

Thy Word Is a Lamp Unto My Feet: The Bible for Today
The Bible and Health

Lesson #9 for June 2, 2007

Scriptures: Matthew 4:23; Luke 4:16-21; Romans 6:4,9-11; Philippians 4:4-9; Colossians 1:20, 21; 3:8-10.

1. Adventism, from its early years, has been known as a church unusually involved in health. “Conservative” Adventists believe that there are three reliable sources of information about health: the Scriptures, the writings of Ellen G. White, and modern scientific research and/or discovery. What should be our relationship to each of those sources of information when it comes to deciding about our own course of practice? Why do you think the Adventist Church has become so involved in health, healing, hospitals, and healthful living issues?
2. In general, Adventists have found that the Bible provides broad guidelines in the area of health. It is difficult, however, to support certain of our ideas about good health from the Bible alone. A good example is vegetarianism. Clearly, vegetarianism was not practiced throughout Scripture. The original diet included: fruits, nuts, and grains; (Genesis 1:29) to which vegetables were added later—after sin. (Genesis 3:18) However, it is very clear that many “saints” in the Bible ate meat. (Genesis 18:1-8) Daniel, as some would point out, ate a diet of vegetables and water for those three critical years of his education. (Daniel 1:8-16) It seems, however, that later he returned to a diet of flesh, at least on occasion. (Daniel 10:3) Jesus himself ate fish and provided it to others to eat. (Mark 6:41; Luke 9:16,17; John 21:9) We do not believe that this is because as some have jokingly suggested, “Jesus was living up to all the light he had!” Ellen White suggests that, “He supplied only that which would suffice for their need, that which was **the daily food of the fisherfolk about the sea.**” *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 345 (1900); *Adventist Home*, p. 451; *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 87. He also ate lamb at the time of festivals. (Matthew 26:17-19; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7,8)
3. When we turn to the writings of Ellen White, we find many specific directives on the subject of health. To what extent was that counsel based on the society in which she lived? Why do you suppose, for example, that the land of Canaan was described as “a land flowing with milk and honey”? (Exodus 33:3) In modern terms that would suggest cholesterol and sugar! Some “liberal” Adventists have looked at the counsel of Ellen White and have considered it far too restrictive. Do you agree?
4. Modern science does research investigating almost every question one could imagine. One can find research supporting almost any view one wants to take! Very specific data is available, but new studies are coming out which seem to negate advice learned from previous studies. How should Christians relate to these “scientific discoveries”? If some modern study seems to contradict one of the broad principles set forth in Scripture or some more detailed information given by Ellen White, what should be our attitude? What about the advice that wine is good for the heart?
5. **How much should we allow our personal preferences, choices, or opinions to guide our interpretation of the broad principles of Scripture, the more specific details given by Ellen White, or even the modern “findings” of science?**
6. Many modern Adventists find it difficult to abide by the more strict requirements suggested by Ellen White. How would those people respond if they were told by God that they would be living for the next 40 years on only one food, manna? As we know, the children of Israel lived essentially illness-free for those 40 years! Was it because they were eating an excellent diet?

