

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.

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

To view and/or download a Hope Channel program on this week's lesson, visit www.lifesbeat.org.

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?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Isaiah 26:3*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Describe the benefits of faith, not only in developing a relationship with God but for healthy living.

Feel: Foster an abiding sense of God’s power, love, watchcare, and tender faithfulness.

Do: Depend on God’s Word to do for you what He promises to do.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Faith Connects

A The biblical stories of God’s power and goodness give us evidence that God can do what He says He can do. Why is it important to fill our minds with pictures of God in action?

B What impact does a growing knowledge of God have on faith?

II. Feel: Peace, Assurance, and Hope

A The products of faith include a sense of peace, assurance, and hope in what God has done and will do for us. What effects do these products of faith have on our physical, mental, and spiritual well-being?

B What kinds of thoughts distract you from resting in God’s assurances of His care? How can you keep focused on His Word?

III. Do: Works of Faith

A What things are possible to do—because of assurance in God’s love and watchcare—that would be difficult, if not impossible, to do without faith?

B What can we do to strengthen our faith?

► **Summary:** Faith is a connection with God that comes from knowing His power and resting on His promises to act on our behalf. The effects of faith in God bring health to our minds and bodies.

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.

Learning Cycle

► STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: **Trusting God contributes far more to positive health than the most potent medicine.**

The relationship between healing and faith is not a modern discovery. Indeed, the interrelationship between the spiritual and physical was recognized years ago. The medieval scholar Thomas Aquinas, quoted by Paul Tournier in *The Person Reborn*, wrote, “ ‘Although the body is not the immediate subject of grace, . . . nevertheless the effect of grace flows from the soul to the body.’ ”—Trans., Edwin Hudson (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 121. Modern culture looks to science and the physical world to counter disease. Take this pill, inject this solution, use this drug. If all else fails, resort to surgery to solve the problem. Nowhere is God seen in this equation.

While there are yet many doctors who do not acknowledge God, the tide of opinion is turning. Studies regarding the effect of prayer and spirituality on the healing process are being done, and people are starting to rethink the role of faith in healing. This shift in thought does not imply that the Christian does not appreciate the role of science and the benefits of medicine; after all, true science is but an avenue to study the ways of God in His creation, and helpful medicine comes from the physical universe that God created. Yet, Christians look beyond the creations of God to the Creator Himself in the pursuit of healing. Any person familiar with biblical truth is not surprised by this approach.

Activity: List biblical stories of resurrection and healing. Look for the resurrection/healing stories in the lives of Jesus, Elijah, Elisha, Naaman, Hezekiah, and Dorcas and in Jesus’ miracles (for example, Peter’s mother, lame men, blind men, lepers, the woman on the road to Jairus’ home).

Discuss: What are the spiritual components of these stories?

► STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: **Remember that faith does not heal. God heals. It would be a mistake to say that a key transports. A car transports; but**

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

how many cars operate without a key? (Without thinking, we express faith in our car's ability to transport us every time we put the key in the ignition.) This distinction is an important one because some have interpreted the results of studies on prayer and healing in a way that suggests that the increased incidence of healing is merely the result of autosuggestion. In other words, these people would say it is the patient's belief in divine healing rather than the reality of a divine Healer that makes the difference. God has the power to heal whether we believe or not. However, when God chooses to heal, how unsurprising that faith, the key to unlocking heaven's storehouse, is most often present.

Bible Commentary

I. The Fear Factor *(Review Matthew 6:27–34 with the class.)*

Did the person who said “We have nothing to fear but fear itself” ever consider death? A survey asked a group to list their biggest fears. Death was the second most frequent response. Public speaking was the first. One witty person reasoned that this fact meant that at a funeral, more people would rather be the person in the coffin than the one giving the eulogy! This is unlikely. Death is the ultimate enemy. Consider how much money and effort are expended annually to postpone death. People will spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in cancer treatments in order to gain even a few more precious months.

Christians claim to believe that they have eternal life through a resurrected Savior. If we can trust God in the face of death, truly confronting that ultimate reality fearlessly, what else is there that Satan can use to scare us? Public speaking?

Consider This: If we trust God with death, why can't we also trust Him to supply our everyday needs? What did Paul mean in Philippians 4:19?

■ *If our trust in God releases us from the fear of death, why should it not also release us from fear of all smaller concerns? How might this trust change world economies or medical practice, not to mention the weapons industry?*

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**II. Faith and Miraculous Healing** (Review Matthew 9:2, 22, 28, 29; 12:9–13; 13:58; 15:28; 17:14–20 with the class.)

While it is true that, at times, Jesus did not heal the sick because of unbelief, it is not true that this was always the case. Sometimes He knew that it was better *not* to heal. He did not heal Lazarus, because He had a greater purpose in mind. If persons are not healed, it is not necessarily evidence of defective faith. If that were so, then all Christians in history who have died were defective! Perhaps it takes more faith to accept death and not be healed than it does to be healed. Remember that Shadrach and friends told the king that God *could* deliver them but expressed trust in Him even if He did not (*Dan. 3:16–18*).

Consider This: Some ministers say that it demonstrates a lack of faith to pray “Thy will be done” when there are promises in Scripture for healing. What do you think? Did Lazarus die because his sisters did not pray or because they lacked faith? Discuss. What greater purpose did Jesus have in mind that they could not see at the time? In the bigger picture, in what way is it possible that a healing could lead to negative consequences in the future? (*Compare the story of Hezekiah’s healing in Isaiah 38, 39.*)

▶ STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: By this time you probably have established several key points for a proper biblical understanding of faith and healing. (1) There is a close interconnection between the physical and the spiritual. (2) It is God who heals, not faith itself. (3) God sees the bigger picture and does not choose always to heal. (4) Healing that comes through modern medicine is nevertheless from God (*compare 2 Chron. 16:11–13*). With that established, discuss how understanding can be applied to the following case studies.

Case 1: Bob’s wife, Rita, recently passed away at age 33, leaving him to raise three young children by himself. He was not very active in church, and Rita’s sister Chelsea repeatedly has told his children that it was Bob’s

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

fault their mother died because he did not have enough faith for Rita to be healed. What would you say to Bob? To Chelsea? The children?

Case 2: Bjorn just has been diagnosed with cancer. He has asked all the church members to pray for him and says he is just going to trust God for his healing, refusing the treatment options suggested by the doctors. When arrested in the early stages, his type of cancer responds to treatment 80 percent of the time. What would you say to Bjorn? How about his family?

Case 3: Casey worries about everything. He has a good job and has not missed a paycheck in more than 12 years, but he's concerned that the economy may decrease demand for his company's products, leading to layoffs. He has three healthy children; but he saw a talk-show host speak about a rare parasite that has attacked more than thirty children in the country this year, and he thinks that all three of his children have the symptoms. He has nightmares about terrorists blowing up the bridge he crosses to work. Finally, he learned that he has ulcers. How can you help Casey?

► **STEP 4—Create**

Just for Teachers: Solomon wrote, “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person’s strength” (*Prov. 17:22, NLT*). To conclude the study, discuss ways that the class can create some cheer for someone who needs good medicine.

Activity: Plan a class outing to cheer up someone—older members, nursing home residents, cancer patients, someone who recently lost a job, kids in the juvenile center. The possibilities are endless. Be specific about date, time, and plans so that this does not become another good idea destined for “file 13.” May the cheer you offer circle back to you and make you feel like a new creation.

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:

- ❶ 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?
- ❷ 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?
- ❸ 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?