

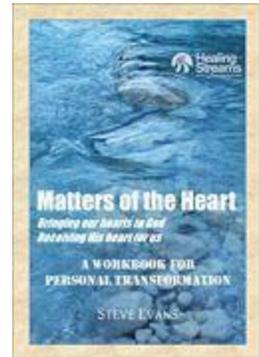
Matters of the Heart

A Workbook for Personal Transformation

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CHAPTER 1: THE SPIRITUAL ROOTS OF DISEASE

Though we begin with the body, this series of lessons is not primarily about physical health and the means to achieve it. Rather, it is about seeking emotional and spiritual health of the highest order. Finding the life that is “hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3) or entering into “the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:21) would be excellent Biblical ways of expressing the goal. As it happens, however, modern medical science has been shown us a connection between our emotional life and the root issues of disease that gives us a practical place to begin looking at our deeper, truer need. C. S. Lewis once described pain as “God’s megaphone,” meaning that He gets our attention when our bodies break down. So, it is in seeking to find a remedy to our illnesses that we have been drawn into a far greater understanding of the ways in which we are actually going astray from our God. The diseases of our bodies are but reflections of the dis-ease of our souls!



Three Flawed Theories

Before we look at what is actually making us sick, let’s go over some cherished notions that we may still be carrying around in the back of our minds. There are three flawed theories of why we get sick. They may not be taught, but they are often caught.

1) The germ theory: As an explanation of why we get sick, this is accurate but misleading, since germs account for only part of all diseases. Nor does this theory tell us why we had the weakened immune system that allowed germs to infect us in the first place. Stressing the body by lack of sleep, poor nutrition, or lack of exercise can weaken the immune system, but are you aware that research has shown that just six minutes of a negative emotion can suppress the immune system for more than 21 hours?

2) The “out of the blue” theory: This provides a graceful covering for us, since we are claiming to have no idea of any connection between our lifestyle and the disease. (Surely it is nothing we have done. It just came on us out of the blue!) Yet everything on earth happens by cause and effect. The real problem with this theory is that it seems to be pointing a finger at God who lives in those “blue” heavens.

However, God is never the author of evil: Untainted by any shadow He is instead the Giver of “every good gift” (James 1:17). Death, disorders and disease are consequences of the Fall of man.

3) The punishment theory: According to this theory we sinned, so God is punishing us. But that cannot be! God punished Jesus fully and completely at the cross for our sins; it would be a breach of justice for God to punish us when the penalty has already been paid in full by Another. A further problem is that it seems to suggest that God reaches, in anger, into His bag of punishments and puts one on us without regard to the natural order.

The Mind-Body Connection

Chronically elevated cortisol levels have been shown to:

- Impair immune function
- Reduce glucose utilization
- Increase bone loss
- Reduce muscle mass
- Inhibit skin growth
- Increase fat accumulation
- Impair memory
- Destroy brain cells
- Increase blood pressure

Negative emotions damage the body. When we perceive a situation to be dangerous, adrenaline and cortisol are released by our bodies to facilitate “flight or fight” responses. This is part of the General Adaptation Syndrome (G.A.S.) which gives us the extra “gas” we need to power-up for potentially life-threatening situations. The problem is that most of the “dangers” that cause stress cannot be resolved by fighting or running away! Modern life seems to be characterized by a mounting sea of stressful events and daily pressures coming at people from every conceivable direction. And yet the real culprit isn’t the situations which surround us—it is the emotional reactions going off inside of us. That is why Dr. Don Colbert entitled his book on the mind-body connection *Deadly Emotions*—not “deadly situations.” Stating that emotions are not confined only to the mind or heart, he describes the physiological processes by which all emotions are translated into chemical reactions which occur at both the organ level and the cellular level! Apparently, the “most damaging” emotions are feelings we might consider “garden variety” such as un-forgiveness, anger, worry, fear and frustration. Clearly, no one with an emotional life is immune to the danger!

The truth is that there is a natural connection between the way that we live and the diseases that come upon us. As much as 80% or more of all incurable diseases have a mind-body connection. According to one study, stress related disorders account for 75-



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90% of all visits to primary care physicians. Consider these connections between disease and emotional stress: high blood pressure and heart disease correlate with anger and hostility; autoimmune disorders, Multiple Sclerosis, Lupus and arthritis are associated with bitterness, resentments and self-hatred; gastrointestinal disorders such as IBS, panic attacks and heart palpitations are related to anxiety; tension and migraine headaches, along with back pain, TMJ and Fibromyalgia are all associated with repressed anger. Now reflect that our science is just beginning to discover the linkages between specific negative emotions and specific physical disorders, but already these connections can be made. Imagine how fine-tuned this may one day become.

