

CHRISTIAN GLOBAL HEALTH IN PERSPECTIVE

A Guide to Healing and Wholeness in Missions

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Christian Global Health in Perspective: A Guide to Healing and Wholeness in Missions
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Published by William Carey Publishing
10 W. Dry Creek Cir
Littleton, CO 80120 | www.missionbooks.org

William Carey Publishing is a ministry of Frontier Ventures
Pasadena, CA | www.frontierventures.org

Cover and Interior Designer: Mike Riester

ISBNs: 978-1-64508-564-5 (paperback)
978-1-64508-566-9 (epub)

Printed Worldwide

28 27 26 25 24 1 2 3 4 5 IN

Library of Congress Control Number: 2024933538

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Lesson 1

Creation, Health, and Wholeness

Summary	Knowledge Objectives
God created life and desired that all people should enjoy well-being and genuine peace (*shalom*), creating order out of disorder. Jesus came that all people may have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10). In light of Jesus's mission, we as his followers can glorify God by understanding his global plan for health and well-being.	1. Identify biblical narratives for healing/mending and *shalom* and relate these to the contemporary concepts of "health" and "healing." 2. Describe health as wholeness in terms of physical well-being, one's right relationship to self, others (including enemies), God, and the environment using a biblical perspective.
Thematic Content • The creation accounts declare humans to be made "in the image of God" (Gen 1:27) and called to be productive stewards of the earth. • God declared all creation as "good," even as "very good" (Gen 1:31). • God is the ultimate healer. Health is experienced in relation to him. • Scripture gives some directions about how to live a healthy life in community.	**Attitude Objectives** 1. Relate being made in God's image to your own personal calling and to the sacredness of human life. 2. Describe how Christians anticipate and practically realize in their own lives the hope for what ultimately will come in the end, and the hope that engenders.
Conceptual Thread—*Shalom**"Shalom* means just relationships (living justly and experiencing justice), harmonious relationships and enjoyable relationships. *Shalom* means belonging to an authentic and nurturing community in which one can be one's true self and give oneself away without becoming poor. Justice, harmony, and enjoyment of God, self, others, and nature; this is the *shalom* that Jesus brings, the peace that passes all understanding." (Wolterstorff 1983, 69–72)	**Practice (Skills) Objectives** 1. Identify biblical directives that promote good health and well-being, and list how these might apply to your context. 2. Create biblically informed strategies that promote comprehensive well-being in communities, and how to attribute these to God.

Part 1—*Shalom* and Relationships from Creation into Eternity

God created the universe, and there is a goodness, beauty, complexity, and healing evident in the created order. Humans are living beings made in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:27) as stewards of creation. This was retained after the fall (Gen 3:1–24) and even after the flood (Gen 9:1, 6). God declared all creation as good, and even very good (Gen 1:31) and showed the value of gender distinction, marriage, procreation, and labor. Human beings, the crowning glory of the creation, were originally given dominion over creation and access to the Tree of Life and other natural resources for health.

Adam and Eve experienced wellness, integrity, intimacy with God, wholeness, and human flourishing (*shalom*). People were made to be healthy, flourish in the beauty and complexity of the created order, work the land, and serve others while glorifying the Lord. The reason believers try to find ways to heal others, build relationships, and care for people who are not flourishing can be found in the creation narrative (Myers 2015).

