out of His way to give you your own resurrection? Why, or why not?

III. Our Healing Ministry *(Review Acts 3:1–9, 9:36–42 with your class.)*

The stories about Peter and John at the temple gate Beautiful and Peter and Tabitha (Dorcas) in Joppa remind us that when the Christian church was just getting established, God may have used miraculous healings as a way of endorsing the disciples' ministry. The record about the healing of the lame man by Peter and John states: “When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging . . . , and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had

happened to him” (*Acts 3:9, 10, NIV*).

About Tabitha the Bible says, “This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord” (*Acts 9:42, NIV*).

Consider This: While God’s church today may not demonstrate all the gifts of miraculous healing that the early disciples did, we still have to minister to those who are sick. That ministry is to be the presence of Christ to those who are sick, to support them in their suffering, to run their errands, to assure them of God’s love, and to point them to the One who is “the Resurrection and the Life.”

Discussion Questions:

- ① What spiritual gifts are useful in ministering to those who are sick? Which ones do you have, and how may they be used in this endeavor?
- ② When you’ve been sick, who provided the most support? What form did it take? How was it helpful?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: *Serving people who are sick is as good for us as it is for them. In so doing, we work hand in hand with the One who spent so much time healing during His earthly ministry.*

Life Application: Is there someone in your church who is responsible for keeping track of who is sick or in the hospital? Should there be? Discuss.

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: *Because discipleship is such a hands-on, practical subject, spend some time as a class discussing how a ministry to the sick can be implemented and sustained.*

Activity: Take a few moments to list those in your congregation who would benefit from a little attention from the rest of the congregation. They may not necessarily be sick; they may be elderly or otherwise incapacitated. List all you can think of.

For each name, plan a strategy to stay in touch with that individual. Then list the name of a person in your class (or in another class) who can act as a point person to see that someone is providing physical and moral support to those who need special attention.