These negative emotions which place so much stress upon our bodies come in two forms: those that arise out of present situations and those that are “embedded” in our deepest memories. Doctors Alexander Loyd and Ben Johnson in their book, *The Healing Code*, state that embedded negative emotions are the most damaging kind, producing “physiological stress” (at a subconscious level), as opposed to “situational stress” (at the conscious level). These unhealed memories are actually stored as false beliefs and negative images which form “destructive cellular memories” in the cells of our bodies! In terms of the mind body connection they list three “one things” which we need to know: There is one thing that can heal anything—our immune system; there is one thing that turns off the immune system—stress; there is one thing that will turn the immune system back on—healing “the issues of the heart.”

From the Bible’s perspective there are a few “good” emotions that we might perceive as negative ones due to the way that they feel: godly fear (awe and respect for God as both holy and all-powerful); “danger fear” (in life-threatening moments); righteous anger (hating the sin, yet still loving the person); and pure grief (mourning that is uncontaminated by anger, fear, doubt or guilt). These emotions are actually very good to have even if they don’t feel like it at the time.

From a medical point of view all other negative emotions are stressors to the body, and it is extremely evident how damaging they are to our physical health. However, from a Christian point of view they represent something that is also very damaging to our spiritual health—they are sins! Now this may seem like adding to the bad news: The negative emotions we don’t like feeling in the first place are not only causing disease, they are also sins, separating us from God! Isn’t this very bad news indeed? No, not at all: It is wonderful news! It shows us there is a way out, both from disease and from the entrapment of negative emotions.

If the negative emotions, causing us so much loss of peace and joy as well as health, are actually things in our personality that God has given us and wants us to have, then we are stuck with them—and the diseases they induce. However, if they are sins then He has provided a way of freedom, since Jesus died to free us from sin’s power as well as from its penalty. That way of freedom will be the subject of all of the following lessons. For now let us consider the negative emotions in relationship to their polar opposite—the peace of Christ.

The Peace of Christ

We always have a choice how we will respond to life: Will we give in to stress, take on the negative emotions so close at hand, or will we choose to find the path of peace that comes from trusting and obeying God? God created us to live in peace with His peace. Even under the terms of the Hebrew covenant, it was possible to live with perfect peace, but there was a condition: Keeping one's mind fixed or stayed on the Lord. How does one do that? In a word—trust. Trusting God is how we “live by faith” (Romans 1:17).

You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Isaiah 26:3

Peace comes to us on the basis of our actual “heart trust” in God, not the doctrinal rightness of our beliefs. Our minds judge right and wrong, but it is with our hearts that we judge who to trust. Whenever we actually release our hearts to trust God, our minds naturally become rested or stayed upon Him, until something else disturbs our rest. In the New Covenant Jesus also promises us peace and His peace goes far beyond any of the outward things that disturb us.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” John 14:27

How does the world give us peace? Anyone can get peace from the world in this way: I see the problem; I go to work on it; I begin to see the thing get better; I get peace back. You don't have to be a believer in anything but yourself to get peace in this way. But there are real problems with getting peace this way: I can't always make things better so I lose even more peace in the attempt; I have to wait until things look like they are getting better before peace begins to return to me; and as soon as one trouble is fixed, I may lose peace over two more things that just flared up. This way is guaranteed to produce many seasons of significant stress over the course of a lifetime. We know it all too well—it is the way of trusting Self to be our savior.

Jesus gives believing, trusting hearts peace at the first sign of trouble—whenever we cast our cares on Him as our only Savior (Psalm 55:22; Matthew 11:28-30; 1 Peter 5:7). All of us get a daily report card on how well we are doing at trusting and obeying the Lord. In fact it is personally delivered moment by moment as the Holy Spirit reveals our actual peace levels to us. In any moment the peace of Christ is either going up, holding steady, or going down—all according to our ability to trust and follow Jesus throughout the day (Colossians 3:15).

When our hearts and minds fully trust Him with the whole of our life and that of our loved ones, we are at peace. Our bodies can then experience peace (homeostasis or physiological equilibrium) and all systems work in balance to maintain health. As Dr. Art Mathias of Wellsprings Ministries in Alaska likes to say, our bodies are barometers of

our spiritual health.[9] Seen in this light the diseases and disorders we can't ignore are "warning bells" alerting us of our need to return to living in the peace of Christ.

