



HEALTH AND SPIRITUALITY

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(2 Samuel 12:1-23)

Health/
Spirituality

It was one of those uneasy moments in counseling. The skeptical client, chafing at my challenge, reversed roles and bore right in. "If God is so good, if knowing Him is so good for you, why are you so sick?"

He was challenging the onset of diabetes, depression, and heart disease in my life—a dark triad of trouble that had assaulted me in my late forties. I was caught off guard by his attack and his implied assumption that my illness was evidence that God was not so good. After an awkward silence, I suddenly realized how backward my client was viewing things, how good God truly had been.

"You know," I answered him, "considering my chaotic childhood and the way I abused my body in my youth, by all rights I should be dead by now. I am paying the wages of my past sins, and that is a sad and sobering truth. But the fact that I stand here at all, that I survived my heart attack and live today, is a testimony to God's goodness to me." And that, I told my now-disarmed client, was a truth worth celebrating.

A vital Christian faith yields good health in every way. Furthermore, as my case demonstrates, it lengthens life and gives meaning to it like nothing else can.

Yet the 20th-century world has received two sharply conflicting views about the relationship of health and Christian spirituality. The Bible has revealed a positive relationship—asserting that a strong spiritual life yields good health. Obedience to the call and commands of God yields life and peace, while disobedience brings death—the wages of sin.

In contrast, some of the leading lights of psychology and psychiatry have argued that religion is pathological, an irrational crutch that has reinforced disease and disorder rather than healing it. Furthermore,

most mental health professionals are less religious and more atheistic than the general populace, and consider religion to be of little value in helping others.

The professionals should more seriously study their own research. The truth about health and spirituality is there in plain view.

RESEARCH ON HEALTH AND CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Buried among thousands of studies in health and mental health over the past half-century are a few gems that look at the relationship between religion and health.

Mental health and well-being. Increased religious commitment reduced suicidal behavior. In fact, one study showed that church attendance rates predicted suicide better than any other factor. Religious commitment also correlated with reduced drug abuse. A large survey of 14,000 youth indicated the lowest abuse rates among conservative religious groups, and the highest rates among the nonreligious and liberal religious groups. The importance of religion to the teenager was the key—religious values that were internalized in youth had more power than fear or peer pressure. Further, dynamic faith correlated with less depression. Religious commitment was shown to counteract the hopelessness and despair of depression. Seventeen different studies over four decades showed that less distress, a greater sense of well-being, and the occurrence of fewer psychiatric symptoms were all related to higher levels of

religious commitment and church participation.

Health and disease. One study showed that even after allowing for the influence of smoking and socioeconomic status, the death rate for males who attended church frequently was just 60 percent of that of infrequent or nonattenders. Women who attended infrequently were twice as likely to die as those who did. Numerous studies have shown that higher levels of religious commitment produce healthier lifestyles, and are related to lower blood pressure levels and reduced hypertension.

Relationships. Every study on marriage showed greater levels of marital satisfaction, exposing the fallacy that religious people stay together in unhappy unions because their faith demands it. Further, the myth that religious people are sexually repressed and unhappy is exploded by numerous findings that indicated highly religious women were more satisfied with their sexual lives than either nonreligious or even moderately religious women. All the studies on divorce showed that divorce rates were reduced as religious commitment increased.

LIVING OUT TRUE RELIGION

Another way that religion has been studied distinguishes intrinsic and extrinsic religion. Intrinsic religion represents a dynamic faith, where people internalize their beliefs and live consistent with their moral teachings. Extrinsic religion, on the other hand, is religion for social status or personal gain. Comparing the two, the health benefits accrue to those living an intrinsic faith. Those espousing only an extrinsic faith were no more healthy than those who had no religion at all.

True believers live out their faith and talk daily in the presence of God. They

pray for and seek the peace of God to surround and infuse them experientially. They live longer and stay healthy longer, show higher levels of life satisfaction, higher levels of personal contentment, have an ability to endure hardship and suffering, and show a consistently higher practice of forgiving others, thanksgiving, and laughter.

Those who refuse to forgive, who maintain a core of jealousy, envy, or bitterness, and who complain and blame are more prone to illness, psychiatric disorders, and a shorter, less contented life. Unrepented sin, ingratitude, and unforgiveness carries a weight that grows and accumulates throughout life. It does not stop on its own, but piles on until it becomes a crushing load.

