

WWJS About Medical Care?
Mark 2:1-12

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The gentle healer came into a town one day.
He touched the blind and helped the lame to walk away.
But more than that, he forgave the sins of those who stray.
The gentle healer comes into our town today. ¹

A full twenty percent of the gospels deal with the healing ministries of Jesus. Seeing the crowds he has compassion on them and one by one, person by person, individual by individual, he heals their diseases, casts out their demons, forgives their sins, and challenges them to live a life of wholeness. What would Jesus say about medical care in America? We are at the heart of the gospels as we try to unpack that question today. I will not be presumptuous enough to pretend that I can answer that question except to give you some direction for your thinking.

There are three things I want to say that I believe Jesus would say.

TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF.

So much of health has to do with our individual and personal choices. Take good care of yourself physically. In I Corinthians 6:19, Paul poses this question, *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? You are not your own, you were bought with a price. Therefore, honor God with your body.”* He makes this statement in the midst of a discussion about food and sex.

The Christian religion, unlike other world religions, regards the body as essential to human completeness. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. There are earthly bodies and there are heavenly bodies. Humans are not spiritual beings contained in a temporary body. Humans are whole beings, composed of body, mind and soul.

Our bodies are amazing machines. So many of you know that so much better than I. This little organ we call a heart will pump fifty-five million gallons of blood in an average lifetime. Our DNA contains two thousand genes per chromosome. One little square inch of skin on your body contains twenty blood vessels, sixty-five hairs and muscles, seventy-eight nerves, six hundred fifty sweat glands, one thousand three hundred nerve endings, and nineteen million five hundred thousand cells. We are awesomely and wonderfully made by our Creator. Take good care of yourself.

If God isn't concerned about your physical health, why all the dietary laws of the Old Testament? Why all the ecclesiastical arguments about food in the New Testament?

Reverend Murray McCheyne was one of Scotland's finest preachers in the 19th century. But McCheyne died of exhaustion at age thirty while pastoring St. Peter's Church in Dundee. On his death bed this is what he said, “God gave me a message to deliver and a horse to ride. Alas, I killed the horse and now I cannot deliver the message.” Don't kill the horse on which your life rides. Take good care of yourself physically.

Take good care of yourself spiritually. The first thing Jesus said to the paralytic in this story of healing is *“Son, your sins are forgiven.”* It is not Jesus’ healing power, but his forgiving power that causes concern in the crowd. *“Who is this fellow who thinks he can forgive sins? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”* Technically speaking, they are absolutely right.

It was the great preacher, Harry Emerson Fosdick, who used to say, “Either our sins have been forgiven by God or they forever remain in us as sin.” We can medicate ourselves into la-la land, counsel ourselves into boredom, and still not deal with the sins that so easily beset us. In my opinion, the Church has miserably failed to help people openly and effectively confess their sins and come to know personally and cooperatively that in the name of Jesus Christ my sins are forgiven. I’ve said those words personally to people, I’ve said it in the liturgy of the Church, and I’ve watched it perform its transforming powers in people’s lives. In the name of Jesus Christ your sins and mine can be forgiven.

It was late Saturday afternoon and I was trying to make a quick hospital call and then take my wife out to dinner. I popped into the room of my member and said a cheery, “How are you tonight?” That is when a whole life burst forth in front of me. You see, I did not know her physician had been there just before I got there. He had asked a question that I had been too embarrassed to ask. He dared to look her in the eye and say to this person suffering with heart problems, “How is it with your family?” What he didn’t know and I was afraid to confront was that she and her brother had not spoken to one another in years. The pain of that fractured relationship was taking its toll on her physically. The healing she needed that night was a spiritual healing. She needed something touched in her heart alright, not the pump, but the soul.

E.S. Jones once said, “We must give up on the notion that we can harbor fears, resentments, self-centeredness, guilt, and still believe nothing will happen to us physically.” The body cannot bear what the soul will not resolve. I will know we are making progress toward spiritual health when the number of prayer requests on Sunday have as much to do with broken hearts as they do with broken bodies. Take good care of yourself. It is a matter of Christian discipleship.

What would Jesus say about medical care? I believe that Jesus would say: ALWAYS BE MOTIVATED BY MERCY.

Looking upon the crowd he had compassion on them. In fact, he never saw them as large groups. They were always individuals, persons. Jesus enters into this healing relationship with individuals. Isn’t that what healing is all about? I ask you today, is healthcare about our money or is it a matter of ministry? The world is going to have to decide.

An old woman who died in Scotland in a nursing home years ago left this note.

What do you see nurses, what do you see?
What are you thinking when you are looking at me?
A crabby old woman, not very wise, uncertain of habit with
faraway eyes.
I’m a small child of ten with a mother and father,
Brothers and sisters who love one another

A bride in her twenties—my heart gives a leap,
Remembering the vow that I promised to keep.
A woman of thirty, my young now grow fast,
Bound to each other with ties that should last.
At forty, my sons have grown and have gone,
But my man is beside me, to see I don't mourn.
At fifty, once more babies play around my knees
Again we know children, my husband and me.
I'm an old woman now and nature is cruel.
'Tis her jest to make old age look like a fool.
The body it crumbles, grace and vigor depart.
There is now a stone where I once had a heart.
But inside this old carcass a young girl still dwells,
And now and again my battered heart swells.
I remember the joys and I remember the pains;
And I'm loving and living life over again.
I think of the years all too few—gone too fast.
And accept the stark fact that nothing can last.
So open your eyes, nurses, open and see
Not a crabby old woman, look closer—see me.²

The reality is that any profession can benefit from this advice. We don't want to be categories, statistics, numbers, clients, patients; we want to be persons. Most of the time we are.