The Pathway of Disease

Pay close attention to this pathway of disease for it is also the way by which mental illness, addictions and all sinful behaviors become entrenched:

- 1) Loss of health comes from loss of peace in the mind or heart. This is the overwhelming evidence of mainstream science.
- 2) Loss of peace comes through the entry of negative emotions. This is simple displacement—after an internal "tug-of-war" either the peace of Christ or stress will always win out.
- 3) Negative emotions draw power from unresolved issues carried from the past. These are the root causes.
- 4) Unresolved issues always reveal that there are broken relationships of trust and love with God, self or others. The two Great Commandments have been breached (Matthew 22:37-39). These issues are crying out to be healed, not buried.
- 5) Loss of peace indicates there is a sin issue to deal with. We have been turning from God, which is why His peace was lifted.
- 6) Loss of peace warns that the other kingdom is manifesting through us. We have been turning to the enemy, which is why unchristlike thoughts and feelings are beginning to grip us.

Just as peace, love, joy and the other savory fruit of the Spirit manifest the life of Christ and the working of God's Kingdom through us, so too do negative emotions actually manifest the "emotional life" of the enemy, coming out of our carnal or fallen nature, and advance his dark kingdom through us. We are paying a terrible price for not living in the peace of Christ.

NOTES/JOURNAL



EXERCISE

List any diseases or infirmities you may have. Now consider how they may be affected by stress. Do the symptoms seem to get better or worse when you experience times of excessive stress? Did any time of specific stress seem to be going on in your life when the disease began? Could it have been caused by a stressful event? Not all disease are directly related to stress—consider researching any that you may have to see if they are. Ask your doctor; search the web.

Disease or condition Moods or stress emotions that may trigger or amplify it

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Ask group members to name the things that stress them the most. How many of these are related to money, time, work, family, politics, etc? Does a loss of peace seem inevitable to them whenever these stressors show up? What have they been doing to try to overcome the stress in these situations? Have they been mainly trying to eliminate the problem, ignore it, be distracted from thinking about it, or have they been trying to learn how to overcome their negative emotional reactions to it? What works? What doesn't work? Close by praying for all these situations!

MAIN POINTS

- Loss of health comes from loss of peace in the mind or heart.
- Loss of peace comes through entry of negative emotions—these are sins.
- Negative emotions draw power from unresolved issues of the past.
- Unresolved issues reveal a loss of love or trust for God, self, or others.
- Loss of peace indicates that we have a sin issue to deal with (Col 3:15).
- Loss of peace indicates that the other kingdom is manifesting through us.
- We are paying a terrible price for not living in the peace of Christ.

DIGGING DEEPER

The mind-body connection:

Many ordinary illnesses are nothing but the expression of a serious dissatisfaction with life.

Sickness may be the solemn occasion of God's intervention in a person's life.



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It is ambition, fear of the future, love of money, jealousy, or social injustice that makes men strive and overwork, invent all sorts of unnecessary tasks, keep late hours, take too little sleep, take insufficient holidays, or use their holidays badly. Their minds are over tense, so that at night they cannot sleep and by day they doubly fatigue themselves at their work.

The fact is that in denying the reality of sin, by giving people to understand that a fault of character is due to the malfunctioning of an endocrine gland, or by calling some impure temptation a “psychological complex,” science destroys man’s sense of moral responsibility. The present state of the world shows where that leads.

How the body responds to stress:

I have found over the years that with every disease there’s usually an emotion linked to that disease. And the emotion that so many Americans have is frustration. We have an epidemic of frustrated Americans here.

The majority of the patients that I see on a daily basis are overstressed, and this contributes greatly to the illness or disease from which they are suffering... Our mind and body seek a state of peace and relaxation, which is called homeostasis... When a person becomes “stressed out”... reactions begin to occur in the body that lead to the general adaptation syndrome... Unfortunately, when most patients finally come to my practice, they are already in [the] final stage of the general adaptation syndrome... I have learned when a person reaches adrenal exhaustion, we shouldn’t just treat their body... We must also treat the person mentally, emotionally, and most of all, spiritually.

SWORD AND SHIELD

Texts that speak to health issues abound in scripture, especially in regard to the connection between negative emotions (sins) and physical health—what our science describes as the mind-body connection (see also Pr 3:7-8; 9:11; 16:24).