Jesus' yoke is far lighter—it is freedom and renewal. Life lived daily in Christ includes the assurance of salvation and the promise of eternal life. It is also the best prescription for good health.

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of health/spirituality include:

- Psalm 38:3
- Proverbs 3:7, 8; 4:20-22; 12:18; 16:24
- Jeremiah 33:6
- James 5:13-16
- 3 John 2

Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on health/spirituality at Proverbs 17:22 on page 821. See also the personality profile of Paul on page 1536.

Wisdom *is* in the sight of him who has understanding,
But the eyes of a fool *are* on the ends of the earth.

A foolish son *is* a grief to his father,
And bitterness to her who bore him.

Also, to punish the righteous *is* not good,
Nor to strike princes for *their* uprightness.

He who has knowledge spares his words,
And a man of understanding is of a calm spirit.

Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace;
When he shuts his lips, *he is considered* perceptive.

18 A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire;
He rages against all wise judgment.

A fool has no delight in understanding,
But in expressing his own heart.

When the wicked comes, contempt comes also;
And with dishonor *comes* reproach.

The words of a man's mouth *are* deep waters;

The wellspring of wisdom *is* a flowing brook.

It is not good to show partiality to the wicked,
Or to overthrow the righteous in judgment.

⁶ A fool's lips enter into contention,
And his mouth calls for blows.
A fool's mouth *is* his destruction,
And his lips *are* the snare of his soul.
The words of a talebearer *are* like tasty trifles,^a
And they go down into the inmost body.

He who is slothful in his work
Is a brother to him who is a great destroyer.

¹⁰ The name of the LORD *is* a strong tower;
The righteous run to it and are safe.

¹¹ The rich man's wealth *is* his strong city,
And like a high wall in his own esteem.

¹² Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty,
And before honor *is* humility.

¹³ He who answers a matter before he hears *it*,
It *is* folly and shame to him.

18:8 ^aA Jewish tradition reads *wounds*.

KEY PASSAGE

GOOD MEDICINE

(17:22)



Health/
Spirituality

A right relationship with God gives people joy (1 Pet. 1:8). That joy gives a merry heart (Prov. 15:15). That merry heart, in turn, "does good, like medicine." There is a definite relationship between godliness, joy, and good health. When people's consciences are clear and their hearts are right with God, they can experience good emotional health no matter what their circumstances. In turn, that affects their physical health. Modern science has shown the correlation between emotional and physical health; King Solomon already knew that, stating, "a broken spirit dries the bones." The bottom line: God's people should be joyful, allowing that joy to permeate every area of their lives. This will have a positive effect on both their emotional and physical health.

Learn More: Turn to the article about health/spirituality on pages 402, 403. See also the personality profile of Paul on page 1536.

should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction.

GREETINGS AND
BENEDICTION

¹¹Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live

Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

2 CORINTHIANS 13:11

Spirit be with you all. Amen.

in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

¹²Greet one another with a holy kiss.

¹³All the saints greet you.

¹⁴The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy

PERSONALITY PROFILE



Health/
Spirituality

PAUL: STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS

(12:9, 10)

Paul had a passion for ministry that would put most any other believer to shame. He tirelessly traveled, taught, wrote letters, prayed, and traveled some more. His legacy forms much of our New Testament; his words comfort, encourage, and guide believers today. Clearly Paul had many strengths, and God used him well for the kingdom.

Paul also was acutely aware of a nagging health problem, a physical infirmity he called his "thorn in the flesh" (12:7). It apparently hampered his service at times, for in his letter to the Galatian church, he wrote, "My trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God. . . . I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me" (Gal. 4:14, 15). From these words, some have conjectured that Paul's "thorn" was an eye disease that hampered his vision. But the point is not to identify the thorn, but to learn how Paul ministered in spite of it.

Paul had pleaded with God to remove the thorn. Paul may have reasoned, "I would be able to travel and write and teach so much more if God would restore my health." The request was certainly reasonable, but God said no. God lovingly responded to his faithful servant, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

Health is a gift of God, but it is not a requirement for spiritual service. Many people have physical ailments, chronic pain, or debilitating diseases. They might think, "If God would only heal me, then I can truly minister for Him." But God often responds that His strength can be made perfect in any weak vessel that is completely dependent upon Him. The only requirement for service in God's kingdom is a humble and obedient heart. He will do the rest.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about health/spirituality on pages 402, 403. See also the key passage note at Proverbs 17:22 on page 821.

rivers that do not have fins and scales, all that move in the water or any living thing which is in the water, they are an abomination to you. They shall be an abomination to you; you shall not eat their flesh, but you shall regard their carcasses as an abomination. ¹²Whatever in the water does not have fins or scales—that shall be an abomination to you.

