

SEPTEMBER 7, 2025

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

*SERMON August 31 - 'Health - Mark 12:29-31, 1 Timothy 5:23, James 5:14-15,
2 Corinthians 12:7-9, Matthew 25:37-40, John 9:2-3, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20*

The message today is coming from a suggestion I got last week on a sheet passed out to ask feedback from the congregation on what you would like to hear on on a Sunday morning.

As the week stretched on I realized it's a very present and honest reality of life that we've been seeing together for some time now. The subject is health.

This year has been difficult for us as a church. We've had a lot of funerals. We've seen struggles with short and long term sicknesses. This past week Pat Kaiser and Jane Barnett's passed, and we just had Bonnie Shatzer's service last week. Folks have and are having surgeries and procedures. Health is a very present care for all of us.

Scripture is largely a book that addresses spiritual health. It was never written to be a medical or science textbook. Rather it's about the story of God interacting with humanity through history, the path to redemption before God, the witness and example of Jesus, and a call to bring the world to a faith that is unifying and ushers in the Kingdom of God.

While the Bible may not prescribe specifics for physical and mental health, the truth is that our spiritual health can be of great assistance and power as we strive to maintain good health and when that health takes a downward turn.

Much of the healing in scripture is spiritually centered. It comes through the prayers of the apostles, prophets, and Jesus. It comes in tandem with the faith of those seeking it.

Prayer and faith are good, and we exercise them well when our health is having issues. Experience and even scripture show us that this isn't always the answer to healing.

Through the centuries we have been fortunate that God has gifted men and women with understanding and inspiration to study, understand, and treat our bodies and minds. We've learned more and more and gotten more effective.

Through those centuries and even today, faith has been both a great help to recognize God working in this and at the same time for others a barrier to embracing this learning and using it.

Passages like Matthew 25 and the story of the Good Samaritan remind us that where there is a need we should do our best to meet it. This is the heart of loving God by loving our neighbor. As much as scripture calls on us to pray, Jesus calls us to action to meet needs physically, in the moment where we can.

The result has been missions and monasteries that help the sick and poor. Clinics are started by people of faith. Hospitals are built and research centers by people of faith to continue to bring health, healing, and wholeness to those who are sick.

This is faith in real time action. It is mercy, compassion, and love.

At the same time there are those who believe that everything is a spiritual condition, or that prayer is all that is needed to bring healing. Doctors and therapists are at the very least suspect.

Of course there are different degrees of all faith and none at all. Most lie somewhere in the middle. It's important to remember, however that there are many people whose lives were cut short because they refused treatment. There have been people criminally charged with negligence for refusing to take a child or aging relative for care that would have saved their life because of a belief that prayer was all that was needed.

To this I offer two simple thoughts:

When the devil tempted Jesus by bringing Him to the top of the temple and daring Him to jump off because God says that He would send angels to prevent Jesus from harm, the response was "do not put God to the foolish test". Like the old joke about the man who died in a flood after refusing a rescue truck, rescue boat, and rescue helicopter in favor of prayer. He asked God why God didn't answer. God said "I sent you a truck, a boat, and a chopper. What more do you want?" Why would we tempt God when we have so many resources available to us? If you look statistically it's no comparison. Healing happens far more frequently with prayer plus treatment than with prayer alone.

We need to be careful about how we speak in situations where our prayers aren't answered. I corrected someone just last week in this. "We were praying for wholeness and healing, and now that prayer has been answered. They are truly whole and healed."

This may be a comforting thought and even truth. The statement is dishonest. I wasn't praying for death. I was praying for continued and healthy life. It's a cruel trick if I ask for my child to have long life and health and the response is, "OK, I'll give you death, grief, and loss".

The struggle is real making sense of tragedy and loss when we pray for healing. We can entrust people faithfully to God, and wrestle with the questions around ungranted prayers at the same time. It's honest. AND it draws us more genuinely close to God in soul giving and sustaining ways.

