

The Scriptural Basis for Health Ministry and Wholeness

It is essential that we have a solid biblical and theological foundation for anything we do in the church. This is particularly true when we are concerned with spiritual matters that relate to salvation, which ultimately means “wholeness.” What is the biblical mandate for whole-person ministry and what are its theological underpinnings?

Wholeness is a Christian mandate. Jesus understood very well the concept of wholeness as abundant living and calls us to self-responsibility. He illustrates that disease is sometimes self-inflicted by lifestyle choices which can lead to a poor quality of life. Disease is the thief who comes only to steal from us, to kill us, and to destroy us. In the Gospel of John Jesus states: “I am come that you might have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). In this passage, Jesus is telling us that there is more enjoyment and satisfaction in a life of wholeness.

Jesus’ ministry is an excellent example of whole-person ministry. Throughout his ministry he had a concern for health. In Matthew 4:23, Jesus was said to have “gone about in all Galilee, teaching, preaching, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.” We see Jesus picking up the broken pieces of people’s lives where disease and disability had crept in, as does the thief, stealing one of their most prized possessions---health.

The Gospels especially clearly show how central healing was in the ministry of Jesus. Healing means restoration to wholeness, the wholeness God intends for body, mind, and spirit. That’s certainly what Jesus’ ministry was all about. As a matter of fact, one-third of the stories in the Gospels record the act of Jesus physically healing people. If we broaden the definition of “healing” to include spiritual and relational healing, then all stories about Jesus address some form of healing. Jesus came to “save,” and the meaning of that word in its original Greek is “to heal.” In fact, biblical Greek has only one word for these two terms, a word that is sometimes translated “save” and sometimes “heal,” depending on the context.

A specific example of Jesus’ whole-person healing ministry is the story of the paralytic who is brought to Him by four friends (Mark 2:1-12). It is obvious the friends wanted Jesus to heal the paralyzed man; they were so determined to gain access to him that they broke a hole in the roof of the house where Jesus was speaking to a crowd of people. But instead of healing him, Jesus forgave him.

Some religious leaders in the crowd disputed his authority to forgive sins, so Jesus settled the dispute by saying to the paralytic, "Stand up, take your mat and go to your home" (Mark 2:11). Where one may expect Jesus to heal, he forgives, and where he forgives, he also heals. This is characteristic of whole-person healing ministry, and the Bible is full of stories and admonitions like that

Though healing ministries have always been vitally important to the church, they have largely had a "sickness" or "disease" focus. The challenge for Pastors and the Church today is to provide health ministry from a wellness and wholeness perspective, or health promotion. Instead of asking only, "What makes people sick and how can we provide a healing ministry to save or heal them?" we need to also ask, "What keeps people well and how can we provide a whole-person health ministry that will keep them that way?"

As pastors and ministers, we are responsible to God and His people to preach and teach the importance of "wholeness" as defined in the Scriptures. If we as pastors fail to preach and teach the message of the interconnectedness of faith with health, healing, and wholeness in the Bible, our pews will remain filled with people who never achieve the fullness of a life spiritually transformed by the love and power of God. Furthermore, they will never experience the rich, abundant and prosperous life that Jesus promised to all who choose to follow Him.