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*Sermon script to go with the PowerPoint slides.*

Introduction

**SLIDE:** Temple

Let us go back in time, 2,000 years ago. You see one of the chief priests of God’s temple in Jerusalem just shaking hands with a young man that is just starting his first day at work. He is hired as a junior Levite, and his duties include things such as cleaning the temple utensils, sweeping the floor of the holy place, organising the line of worshippers that quickly piles up and gets messy outside, cleaning and feeding the animals that have been brought for the temple rituals, and so on.

With what kind of attitude would you do your work? Would you feel honoured and privileged, acting as if you were working for God himself? Or would you drag yourself day in and day out, seeking every opportunity to take a break?

Unfortunately, that young man from our story had the second attitude. He would often come in late, he would argue with his superiors frequently, he would constantly “forget" to perform his duties and even when he remembered them, he would only do half a job. And this situation dragged itself for week after week, month after month, year after year.

His managers had great patience with him. They would always say, “He's just young and foolish, he will learn soon enough”. They would train him, coach him, often work until late because they spent so much time trying to help the young man to do his own job. They had in numerous conversations and exhortations.

The young man just didn’t seem to take any of his responsibilities seriously. As a faithful steward of God’s temple resources, what is the most sensible thing that the young man’s manager should do after all these events?

You have answered correctly, it would be best to dismiss him of this job.

Unfortunately, many people today, even amongst God’s people, are not unlike this unfaithful young man. They do not take care of God’s temple with the respect nor the diligence it deserves.

**SLIDE:** "What do you mean by that?”, you may ask. Let’s open the Bible in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 where the apostle Paul tells us,“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have from God? And that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

Yes, I’m referring to our health. Often we don’t live life as if our bodies are an amazing gift from God and we take our health for granted, not honouring it with the attention and care it deserves.

**SLIDE:** So how may a servant of Jesus be a faithful steward of God’s temple, that is, his or her body?

But before we proceed in addressing that question, let us just take a step back and do a little bit of groundwork.

**SLIDE:** First, we need to realise that we live in the middle of a ‘great controversy’, a battle between Christ and Satan, a battle for minds and hearts. And in that context, God’s instructions are that:

1. As our creator, he knows what’s best for our health and peace.
2. My body is God’s temple, and I am committed to using it for His glory.
3. By protecting my physical temple, I am helping my mental and spiritual health.
4. God wants to bless me with a long, healthy and satisfying life.
5. I will protect my eyes, ears and mouth from things that will defile God’s temple.

I find that just beautiful, don’t you? On the other hand, Satan wants us to say:

* My body is mine, so I can use it how I want. “My body, my choice”.
* God’s diet for my eyes, ears and mouth is old-fashioned and boring.
* Poor health is just a matter of random chance, so I can live however I want.
* I will eat, drink and be merry today, and maybe decide to live better tomorrow.
* There’s no relationship between diet and spirituality.

You can see just how much of a controversy is raging around how we treat our bodies!

Secondly, we also need to understand the Biblical idea of health, because it’s a little different from how our world defines it.

**SLIDE:** The 1828 Noah Webster’s Dictionary defined health as this:

“That state of an animal or living body, in which the parts are sound, well organised and disposed, and in which they all perform freely their natural functions. In this state the animal feels no pain. This word is applied also to plans; Sound state of mind, natural vigour of faculties.”

Notice how the definition of ‘health’, two hundred years ago, had two main aspects: Physical health (as the Absence of Disease or Pain) and mental health.

Now let us compare this to the latest definition of health by the World Health Organisation:

**SLIDE:** “Health is a state of complete **physical**, **mental** and **social** well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” (WHO, 2022)

Can you notice the difference? We expanded our understanding of health by realising it is not the mere absence of pain, but it is a state of complete well-being, physical, mental and social. Notice how the social dimension was not even considered in the 19th century definition.

But what about the Biblical definition of health? In the Bible, the word that best includes our modern concept of health is the word “Shalom”, which often gets translated as “peace".

But Shalom is more than peace, as in the absence of conflict. Shalom is first and foremost peace with God, from which stems all other areas of well-being, including physical health, social health and longevity.

**SLIDE:** And this is why we have statements such as these: “And Jesus increased in wisdom [mental]; and stature [physical] and in favour with God [spiritual] and man [social].”

In other words, the Biblical definition of health, which is more than 4,000 years old, is still more complete than the latest version of the WHO’s version of health, which although is a good one, lacks the foundational element: Spiritual health, peace with God.

With this groundwork about the Great Controversy around our body’s health, and the Bible definition of health, let’s proceed with our initial question:“How may a servant of Jesus be a faithful steward of God’s temple, that is, his or her body?” I want to answer it in three ways.

**PART I.** Let’s discover **four reasons** for caring for our body temple:

1. **First, a faithful steward of God’s temple understands why his or her temple work is important.**

As we have already seen, our body-temple is a sacred gift that ultimately belongs to God, so we must look after it as best as we can.

