

Faith and HEALTH Connection

Spirituality and Your Health - Understanding the Connection

A growing body of scientific research indicates there's a connection between spirituality/religion and health. To say that practicing a particular faith or involvement in certain religious practices will have an impact on one's well being and health is oversimplifying things. In fact, it's missing the main point altogether. The connection exists when people develop the type of qualities that come from knowing God and experiencing His love and in living in a way that God, the Great Physician, prescribes. Let's explore this.

From a health perspective, our biggest challenge is to cope with the circumstances of life and its associated stressors along with relationship stressors in a healthy way. For the most part, our behaviors in response to these life events and stressors are attempts to meet our most basic needs of love, acceptance, self worth, security and identity. We have two options. We can choose to include God in our efforts to manage our life and stressors, or we can choose to go it alone.

If we rely on our own abilities and resources, apart from God, our strategies of living can be errant and unhealthy. When we depend on our own strength to cope with the pressures of life and past rejections, the result is very often conflict and frustration. Accompanied with a self-sufficient attitude and unhealthy thinking patterns and behaviors, this can lead to habits that have a detrimental impact on our spiritual, emotional and mental health. In turn, our physical health is often affected. When we experience poor health, we can not live a full life or be used fully by God. This is the strategy of the devil.

The other choice we have is to include God in managing our stressors and relationships. A brief summary of the Christian faith may be helpful here. When God created the earth, He also designed man perfectly and to be in a perfect relationship with Him. However, in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve made some choices that went against God and sin entered into the world. Ever since then, all people have inherited this sinful nature in their soul. But because God loves us so much, He has a remedy. He sent Jesus to live on the earth to teach others about God and of His love for us. Jesus then died and was resurrected. His death was payment for all our sins – past, present and future. Jesus lived and died so we could have a personal relationship with God forever. This relationship offers an abundant life while we are on this earth. It also affords an eternal life in heaven.

Once we accept Jesus into our life, God's Holy Spirit begins to reside inside us. His Spirit will then guide and empower us to think and behave differently. The challenge is that after we become a Christian, we still have an Adam (and Eve)-like nature in our soul. This remnant sinful nature influences our choices and behaviors. To live the peaceful and joyful type of life that God has in store for us, we must exchange that nature for Christ's nature. We must consciously ask God's Spirit to help us "die" to our old nature so that His nature in us can be more dominant. This will transform us into a new person. The secret to this type of living lies in a daily yielding or surrendering of our old nature and way of thinking and doing things to Christ's new nature that is

in us after we become "born again." This is an ongoing process and, if practiced over a period of time, we can change and experience a more abundant life.

The great news is that God inspired the authors of the Bible to give us His guidelines on how to live life and to manage the stressors of life. It's through reading the Bible that we can know God's nature and deepen our relationship with Him. This, in turn, will enable us to become the type of person He created us to be. Another benefit of reading the Bible and meditating on what we read is that our thinking can be changed. I imagine that we all have believed things about other people, our self and God that are not true. But to be whole and fully alive as God created us to be requires that our mind understand God's truths and who we become after we accept Jesus as our personal Savior. As we begin to replace the lies that the enemy has caused us to believe with these truths, our entire nature can be transformed. This will help set us free from our past hurts, false beliefs, negative thinking, sinful behavior and unhealthy habits that we have developed to meet our needs apart from God.

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As we embrace the truth found in the Bible and begin to live according to its principles, we can experience God's presence and love. This gives us the wisdom, hope and power we need for everyday living. We will begin to receive what are called the fruits of the Spirit addressed in the book of Galatians such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control. As we develop this nature, our ability to love and care for others will increase. We will love our self more

and our desire to take better care for our body as God asks us to will grow. This is because we realize it is primarily through our physical body that we are able to do the things that He's gifted us to do.

Yes, there's a spirituality/religion and health connection. It occurs when individuals, regardless of their faith, incorporate powerful biblical truths into their lives. Forgiving, loving others, believing, worshipping in community, prayer and meditation are just a few tenants of the Christian faith that, if practiced by anyone, seem to have a positive impact on quality of life and health.

It's an intimate relationship with God accompanied by the resulting fruits of His Spirit operating in our lives that will likely promote well being and physical health. It all flows from knowing God and experiencing His mighty love. John Piper writes in Don't Waste Your Life that the goal of the Christian life is gladly making others glad in God. I believe that being "glad in God" also promotes good health. And ultimately, this is what honors God and makes Him happy - that people attribute their gladness to Him and His love.

Key Scriptures: Eph 2:10, John 3:16, John 10:10, 2 Cor 5:17, John 8:32, Gal 5:22-23

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