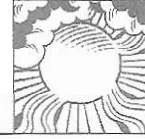
¹³And these you shall regard as an abomination among the birds; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, the buzzard, the kite, and the falcon after its kind; ¹⁵every raven after its kind, ¹⁶the ostrich, the short-eared owl, the sea gull, and the hawk after its kind; ¹⁷the little owl, the fisher owl, and the screech owl; ¹⁸the white owl, the jack-daw, and the carrion vulture; ¹⁹the stork, the heron after its kind, the hoopoe, and the bat. ²⁰All flying insects that creep on all fours shall be an abomination to you. ²¹Yet these you may eat of every flying insect that creeps on all fours: those which have jointed legs above their feet with which to leap on the earth. ²²These you may eat: the locust after its kind, the destroying locust after its kind, the cricket after its kind, and the grasshopper after its kind. ²³But all other flying insects which have four feet shall be an abomination to you.

Unclean animals

²⁴By these you shall become unclean; whoever touches the carcass of any of them shall be unclean until evening; ²⁵whoever carries the carcass of any of them shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening; ²⁶the carcass of any animal which divides the foot, but is not cloven-footed or does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. Everyone who touches it shall be unclean. ²⁷And whoever touches it shall be unclean to you, he who touches its carcass shall be unclean until evening. ²⁸Whoever carries any such carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. He also who carries its carcass shall be unclean to you.

²⁹And if any animal which you may eat comes unclean to you.

³⁰And if a part of any such carcass falls on it, it becomes unclean; ³¹but if water is put on the seed, and if it is sown, it remains clean; ³²and if a part of any such carcass falls on any seed, it becomes unclean; ³³and if a part of any such carcass falls on it, it becomes unclean to you. ³⁴Nevertheless a spring or a cistern, in which there is plenty of water, shall be clean, but whatever touches any such carcass becomes unclean. ³⁵Whoever touches any such carcass shall be unclean until evening. ³⁶Whoever touches any such carcass shall be unclean to you, but whatever touches it shall be clean, in which there is plenty of water, shall be clean, but whatever touches any such carcass shall be unclean to you. ³⁷Whoever touches any such carcass shall be unclean to you, but whatever touches it shall be clean, in which there is plenty of water, shall be clean, but whatever touches any such carcass shall be unclean to you. ³⁸Whoever touches any such carcass shall be unclean to you, but whatever touches it shall be clean, in which there is plenty of water, shall be clean, but whatever touches any such carcass shall be unclean to you. ³⁹Whoever touches any such carcass shall be unclean to you, but whatever touches it shall be clean, in which there is plenty of water, shall be clean, but whatever touches any such carcass shall be unclean to you. ⁴⁰Whoever touches any such carcass shall be unclean to you, but whatever touches it shall be clean, in which there is plenty of water, shall be clean, but whatever touches any such carcass shall be unclean to you. ⁴¹Whoever touches any such carcass shall be unclean to you, but whatever touches it shall be clean, in which there is plenty of water, shall be clean, but whatever touches any such carcass shall be unclean to you. ⁴²Whoever touches any such carcass shall be unclean to you, but whatever touches it shall be clean, in which there is plenty of water, shall be clean, but whatever touches any such carcass shall be unclean to you. ⁴³Whoever touches any such carcass shall be unclean to you, but whatever touches it shall be clean, in which there is plenty of water, shall be clean, but whatever touches any such carcass shall be unclean to you. ⁴⁴Whoever touches any such carcass shall be unclean to you, but whatever touches it shall be clean, in which there is plenty of water, shall be clean, but whatever touches any such carcass shall be unclean to you. ⁴⁵Whoever touches any such carcass shall be unclean to you, but whatever touches it shall be clean, in which there is plenty of water, shall be clean, but whatever touches any such carcass shall be unclean to you.