1. **We need to be healthy so that we can serve God better and longer.**

**SLIDE:** Ephesians 2:10 tells us that “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

God created us to practice good works. How can we serve God and others if we’re sick all the time, or even run at a level that isn’t our peak? Sure, we may become sick for various reasons outside of our control and that’s not our fault, but we should do everything we’re able to do to avoid bringing unnecessary disease and sickness upon ourselves, so that we may be able to serve God and serve others for as long as possible.

I want to share with you a quote from Ellen G. White, whom Seventh-day Adventists believe possessed the biblical gift of prophecy. It’s precisely on this topic:

**SLIDE:** “Health is a blessing of which few appreciate the value; yet upon it the efficiency of our mental and physical powers largely depends. Our impulses and passions have their seat in the body, and it must be kept in the best condition physically and under the most spiritual influences in order that our talents may be put to the highest use.” *Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, 346*

1. **We look after our health because a sound mind allows for greater spiritual discernment.**

In Romans 12:1-2, the Apostle Paul says:

**SLIDE:** “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

In other words, Paul tells us that if we want to prove for ourselves what the good and perfect will of God is, we need to renew our minds, but this can only happen if we present our bodies a living and holy sacrifice—as healthy as we can—and this is even called a spiritual service of worship!

**SLIDE:** Ellen White commented on this reality when she wrote: “Anything that lessens physical strength enfeebles the mind and makes it less capable of discriminating between right and wrong. We become less capable of choosing the good and have less strength of will to do that which we know to be right.” *Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, 346*

Wow! They’re serious words.

1. **We take care of our health because God wants his children to develop the gift of self-control.**

**SLIDE:** Let’s read that in Galatians 5:22-23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

Self-control is described as a fruit of the Spirit, in other words, it is a character trait that the Holy Spirit wants to develop in us. Remember that our body is ‘the temple of the Holy Spirit’ so the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ should be in us. And looking after our health and habits is one of the main ways through which God accomplishes this goal.

After all, if I can’t control what comes *into* my mouth, how am I expected to control that which comes *out* of my mouth?

Finally, it is very important to notice that there is one big thing that is NOT a reason for a Christian to look after his or her own health. We do not look after our health to be saved, nor to earn God’s love, nor to contribute to our salvation.

The Bible does not teach “Salvation by Soy” nor “Gluten-free Righteousness!” There’s absolutely nothing we can possibly do to merit or earn our salvation—it is a Free Gift from God that is given by Grace and accepted through Faith.

Our desire or responsibility to look after our own health is simply a love response of faith and gratitude for God’s infinite gift of salvation that cost the very blood of His Son Jesus Christ, the Creator of all things. So, no-one is loved more, or less, in God’s eyes on account of diet or health. Please allow that to sink in for a moment.

**SLIDE:** We’ve covered four reasons why God wants us to look after our health: Our body temple is sacred; To be able to serve God better and for longer; To acquire greater spiritual discernment; and, To develop the gift of self-control. And we’ve seen one thing that is NOT a reason—to earn or contribute to our salvation.

So now let’s look at the second way a servant of Jesus can be a faithful steward of God’s temple.

**PART II.** A faithful steward of God’s temple understands how to care for his or her health.

Good health is achieved when we obey all of God’s instructions.

**SLIDE:** Proverbs 4:20-22 says: “My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings … For they are life to those who find them and health to all their body.”

Following God’s commandments or instructions always lead to life. In fact, physical law and moral law are very closely connected. Let us look at this insightful statement by Ellen White, from the same book we have been quoting so far:

**SLIDE:** “Transgression of physical law is transgression of the moral law; … His law is written with His own finger upon every nerve, every muscle, every faculty, which has been entrusted to man. And every misuse of any part of our organism is a violation of that law.” *Christ’s Object Lessons, p.347*

What a powerful statement! And if the transgression of the physical law is the transgression of the moral law, this means that we ought to dedicate our time to study the laws that govern our physical health just as we devote time to study God’s moral law.

In fact, Ellen White came to this exact same conclusion when she wrote the following quote on the next page:

**SLIDE:** “The relation of the physical organism to the spiritual life is one of the most important branches of education.” *Christ’s Object Lessons, p.348*

So, what are the basics or the fundamentals of good health, according to God’s instructions?

Just think back to the Garden of Eden. That was the perfect environment where God placed our first parents. The more we can align ourselves with that ideal, the better health we will enjoy, and the happier we will be. Here are some of the elements present in the Garden:

**SLIDE:**

1. Plant-based nutrition and adequate hydration
2. Absence of harmful substances
3. Fresh, clean air and correct habits of breathing
4. Edifying and satisfying work and learning
5. Adequate physical activity and periods of rest (with Sabbath rest)
6. Adequate exposure to sunlight and nature
7. Harmonic relationships with others and the environment
8. Perfect trust in God

It goes without saying, that on this planet, affected by 6,000 years of sin, it is impossible to achieve the perfection of Eden in all these areas. However, all of us can certainly do lots of things that will allow us to come a little bit closer to that ideal.