7. In the days of Jesus, it is noteworthy that, “During His ministry Jesus devoted more time to healing the sick than to preaching.” {DA 350.3} What do you think is implied by that? Why would Ellen White suggest that, “If you are a Christian and a competent physician, you are qualified to do tenfold more good as a missionary for God than if you were to go forth merely as a preacher of the word”? {CH 503.3}
8. “Conservative” Christians believe that our bodies were created by God. None of us would question the fact that God intended for our bodies to be healthy. We were to take good care of these bodies, eating only the very best of natural foods and supplementing that with a daily diet from the tree of life. Man has not had access to the tree of life for a very long time. How can we know what God’s plan is for our best health? How should we relate to findings from revelation versus findings from science?
9. Paul makes it very clear that our bodies should be treated as “the temple of God.” (1 Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:19,20; 10:31) God wants us to be in good health at all times. (3 John 2) God not only created our bodies but has paid an enormous price to “buy us back” from sin. (Romans 12:1; 14:7; Ephesians 5:29) What should be our responsibility in caring for the “body temples” that God has given us? Is it honest for us to abuse our health and then pray for God to keep us well or make us well?
10. Has God given the Seventh-day Adventist Church the responsibility of living healthful lives as examples to others? If you saw Adventists mixed among non-Adventists, do you think you could pick out the Adventists because they were healthier?
11. If you could secretly watch Adventists eating in restaurants, could you tell by their food choices that they were taking good care of their “body temples”? Someone has jokingly suggested that you can identify the Adventists in a restaurant because, in light of the imminent return of Jesus, they eat their desserts first!
12. Why do you think the health message has been such a large part of the Adventist message? Was God’s intention for the health message to be an “entering wedge”? What do the following words mean? “Again and again I have been instructed that the medical missionary work is to bear the same relation to the work of the third angel’s message that the arm and hand bear to the body.” {Testimonies, vol. 6, p. 288; ChS 134.4}
13. Does God expect us to be examples of what we preach? Paul probably spoke more about health than any of the other Bible writers. Notice his words concerning what he had been through in his lifetime.

But if anyone dares to boast about something—I am talking like a fool—I will be just as daring. ²²Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. ²³Are they Christ’s servants? I sound like a madman—but I am a better servant than they are! I have worked much harder, I have been in prison more times, I have been whipped much more, and I have been near death more often. ²⁴ Five times I was given the thirty-nine lashes by the Jews; ²⁵three times I was whipped by the Romans; and once I was stoned. I have been in three shipwrecks, and once I spent twenty-four hours in the water. ²⁶In my many travels I have been in danger from floods and from robbers, in danger from fellow-Jews and from Gentiles; there have been dangers in the cities, dangers in the wilds, dangers on the high seas, and dangers from false friends. ²⁷There has been work and toil; often I have gone without sleep; I have been hungry and thirsty; I have often been without enough

food, shelter, or clothing. ²⁸And not to mention other things, every day I am under the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹When someone is weak, then I feel weak too; when someone is led into sin, I am filled with distress. (2 Corinthians 11:20-29, *GNB*)

Could someone who had been through all that ever look like an example of good health?

14. The Greek word for “salvation” used consistently throughout the New Testament is also the word for “healing.” God seems to want us to return to a perfect relationship with him which manifests itself not only in good health but in a wonderful friendship. (Romans 6:4,9-11; 1 Corinthians 15:51-57; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; Colossians 1:20,21; 3:8-10; 1 John 3:2) God really does want us to be in perfect mental, physical, spiritual, and social health.
15. Look at the example of Jesus. What characteristics of his life and ministry are examples of good health? How did he relate to the poor health of others? As we know, Jesus performed many miracles. Most of the miracles were for the healing of diseases and illnesses of the people who came to see him. Jesus was constantly restoring people to a right state of mental and physical health. Some day he will take us to heaven where we will be permanently restored to a right relationship with him, including perfect health.
16. In the days of Jesus, what was the relationship between health and “demon possession”? Were those who were “demon-possessed” just suffering from certain serious illnesses? Or were they, in fact, inhabited by Satan’s cohorts?
17. There is very good evidence in Scripture, in the writings of Ellen White, and in modern medicine, suggesting that many of the diseases and illnesses that affect human beings come from their mental state. Read Hebrews 12:2 and Philippians 4:8. What happens to those who stop depending upon their own human efforts and rely wholly on the healing powers of God? If we spend as much time as possible focusing on Jesus and his goodness, how does that affect our spiritual, mental, and physical health? How much is implied by the statement of Jesus in John 14:6 (*GNB*), “I am the way, the truth, and the life”?
18. Do we allow ourselves to be “stressed out” by the demands of modern society? To what extent should our belief in Scripture, in Jesus, and in the Father, and our hope for a better life in the future give us peace despite these modern stresses?
19. Ellen White makes a very interesting statement in *Ministry of Healing* page 127: “Pure air, sunlight, abstemiousness, rest, exercise, proper diet, the use of water, trust in divine power—these are the true remedies.” {*MH* 127.2} How many of those remedies do you take advantage of every day? Which are the most difficult ones to implement in your own life? How can those remedies be integrated into our pell-mell, helter-skelter lives?
20. Read Galatians 5:22,23. There is an apparent contradiction in this statement. Many modern Christians pray for their lives to be controlled and guided by the Holy Spirit. But among the gifts that the Holy Spirit offers to give us is the final one, self-control. What is implied by that? Is the Holy Spirit just suggesting that we need to be temperate in what we eat or drink?