SOUL NOTE

Body and Soul (11:44, 45) Holiness was the basis of God's ethical requirements as well as an expression of His character. God still desires to make us "holy and without blame" (Eph. 1:4). In Old Testament times, holiness was a matter of both body and soul, and the law regulated cleanness in matters such as food and bodily discharges. The priest had a primary role in dealing with both physical and spiritual needs. Today, we generally separate the two subjects—leaving a gap between medicine and ministry, between health and religion. But God reveals the unity of the human person—both body and soul are His concern. **Topic: Health/Spirituality**

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skin, and the leprosy covers all the skin of *the one who has the sore*, from his head to his foot, wherever the priest looks, ¹³then the priest shall consider; and indeed *if* the leprosy has covered all his body, he shall pronounce *him clean who has the sore*. It has all turned white. He *is* clean. ¹⁴But when raw flesh appears on him, he shall be unclean. ¹⁵And the priest shall examine the raw flesh and pronounce him to be unclean: *for the raw flesh is unclean. It is leprosy.* ¹⁶Or if the raw flesh changes and turns white again, he shall come to the priest. ¹⁷And the priest shall examine him; and indeed *if* the sore has turned white, then the priest shall pronounce *him clean who has the sore*. He *is* clean.

¹⁸"If the body develops a boil in the skin, and it is healed, ¹⁹and in the place of the boil there comes a white swelling or a bright spot, reddish-white, then it shall be shown to the priest; ²⁰and *if*, when the priest sees it, it indeed *appears* deeper than the skin, and its hair has turned white, the priest shall pronounce him unclean. It *is* a leprous sore which has broken out of the boil. ²¹But if the priest examines it, and indeed *there are* no white hairs in it, and it *is* not deeper than the skin, but has faded, then the priest shall isolate him seven days; ²²and if it should at all spread over the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean. It *is* a leprous sore. ²³But if the bright spot stays in one place, *and* has not spread, it *is* the scar of the boil; and the priest shall pronounce him clean.

²⁴"Or if the body receives a burn on its skin by fire, and the raw *flesh* of the burn becomes a bright spot, reddish-white or white, ²⁵then the priest shall examine it; and indeed *if* the hair of the bright spot has turned white, and it appears deeper than the skin, it *is* leprosy broken out in the burn. Therefore the priest shall pronounce him unclean. It *is* a leprous sore. ²⁶But if the priest examines it, and indeed

there are no white hairs in the bright spot, and it is not deeper than the skin, but has faded, then the priest shall isolate him seven days. ²⁷And the priest shall examine him on the seventh day. If it has at all spread over the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean. It *is* a leprous sore. ²⁸But if the bright spot stays in one place, *and* has not spread on the skin, but has faded, it *is* a swelling from the burn. The priest shall pronounce him clean, for it *is* the scar from the burn.

²⁹"If a man or woman has a sore on the head or the beard, ³⁰then the priest shall examine the sore; and indeed if it appears deeper than the skin, *and there is* in it thin yellow hair, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean. It *is* a scaly leprosy of the head or beard. ³¹But if the priest examines the scaly sore, and indeed it does not appear deeper than the skin, and *there is* no black hair in it, then the priest shall isolate *the one who has* the scale seven days.

³²And on the seventh day the priest shall examine the sore; and indeed *if* the scale has not spread, and there is no yellow hair in it, and the scale does not appear deeper than the skin, ³³he shall shave himself, but the scale he shall not shave. And the priest shall isolate *the one who has* the scale another seven days. ³⁴On the seventh day the priest shall examine the scale; and indeed *if* the scale has not spread over the skin, and does not appear deeper than the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him clean. He shall wash his clothes and be clean. ³⁵But if the scale should at all spread over the skin after his cleansing, ³⁶then the priest shall examine him; and indeed *if* the scale has spread over the skin, the priest need not seek for yellow hair. He *is* unclean. ³⁷But if the scale appears to be at a standstill, and there is black hair grown up in it, the scale has healed. He *is* clean, and the priest shall pronounce him clean.

³⁸"If a man or a woman has bright spots on the skin of the body, *specifically* white bright

SOUL NOTE



Preventive Care (ch. 13) God wanted His people to be healthy. The detailed laws of chapter 13 deal with detecting, examining, quarantining, cleansing, and restoring people who had leprosy, a skin disease, or another physical malady. God also gave specific instructions concerning the cleanliness of clothes and houses (13:47-59). If God cares so much about our health, then so should we.

Topic: Health/Spirituality

bread.”⁶ So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.

⁷Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people.