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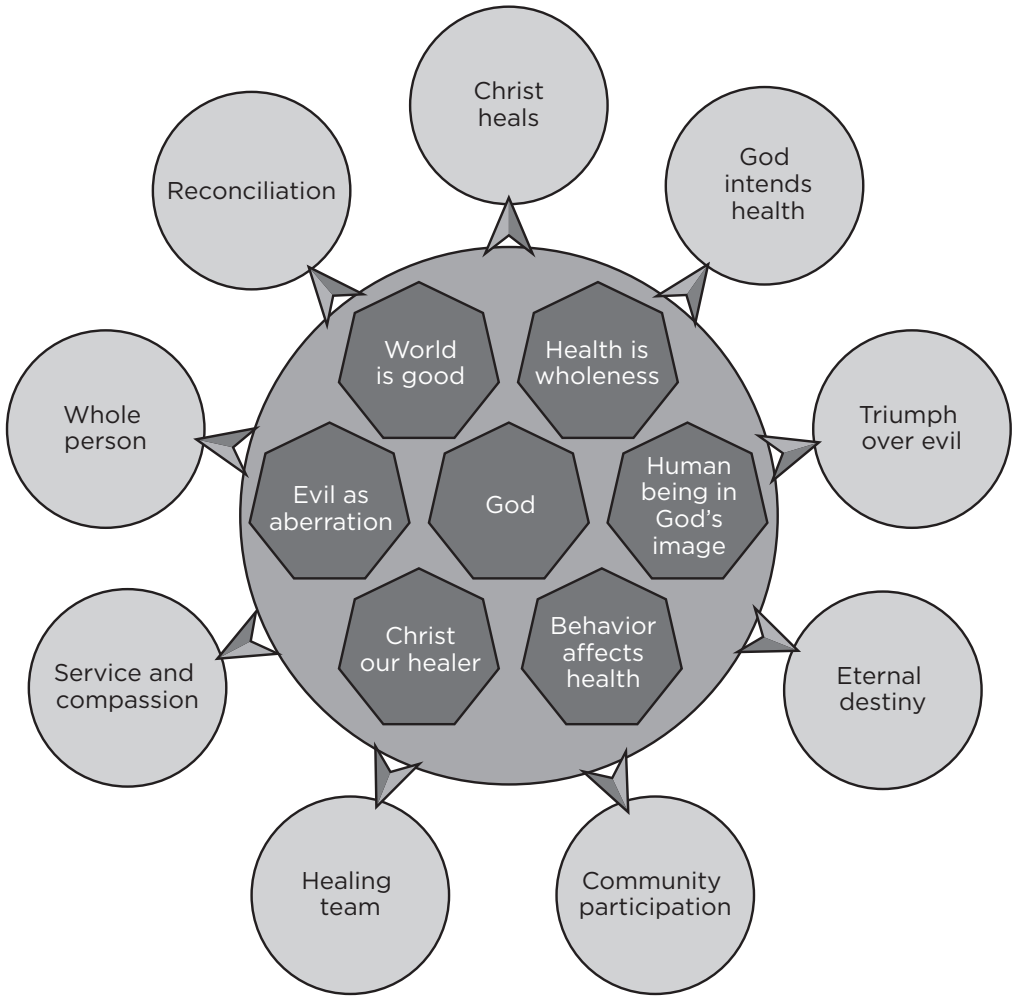


Figure 1: Thinking Biblically about Health (adapted from Fountain 1989, 51)

Adam and Eve fell into sin by rebelling against God, bringing loss of fellowship with God, disruption of *shalom*, and ultimately suffering, disease, and death (see Lesson 2). Yet even after the fall, God still plans for their redemption from sin and intends health for human beings. Christians are called to live into that eternal destiny. Health is physical well-being, but it is also related to righteousness, peace, strength, life, blessedness, holiness, and longevity. The Christian faith is a faith based on a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and the love of Christ flows out to our relationships with people. The evil we experience is an aberration, requiring liberation, and redemption.

Broken relationships require reconciliation. A fractured self needs wholeness of body, mind, and spirit for its restoration. A disordered interaction with the natural world affects all of creation. The good news of the gospel is that God in Christ brings reconciliation with God which then brings profound healing; Jesus is the supreme healer. Hope is essential for life even in the face of certain physical death. Besides competent medical assistance, healing requires community participation and ownership. Teamwork is essential, approached with a posture of humility, service, and compassion.

Learning Activities

- **View**—Lausanne video, "Creation, Health, and Wholeness" (bit.ly/48YCBWz).
- **Read**—Genesis 1–3.
- **Review**—the graphic above "Thinking Biblically about Health."

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For Those Wanting to Know More



- **Read**—Jenkins, "On Being Concerned about Medicine and Something More" (https://bit.ly/3Sif5Nr).
- **Read**—Fountain, "Thinking Biblically about Health," chapter 5 in *Health, the Bible, and the Church: Biblical Perspectives on Health and Healing*.
- **Reflect**—Fountain provides several outcomes of pursuing a biblical view of health. What other outcomes would you add? In what ways does your understanding of being healthy and being made in the image of God relate to your calling?

Part 2—Health as Restoration in Individuals and Community

As Christ-followers, one of the goals in health is bringing restoration to the whole person in community. We need science and technology as well as an understanding of the whole person in the context of their relationships. According to Dr. Daniel Fountain:

> Health cannot be defined. It is not simply an object for analysis. To render it such is to think secularly about health. Health is life, a gift we receive, an endowment we are to develop, and a journey we are to pursue. We can observe and analyze much along the way. We can manipulate and improve certain aspects of health and life. But we can never comprehend the whole…there remains a mystery. (1989, 52)

God intends humans and all creation to enjoy abundant life, of which health is a part (John 10:10). From the beginning of creation, we were designed to be in loving, just, peaceful, and enjoyable relationships. Though creation has been corrupted by the fall (Gen 3:1–20), there remains both the image of God in humans, and tremendous healing capacity in creation. Working toward health and wholeness is participating with God in his plan to restore and redeem the whole world.