And it's okay. Paul in Corinthians asks three times to be healed and the healing isn't granted. I'm sure Timothy prayed about his stomach condition, whatever it was. Instead he received instruction to "take a little wine" to settle it. Certainly a doctor today isn't likely to send a prescription to the liquor store for a belly ache, but then that was a remedy. Thank goodness we have better ones today! In James where it says to bring the sick to the elders of the church for prayer and anointing to bring healing there's an interesting sense of things. Some suggest the anointing oil is simply a ritual oil. Others suggest that in that time there were oils used medicinally. In other words, "go for prayer and take your medicine."

The story of David being hired to play the harp for a King Saul slowly being driven mad is often overlooked in this regard. In that time mental breakdown was always seen as spiritually driven. While their understanding was far less than we have today, that didn't stop attempts at treatment. They believed that music could soothe whatever was happening in the person's mind. This wasn't just a one time inspiration for Saul. It was much more common.

What does all this have to do with anything if I'm saying that scripture isn't directly giving us direction on physical and mental health? Even if the instructions aren't a textbook, we have stories that help us put together best practices for how to faithfully care for our bodies. There are many places to seek guidance. We do well to listen to them.

Paul in Corinthians reminds us that our bodies are temples for the Holy Spirit. We should take this to heart. We wouldn't come into the sacred space of our church and break the stained glass with rocks or spray paint vulgarity down the halls. Our bodies are sacred as well. They house something incredibly valuable to God. Our spirits. Ourselves.

Doctors don't just recommend things when we're sick. The phrase "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is very true. We have guidance on what to put into our bodies. How much we should be exercising to stay healthy. We have suggestions to train and occupy our minds to keep them as healthy as possible or as long as possible.

I'm as guilty as the next person for being imperfect on this front. But I DO recognize reality. When I listen to the advice of my doctors my body and mind are healthier. I am more efficient and effective. I am a better husband, father, pastor, teacher, and everything else. Fail as I might, I continue to try and to improve.

The advice for everyone won't be the same because we're all different. And that's okay as well.

Spiritually this is directly related to our instruction in Mark to love the LORD with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Everything we are is to be given over to God. The healthier our bodies and minds, the more we have at our beck and call to love and to serve with our whole being.

Fortunately, the last piece to cover has limitless possibilities to love and serve God. This piece is our spiritual health.

The prescription for this is simple and it's evident through the Bible. Pray, talk to God and more importantly listen. Worship, come into the presence of God and do it not just looking at what we can get. More important what can we bring? Study. Don't just memorize the Bible. Actually dig deep and understand it. Serve. Do for others so they can see the goodness of God in Christ through you. Spend time together as believers. Uplift and encourage one another because a life of faith is both beautiful and comes with a host of challenges.

Being spiritually healthy is significant precisely because our mind and body can deteriorate. In a famous interaction with a blind man Jesus is asked what sin the man committed to become blind. This is a warning to those who get high and holy assuming that illness is automatically the result of sin. Jesus says "no one sinned, he is blind to make the glory of God known."

In this situation, it was made known by a miraculous healing. But what about the rest of us when we aren't healed?

Last Sunday in Sunday school two different stories were shared about individuals who have and are enduring significant physical health issues. In both circumstances, the ones afflicted have a spiritually mature and healthy perspective. Rather than being gloom and doom, bitter, or harsh about their condition they use it for the glory of God.

They see it as an opportunity to help others sharing in similar circumstances. They get to speak hope into the lives of others as they go through treatment. Because they have hope that comes from their faith. They get to

give comfort in the midst of confusion and fear. Their faith gives them comfort and courage that they can pass on to others.

Spiritual health in many ways transcends physical and even mental health. It not only gives us the ability to love and serve God even when our minds and bodies begin to fail. It also is motivation to care for our minds and bodies so that we can have the fullest experience of faith and life possible in each moment.

Yet all three entwine together as we seek to be as whole as we can be in this life.

Care for your health. All of it. Love yourself enough to do this because God loves you enough to want you and shine His love through you as brightly as possible. Do this because we and many others love you and would like to have you, perhaps selfishly, as long as possible.