⁸Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.”⁹ So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

FROM MOUNT HOR TO MOAB

¹⁰Now the children of Israel moved on and camped in Oboth. ¹¹And they journeyed from Oboth and camped at Ije Abarim, in the wilderness which is east of Moab, toward the sunrise. ¹²From there they moved and camped in the Valley of Zered. ¹³From there they moved and camped on the other side of the Arnon, which is in the wilderness that extends from the border of the Amorites; for the Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites. ¹⁴Therefore it is said in the Book of the Wars of the LORD:

“Waheb in Suphah,^a
The brooks of the Arnon,
And the slope of the brooks
That reaches to the dwelling of Ar,
And lies on the border of Moab.”

¹⁶From there they went to Beer, which is the well where the LORD said to Moses, “Gather the people together, and I will give them water.”¹⁷ Then Israel sang this song:

“Spring up, O well!
All of you sing to it—
¹⁸ The well the leaders sank,
Dug by the nation’s nobles,
By the lawgiver, with their staves.”

And from the wilderness they went to Mattanah,¹⁹ from Mattanah to Nahaliel, from Nahaliel to Bamoth,²⁰ and from Bamoth, in the valley that is in the country of Moab, to the top of Pisgah which looks down on the wasteland.^a

KING SIHON DEFEATED

²¹Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, ²²“Let me pass through your land. We will not turn aside into fields or vineyards; we will not drink water from wells. We will go by the King’s Highway until we have passed through your territory.”²³ But Sihon would not allow Israel to pass through his territory. So Sihon gathered all his people together and went out against Israel in the wilderness, and he came to Jahaz and fought against Israel. ²⁴Then Israel defeated him with the edge of the sword, and took possession of his land from the Arnon to the Jab-bok, as far as the people of Ammon; for the border of the people of Ammon was fortified. ²⁵So Israel took all these cities, and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon and in all its villages. ²⁶For Heshbon was the city of Sihon king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab, and had taken all his land from his hand as far as the Arnon. ²⁷Therefore those who speak in proverbs say:

21:14 ^aAncient unknown places; Vulgate *What He did in the Red Sea* 21:20 ^aHebrew *Jeshimon*

SOUL NOTE



Deliverance (21:8, 9) A pole with one or two snakes on it is often used as an emblem of the medical profession and a symbol of healing. It reminds us of this biblical event. God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and place it on a pole. He promised that everyone who looked at the pole by faith would be healed. In the New Testament, Jesus used this incident to illustrate His willingness to die on the Cross and be “lifted up” so that all who look to Him by faith might be saved (John 3:14, 15). That is the ultimate healing that Christ offers to all people and which all people need—healing from sin. **Topic: Health/Spirituality**

neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. ¹²For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.’”

¹³So David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.”

And Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also *who is born to you shall surely die.*” ¹⁵Then Nathan departed to his house.

THE DEATH OF DAVID'S SON

And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became ill. ¹⁶David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. ¹⁷So the elders of his house arose and went to him, to raise him up from the ground. But he would not, nor did he eat food with them. ¹⁸Then on the seventh day it came to pass that the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead. For they said, “Indeed, while the child was alive, we spoke to him, and he

would not heed our voice. How can we tell him that the child is dead? He may do some harm!”

¹⁹When David saw that his servants were whispering, David perceived that the child was dead. Therefore David said to his servants, “Is the child dead?”

And they said, “He is dead.”

²⁰So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate. ²¹Then his servants said to him, “What is this that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child *while he was alive*, but when the child died, you arose and ate food.”

²²And he said, “While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who can tell *whether* the LORD^a will be gracious to me, that the child may live?’” ²³But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.”

12:22 ^aA few Hebrew manuscripts and Syriac read *God*.

SOUL NOTE



Spiritual Health (12:1–23) Psalm 51 records David's lament after being confronted by Nathan. Evidently David had felt no guilt until God, through Nathan, revealed his sin to him. When David felt the crushing weight of his guilt, he felt sick and tormented. “I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me,” he said (Ps. 51:3). David had withdrawn from God and failed spiritually. The result was devastating. The pain sent him back to God, for God alone could restore him. Guilt can crush people, or it can send them to God for forgiveness and spiritual restoration.

Topic: Health/Spirituality

SOUL NOTE



Me First (12:13) As Nathan spun his story, David flashed with anger. “The man who has done this shall surely die!” he exclaimed (12:5). David clearly saw the rich man's sin, but failed to make the connection with his own actions toward Uriah and Bathsheba until Nathan said, “You are the man!” (12:7). It is easy for us to hear a sermon or read a Bible passage and think of other people to whom it applies. Instead, we should first ask, “What can I learn that will help me grow spiritually?”