True temperance teaches us to dispense entirely with everything hurtful and to use judiciously that which is healthful. There are few who realize as they should how much their habits of diet have to do with their health, their character, their usefulness in this world, and their eternal destiny. The appetite should ever be in subjection to the moral and intellectual powers. The body should be servant to the mind, and not the mind to the body. {*Patriarchs and Prophets* 562.1 (1890); *CG* 398.3; *Te* 138.2; *2MCP* 394.4}

21. What is implied by this word, “self-control”? Does it refer primarily to abstinence from tobacco,

alcohol, and other harmful substances? In what way would that be a part of the gift of the Holy Spirit? Or does it imply something much larger? Does the gift of the Holy Spirit lead us to eventually understand his will for us clearly and lead us to a realization that all he wants for us is for our best good so that when exercising self-control we will be doing God's will? Could such a thing happen to people living in our sinful world?

22. Someone has suggested that particularly in the area of health, **“Our society is information rich and application poor.”** It has been estimated that as much as 80 or 90% of the health budget of the United States could be eliminated if people would practice the principles of health which are clearly spelled out either in Scripture or in modern science. To what extent should people be held responsible for the consequences of their own bad habits? Should the IV drug user be expected to pay for his liver transplant, his HIV medications, etc.? Should the obese person with high cholesterol pay for his open-heart surgery?
23. Thinking of the principles of health as you understand them from Scripture and the writings of Ellen White, how do you evaluate the stream of advertisements that you see on television about food? How often are healthful foods advertised? Have you ever seen an ad on TV encouraging you to consume more carrots, broccoli, or spinach?
24. When it comes to mental health, there is little doubt that the key to much mental illness is inadequate, damaging, or poor interpersonal relationships. What does the Bible tell us about that subject? Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; 1 John 4:7; 4:18. What would it be like to live in a world where those suggestions were actually practiced? Is such a world even possible this side of heaven? What would a church be like where everyone loved one another (1 Thessalonians 3:2), served one another (Galatians 5:13), bore the burdens of one another (Ephesians 4:2), was kind to everyone else in the church (Ephesians 4:32), helped and advised others (Romans 15:14), was tender-hearted and forgiving to everyone (Ephesians 4:32), comforted each other (1 Thessalonians 4:18), always showed compassion to one another (1 Peter 3:8), and was hospitable to others and prayed for each other (1 Peter 4:9; James 5:16)? Wouldn't [??Would] there be a rush by people from the outside to be a part of such a group?
25. What should Adventists do about the current epidemic of obesity? Should the church be silent on this subject, leaving it to individual choice? Should we as health care providers and Seventh-day Adventists say anything?
26. For the first time in modern history, it looks like the current generation of people living on this earth are going to live shorter lives than their parents. What do you think are the major factors causing that? Should the church be speaking to that issue?
27. Adventists have been foremost among Christian denominations in speaking out on the subject of health. We have come to be known for this issue. In the last 40 years, various studies have been done on Adventists. Some suggest that if we carefully followed the principles and guidelines outlined by Ellen White, we could live as much as 12 years longer than the general population. We would also be much healthier throughout life. Loma Linda, California, has been recognized as one of four cities in the world renowned for its long-lived population. What do we need to do as individuals to more clearly exemplify good health before our neighbors and leave an attractive example before them of the Adventist lifestyle?

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