My son, attend to my words. Turn your ear to my sayings. Let them not depart from your eyes. Keep them in the midst of your heart. For they are life to those who find them, And health to their whole body. Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it is the wellspring of life. Proverbs 4:20-23 WEB

A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot. Proverbs 14:30

A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. Proverbs 17:22



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The emphasis of scripture regarding our health is on the spiritual food in our daily diet, especially the fruit of the Spirit (peace, love and joy), not physical food. Physical food is not seen as a threat to health, if thanksgiving and moderation are maintained (Pr 23:21; Pr 25:16; 1Co 9:25).

Let no man therefore judge you in eating, or in drinking... "Don't handle, nor taste, nor touch" (all of which perish with use), according to the precepts and doctrines of men? Which things indeed appear like wisdom in self-imposed worship, and humility, and severity to the body; but aren't of any value against the indulgence of the flesh. Colossians 2:16, 21-23 WEB

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. 1 Timothy 4:4

Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them. Hebrews 13:9

PRAYER FOCUS

Are you willing to be H.O.T. for Jesus? Guarding the inward flame of our "first love" will mean that we have to live in an Honest, Open and Transparent way with the Lord and with others. Anything hidden "in the dark" of buried secrets becomes a weapon the enemy can and will use against us. Anything "brought to the light" will become suffused with light and life (Mk 4:22; Jn 3:21; 1Jn 1:7).

Father, in the course of these lessons enable me to be honest, open and transparent before You. Please help me to choose to deal with You and with anything You may want to bring up. Despite the pain I may have to work through, I am determined to break free of my past and truly learn how to live with Your peace established in my heart.

RENUNCIATIONS AND AFFIRMATIONS

Renounce any agreements with untruth; believe Jesus' truth as your new way of life.

Why is it so hard to live a life of grace? A life of grace is a mercy-based, peace-filled life—the very thing we all so deeply and desperately desire which also happens to be the polar opposite of the stressed up or depressed down emotional states we carry around. A life of grace is characterized by living as the Bible says that we are meant to live: by trusting to, rely upon and rejoicing in the grace that is always being given to us (Ro 1:17).

"Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith." Habakkuk 2:4

If such a life has been eluding you, then you need to know what the problem is, but before seeing where the problem really lies, it will be helpful to understand what it is NOT. Be sure to go over this list renouncing any anger, blame or frustration with your life that you have been placing on the wrong culprit for what has been causing "the problem," making it a scapegoat. Then being confessing the truth of Ephesians 2:8: we are saved by grace (which is always being given us by God) through faith (that's the only place where the disconnect can happen!).

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. Ephesians 2:8

The problem is:

- Not you
- Not your past
- Not God
- Not your circumstances
- Not others
- Not your weaknesses
- Not the world
- Not your 'personality'
- Not your flesh
- Not your addiction
- Not the devil
- Not your disease
- Not your sin

The problem is what we choose to believe in our heart of hearts about ourselves, our God and our world. Believing the truth—God's truth—with a full heart of faith will always work to set us free (John 8:32). Believing a lie, any lie, will always work to destroy us. What you choose to believe determines:

- 1) Your immediate and future emotional state (your inner world).
- 2) Your level of contact with REALITY (others, all of creation, God).
- 3) Your consequences. You are not the only player: God, the devil and all of creation are responding to choices you make based upon what you believe deep down and act upon.



STRETCH YOURSELF!

What are some steps you can take to reduce stress in your life? This workbook is intended to help you convert emotional stress back into the peace of Christ through prayer, but there are many practical ways to de-stress as well. Consider these steps that others have found helpful, then add the ones that you will actually do to the second list.

- Laughter.
- Loving—pets, children, anyone and anything you can (in a right way!).
- Getting out in nature—drink in the beauty and grace of our Creator’s world.
- Deep, relaxed breathing—letting out stress; taking in peace.
- Stretching, tensing and relaxing your muscle groups from head to toe.
- Imagining a relaxing scene—like walking along a beach or lying in sunshine.
- Meditation—focused awareness, interactive and directed toward the Lord.
- Prayer—casting your cares on Him because He cares for you; sharing the day’s burdens.
- Massage and hugging—healthy, legitimate forms of receiving and giving human touch.
- Aerobic exercise—brisk walking, cycling, swimming, or jumping with reasonable intensity.
- Daily quiet time all to yourself with little or nothing to do but relax.
- Playing gentle music, watching wholesome videos, reading good books.
- Sleep—we need between seven to nine hours of sleep a night and more on the weekends.

Things I could stop doing (activities to eliminate, expectations to pare down).

1) _____

2) _____

Things I could start doing (to relax stress away, to burn it off, to forget about it).

1) _____

2) _____

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