Topic: Change/Maturity

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7ABBAH IS I

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MANASSEH REIGNS IN JUDAH

21 Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hephzibah. ²And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. ³For he rebuilt the

high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; he raised up altars for Baal, and made a wooden image,^a as Ahab king of Israel had done; and he worshiped all the host of heaven^b and served them. ⁴He also built altars

21:3 ^aHebrew *Asherah*, a Canaanite goddess
^bThe gods of the Assyrians

PERSONALITY PROFILE



Death

THE UNWELCOME VISITOR

(2 KINGS 20:1-3)

Death happens to everyone, and no one escapes it this side of the Lord's return. The Bible records just two men, Enoch and Elijah, who were allowed to arrive in heaven without passing through this dreadful portal. Everyone else eventually meets that unwelcome visitor, even as the Son of God Himself did.

One day death knocked on King Hezekiah's door. He was a good and godly king who ruled over the southern kingdom of Judah. After the evil reign of Ahaz, the new king Hezekiah cleaned house—literally. He tore down pagan altars and “trusted in the LORD God of Israel” (2 Kin. 18:5). When the Assyrians attacked the nation, Hezekiah went to the temple and prayed for God's deliverance. God miraculously intervened, killing most of the enemy army and sending their king scurrying home, where he was assassinated. Judah was safe for a while.

But then Hezekiah became very ill, and Isaiah arrived to tell him to set his house in order because he would soon die. Hezekiah reacted predictably—he “wept bitterly” (20:3) and pleaded with God for his life. And God answered, giving Hezekiah fifteen more years.

Believers know that the joys of heaven are on the other side of death's door, but we still cling to this life. What person has not, upon receiving news of impending death, wept bitterly to God? Many have stories of God's mercy and healing. But even those who have died could tell us stories of healing—ultimate healing upon seeing the face of their Lord!

The greatest fear is the unknown. We know of heaven, but we don't understand it. We prepare for death by faith, knowing we must go through the door alone. But believers have the truth that God who knows and loves them is on the other side, waiting with open arms. For believers, death is not the end—it is the beginning of eternity with God.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about death on pages 500, 501. See also the key passage note at 1 Corinthians 15:20-22 on page 1514.

SOUL NOTE



Doctor's Orders (20:7) God promised to heal Hezekiah. He could have intervened miraculously; He could have sent Isaiah to touch and heal him. Instead, God sent Isaiah with a prescription. The phrase, “Take a lump of figs,” probably referred to a poultice that would relieve the boil. When we are ill, we should seek healing. God may intervene miraculously, or He may send doctors and medicines. In either case, He is ultimately in control to heal His people or to bring them home to Him.

Topic: Health/Spirituality

None who go to her return,
Nor do they regain the paths of life—
So you may walk in the way of
goodness,
And keep to the paths of righteousness.
For the upright will dwell in the land,
And the blameless will remain in it;
But the wicked will be cut off from the
earth,
And the unfaithful will be uprooted from
it.

DANCE FOR THE YOUNG

3 My son, do not forget my law,
But let your heart keep my commands;
For length of days and long life
And peace they will add to you.

Let not mercy and truth forsake you;
Bind them around your neck,
Write them on the tablet of your heart,

4 And so find favor and high esteem
In the sight of God and man.
5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
And lean not on your own
understanding;
6 In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct^a your paths.
7 Do not be wise in your own eyes;
Fear the LORD and depart from evil.
8 It will be health to your flesh,^a
And strength^b to your bones.
9 Honor the LORD with your possessions,
And with the firstfruits of all your
increase;

3:6 ^aOr *make smooth or straight* **3:8** ^aLiterally *navel*, figurative of the body ^bLiterally *drink or refreshment*

KEY PASSAGE

TRUST IN HIM

(3:5, 6)



Trust

It's one thing for people to trust God with their eternal destiny; it is quite another for them to trust God to handle the challenges and difficulties of daily life. These verses encourage God's people to trust in God with all their hearts and acknowledge Him in all their ways. When we do so, He promises to direct, or straighten, our paths. We need to trust God to help us handle the difficult situations we face, even in cases where we can't begin to see how He could. Also, trusting the Lord means to trust Him in all areas. If we really want to know God's will for our lives, or even for our actions in a particular situation, we must begin by trusting that God cares about every aspect of living, and that He will provide what we need.