While each of these points deserve a whole message on their own, for the sake of time I will just share a little bit about two of them: nutrition and harmonic relationships, and more specifically about how they affect our mental health.

**SLIDE**: In his fascinating book *Live More Happy*, Dr Darren Morton states that: “Australian researchers found that a Mediterranean-style diet, which emphasised fruits, vegetables, grains and legumes, relieved depression four times more effectively than when only social support was offered to the study participants. More recently, studies have found that a higher consumption of fruit and vegetables not only improves happiness, but also enhances other mental measures like curiosity and creativity.”

In other words, a diet that is constituted mainly by plants was found to be more effective against depression than even social support! It is important to notice that this article is not claiming that a plant-based diet is the cure to depression, but that it’s certainly a powerful factor that helps in maintaining a healthy mind. Depression can be a very complex condition and sometimes its treatment may require professional help and the use of medications.

The relationship between diet and mental and spiritual well-being is so important, that Ellen White once wrote:

**SLIDE**: “God places a high estimate on those who do faithful service in preparing wholesome, palatable food. The one who understands the art of properly preparing food, and who uses this knowledge, is worthy of higher commendation than those engaged in any other line of work. This talent should be regarded as **equal in value to ten talents**; for its right use has much to do with keeping the human organism in health. Because so inseparably connected with life and health, it is **the most valuable of all gifts**.” *Ellen G. White, Counsels on Diet & Foods, 251*

The second interesting scientific finding that supports the Biblical model of health has to do with the relationship between acts of kindness and mental health.  This is what Dr Martin Seligman, one of the fathers of Positive Psychology reported:

**SLIDE**: “We scientists have found that doing a kindness produces the single most reliable momentary increase in well-being of any exercise we have tested... Here is the exercise: find one wholly unexpected kind thing to do tomorrow and just do it. Notice what happens to your mood.”

Isn’t that amazing? Doing acts of kindness is the single most potent source for a natural dopamine high! Try paying some extra money at the supermarket’s cashier and ask them to apply the credit for the person coming after you in line, without saying anything to that person. It’s guaranteed that you’re going to get an incredible feeling! God just wired us to be like that.

But this knowledge, while only recently being measured by scientists, is not new. In the inspired words of Ellen White:

**SLIDE**: “The pleasure of doing good to others imparts a glow to the feelings which flashes through the nerves, quickens the circulation of the blood, and induces mental and physical health.” *Ellen G. White, Testimonies Vol. 4, 56*

In short: practicing kindness and adopting a plant-based diet are two amazing ways to get a lift to both your mental and physical health.

And this finally leads us to the last part of today’s message.

**PART III.** As a faithful Steward of God’s temple, where do I go from here?

If God has placed in your heart a desire today to do something more for your health, I have good news for you. There are practical things you can do!

**SLIDE**: First, try to educate yourself further on health-related matters. Dr Darren Morton’s *Live More Happy* book is a great place to start. The more you know about health, the easier it will be to adopt a lifestyle change.

Second, don’t go too hard on yourself. Start small.

I’d like to recommend you the concept of adopting “Mini-Habits”. A mini-habit is a habit that is too small to be intimidating but it gives you momentum to build-up a new habit in the right direction. For example, let’s say that you want to start walking more, and you’re currently not walking at all. A mini-habit of walking would be to walk outside for just one minute.

The trick is to keep the consistency. If it’s a one-minute walk, stick to it every day of the week. Other examples of mini-habits of health could include doing one push-up a day, or eating one serve of fruit or vegetable per day. Once this mini-habit is established, then you can increase it, for example, by making it a minimum of five-minute walk, five push-ups or two serves of fruits or vegetable per day.

Third, consider joining a health club. Meeting with like-minded people will give you a great boost in motivation, plus you can make an evangelistic friendship as a bonus! Examples of health clubs include *Live More* groups or *CHIP* programs or just a local walking group.

Fourth tip, consider being a part of a health ministry, especially if you already have well-consolidated health habits. Examples of this could be cooking clubs, walking groups or even a community garden, not to mention running *CHIP* or *Live More* sessions.

**Conclusion**

Through the Bible and the writings of Ellen White, we are given a beautiful vision of what it can be like if, just like Jesus, the medical missionary work and the gospel work are carried together hand in hand. Let’s read about this vision:

**SLIDE**: "When properly conducted, the health work is an entering wedge, making a way for other truths to reach the heart. When the third angel's message is received in its fulness, health reform will be given its place in the councils of the Conference, in the work of the church, in the home, at the table, and in all the household arrangements. Then the right arm will serve and protect the body." *Ellen G. White, Testimonies to the Church, Vol. 6, p.327*

**SLIDE**: So, thinking back to our introduction story about the young man working in the temple in Jerusalem, here’s my question for you today: What kind of temple worker will you be? One who treats this work with the respect and care that it deserves, or one who takes it for granted and deals with it carelessly?

Our bodies are God’s temples here on earth. Let’s care for them beautifully, just as our Master would do if He were present.