Dr. Faith Fitzgerald, in a speech to med students a few years ago, called on future physicians to be servants of the vulnerable, the injured, the impaired, the lonely. We serve those who most need service and that is the noble part of our profession. "Yes," continued Dr. Fitzgerald, "Being a physician is intellectually gratifying, emotionally enriching, mechanically exciting and financially rewarding, but medicine is not about you. We will not be judged by what we get, but by what we give to those who put themselves and their loved ones in our hands."

Maybe it is time for healthcare providers, insurance companies, legislators and private citizens to take on the mind of Christ who in the words of St. Paul "*Did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant.*"

I ask you today, in what condition might your compassion be?

According to an article in USA Today last May, more than eighteen thousand adults in the USA die each year because they are uninsured and can't get proper health care. There are thirty million working age Americans whose employers do not provide insurance and who do not qualify for government medical aid. They also have ten million children. It is a well established medical fact that uninsured people die at twice the rate of insured persons.

As I speak, our own state is engaged in a bitter battle over the extent of government assisted TennCare, as well as the question of insurance reforms giving Tennesseans with pre-existing conditions the ability to obtain affordable health insurance.

Let me say quickly that I am not smart enough to know the solution to this problem. Our

new governor, who says he can resolve this deadlock, deserves our earnest prayers and faithful intercession. In the meantime I ask you—is it not time to silence our horns, lower our voices, temper our greed, abandon our politics, and sit down at the table of brotherhood until we discern the common good for all? We are not talking about roads and parks here. We are talking about the lives of human beings, red and yellow black and white, all of whom are precious in God’s sight.

Here in the health mecca of America, in Brentwood, Tennessee, I suspect there are enough caring people to solve this pressing problem. While for better or worse, the institutional Church no longer sits at the health table of America. Church people, good people, Christian people, ethical people, people like you, run health care companies, provide insurance, staff hospitals, do social work and become the doctors and nurses to whom ordinary people like me trust their lives. In the name of Jesus Christ today, I challenge you to find a just, compassionate, and fair solution to this concern of America. What would Jesus say? BE MOTIVATED BY MERCY.

What would Jesus say about healthcare in America? I think He would say: WORK TOGETHER FOR THE GOOD OF ALL.

Healing is a team effort. Nobody can operate in their corners anymore. Take a closer look at the story. Here is a paralytic who is carried to Jesus by four friends. When they are pushed aside by the crowd, they climb the steps to the roof. Every home in the Middle East has a set of steps going up to a flat roof. The crowd causes them to use the outside steps. On the roof they create a hole big enough to let an adult down until he is laying on a mat at the feet of Jesus. *“And when Jesus saw **their** faith, he spoke to the paralytic.”*

I have some questions about this story. What if these four friends had said, “We just need to mind our own business and let this guy take care of himself?” What if they had said that they had tried their best? “We picked him up, we took him to the healer, but the place was full and we couldn’t get in so we went home. We did all we could do?” What if they had failed to have faith in Jesus Christ? By **their** faith Jesus stopped to speak to the paralytic.

There is a profound truth here for us to understand in the midst of our lives. You see, illness does funny things to us. Those of you who join me as a survivor know what I am saying. Illness does a weird thing to you down in your soul and the worst thing that it does is it makes you dependent. I don’t like being dependent. The worst thing of fighting with cancer was suddenly not being able to do for myself what I had always done all of my life. People come to me in moments of great pain and sorrow and say to me, “I can’t even pray, Howard, I can’t even pray.” I say to them, “Join the crowd, we’ve all been there.” That’s why doing for others is so critical, so important and so effective, whether it is prayer or providing the right care to happen.

We are in the team business here and that’s why there must be a connection between all of Science’s horses and all of Religion’s men and women to make us whole again. I am talking about something that other people here know much more than I. Dr. Mark Houston, Director of Hypertension Institute of Nashville and Associate Clinical Professor of Medicine at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, knows a lot about this connection and writes books about it. Mark would you come up and let me chat with you for a minute.

I'm trying to understand this connection between faith and health, between religion and medicine. You have lived into it, you have written about it and you lecture about it. How have you seen that happen in your own life and your particular practice of medicine?

“Science, medicine, and religion have been separated and we have got to pull them back together into one. The power of that in healing is incredible. I always use the saying, ‘*The wise healer uses what works.*’ If you don’t bring together the things that you know are effective in healing, the mind, the body and the soul, then you will never achieve optimal health. We have realized that health is multi-dimensional. Healing is really five different things: your mind, your body, your spirit, but it is relations to your God and relations to others. Part of that healing philosophy is to seek the wholeness.”

Absolutely, and you have done that. You have pulled those two together in your own practice, haven't you?

“I try and I think that one of the things I would tell people is that all the knowledge we need is already available. We are just trying to figure it out and when people come in we want to use the gifts that we have been given because all of our knowledge as healers is from God. We are not the people who heal. He has given us the technology, He has given us the knowledge to pool, to help people to heal...”

What would you say to ordinary people like me who are consumers? How can we be whole?

“I think that our spirits are really directly from God and that disconnect is where the illness begins. Until we can reestablish the connection with God, we are not whole. Our mind and our body and spirit are communicating with each other. If one of them is not working, the other two parts are sick. The key is to have the spiritual connections. As you said, we are whole, we are not just fragmented parts.”

We want to talk a lot more about this in a few days. Thank you Mark.

There is a Balm in Gilead that makes the wounded whole. There is a place, that quiet peace, near to the heart of God. Let us step forward to be part of the team that makes people well.

END NOTES

1. Paraphrase of Michael Cord, [The Gentle Healer](#)

2. Bruce Larson, There's More to Health Than Not Being Sick