Learn More: Turn to the article about trust on pages 1180, 1181. See also the personality profile of Habakkuk on page 1185.

SOUL NOTE



Health and Strength (3:7, 8) Modern medical research is proving the positive relationship between health and godliness, a fact that believers have understood for a long time. Living a godly lifestyle brings physical, emotional, and spiritual health and blessing. Being a believer will not exempt a person from physical problems, but at times it may keep a person from some kinds of diseases. And knowing that one belongs to God brings spiritual contentment that will have a positive effect on the body as well. **Topic: Health/Spirituality**

and be helped by you on my way to Judea. ¹⁷Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No? ¹⁸But *as God is faithful*, our word to you was not Yes and No. ¹⁹For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me, Silvanus, and Timothy—was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes. ²⁰For all the promises of God in Him *are* Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. ²¹Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, ²²who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

²³Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth. ²⁴Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.

2 But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow. ²For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?

FORGIVE THE OFFENDER

³And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is *the joy of you* all. ⁴For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.

⁵But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent—not to be too severe. ⁶This punishment which *was* inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, ⁷so that, on the contrary, you *ought* rather to forgive and comfort *him*, lest perhaps

such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. ⁸Therefore I urge you to reaffirm *your* love to him. ⁹For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. ¹⁰Now whom you forgive anything, I also *forgive*. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one^a for your sakes in the presence of Christ, ¹¹lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

TRiumPH IN CHRIST

¹²Furthermore, when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, ¹³I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.

¹⁴Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. ¹⁵For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. ¹⁶To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life. And who *is* sufficient for these things? ¹⁷For we are not, as so many,^a peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.

CHRIST'S EPISTLE

3 Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you or *letters* of commendation from you? ²You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; ³clearly *you are* an epistle of Christ,

^{2:10} ^aNU-Text reads *For indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it.*

^{2:17} ^aM-Text reads *the rest.*

SOUL NOTE



Forgive and Comfort (2:7, 8) The man in the church who had been disciplined had repented of his sin. Therefore, Paul encouraged the believers to “forgive and comfort him” so that he would not be “swallowed up with too much sorrow.”

The church can find it difficult to discipline its own, but that may be needed in order to bring a sinner to repentance. Once that repentance is seen, however, restoration is important. Forgiveness and comfort can return the person to the fellowship so he or she can return to spiritual health and service for God. **Topic: Health/Spirituality**

GREETING TO GAIUS

The Elder,

¹To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth:

²Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. ³For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth *that is* in you, just as you walk in the truth. ⁴I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.^a

GAIUS COMMENDED FOR GENEROSITY

⁵Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and^a for strangers, ⁶who have borne witness of your love before the church. *If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well,* ⁷because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. ⁸We therefore ought to receive^a such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.

DIOTREPHES AND DEMETRIUS

⁹I wrote to the church, but Diotrophes, who loves to have the preeminence among them,

does not receive us. ¹⁰Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting *them* out of the church.

¹¹Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but^a he who does evil has not seen God.

¹²Demetrius has a *good* testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true.

FAREWELL GREETING

¹³I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; ¹⁴but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face.

Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

⁴ ^aNU-Text reads *the truth*. ⁵ ^aNU-Text adds *especially*. ⁸ ^aNU-Text reads *support*.
¹¹ ^aNU-Text and M-Text omit *but*.

SOUL NOTE



Health Maintenance (2) Concern for people's physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being go together. Some people think the body doesn't matter, so they either neglect themselves and the bodies God gave them, or they indulge in sinful behavior, thinking that it doesn't matter. Both attitudes are mistaken. We should not obsess with our appearance or health, but we should do our best to maintain a certain level of health so that we can serve God to the best of our ability. It's wrong to neglect or indulge ourselves; instead, we should keep a healthy balance so that we can be ready to serve God wherever He may call us. **Topic: Health/Spirituality**

SOUL NOTE



Honorable Mention (5-8) When churches care for their missionaries and teachers, they honor God and "become fellow workers for the truth." All believers are called to share the Good News and make disciples, but not all are called to travel, preach, or serve as missionaries. But certainly everybody can support those who do. Gaius was commended for being hospitable to these traveling teachers, and that goes for all of us. We please God when we receive workers hospitably, help meet their needs, make them comfortable, and then send them on their way "in a manner worthy of God." God's laborers for the truth deserve honor. **Topic: Honor**