God heals his people who follow his ways (Exod 15:26). The Bible gives direction about how to live a healthy life in community, though this may be only partial and temporary. Health flourishes when broken relationships to God, neighbor, self, and creation are reconciled. The "health" Christians ultimately have in mind is more than just overcoming suffering, disease, disability, and death—it is also restoring right relationships with people, planet, and God.

The Hebrew term *shalom* comes closest to representing the fullness God intends for all creation: restored wholeness, unity, justice, well-being, joy, and peace. Relationships that mirror or reflect *shalom* may also include health and fulfillment which makes the understanding of this word very relevant for this discussion. The idea of justice includes living in harmonious and enjoyable relationships. Relationships that are not just cannot be peaceful either (Myers 2009).

> *Shalom* at its highest is enjoyment in one's relationships. To dwell in *shalom* is to enjoy living before God, to enjoy living in one's physical surroundings, to enjoy living with one's fellows, to enjoy life with oneself. (Wolterstorff 1983, 70)

There are other biblical words and concepts that together give a very full meaning to health and wholeness. In addition, healing, peace, and salvation are all closely linked as God's means of restoration. Believers can align their work by cooperation with the living God. Jesus's life and work is the supreme example and means by which *shalom* and the fullness of salvation can be realized globally in individuals, communities, and nations.

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Learning Activities

- **Read**—Myers, "Health, Healing, and Wholeness" (https://bit.ly/4bdoGhm).
- **Reflect**—Myers concludes that health, wholeness, and flourishing are at the center of the biblical text and is the mission of God. Why do you think this is not widely understood in churches, healthcare, or global health?

For Those Wanting to Know More

- Read the article by Christoffer Grundmann, "To Have Life and Have It Abundantly" (https://bit.ly/3IBomvU).
- Briefly summarize the biblical concepts of health presented in Grundmann's article.

Part 3—The Triune God as Ultimate Healer

All three persons of the One True God (the Trinity) are seen as healers. God's intention and actions in history are to heal a creation marred and affected by sin and Satan, the adversary. When humans fail to align with God's healing purposes, they facilitate disease and death.

There is a clear but complex relationship between faith and health. Though limited in our humanity, and mortal in our flesh, humans have been given the capacity to harness the deadly powers of nature and speak truth in order to heal. Though disease and structural evil are pervasive problems and a cause for lament, humans can experience love, healing, and peace to some degree, resulting in well-being. This was experienced in the healing Jesus brought and is represented today in the call of those sent as his ambassadors (2 Cor 5:20) and faithful witnesses.

Healing is also connected to the coming of the kingdom of God and the fall of Satan, and this ongoing work is empowered by the Holy Spirit. The church is called to be the face of healing throughout the whole world. Healing is partial now, mediated through various means, and gives opportunity to glorify God as the ultimate Healer. Striving toward healing, restoring wholeness, and fostering peace is an essential part of the mission of God. Health and healing are a foretaste of that complete health, which, finally, will be revealed to us in the consummation of the world and the renewal of all creation (Rev 21:3–4).

Seven Theses—From Scripture to Today

1. God intends *shalom* and community for humans and all creation, but sin and Satan play adversarial roles against us and God's intention for us.
2. God is God and we are weak, mortal, and frail creatures.
3. Illness puts us into a quandary before God, for it interrupts and challenges God's good world in personal experience.
4. Suffering does not mean divine absence but rather testing.
5. Jesus is Healer-Savior and leads us in faith and prayer.
6. The Spirit is Healer and is the divine pledge of complete healing.
7. The church is called to be God's face of healing in this world.

From Willard Swartley, *Seven Theses: Health, Healing, and the Church's Mission* (IVP 2012), 25–38.

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Learning Activities



Read—Swartley, "Seven Theses: From Scripture to Today" (https://bit.ly/4bsyd4r).

Reflect—Develop your own list of three biblical directives that promote good health and well-being and explain how each of these might apply to your context.

For Those Wanting to Know More



Read—John Goldingay's *Theology and Healing* (https://bit.ly/3SpkbJh).

Read—Frederick Gaiser's *Healing in the Bible* (book) and reflect on these readings.

Summarize your answer to Goldingay's question: Why is a right relationship with God so important in determining well-being or health in all areas?

Reflect—Gaiser's summary includes healing as a work of God and the church as a healing community. In what ways does God act as healer through people in the world now?

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