

By Lahrona Welch Little

March 22, 2020

The concepts of spirituality and health are not separate. Though spirituality and health are distinct, they are intertwined and interconnected. The topic of spirituality and health is very broad and deep, therefore, the following lessons barely skims the surface. However, this Lenten Season is fraught with opportunity to discuss spirituality and health in light of the present public health crisis of COVID-19 and begs the question, how can our spiritual practices foster, rather than obstruct, health and wellbeing?

Spirituality and Health is a series of 4 lessons that address: the nature of spirituality and health, spirituality and mental health; and spirituality and physical health.

The Nature of Spirituality and Health

Focus scripture:

Luke 8:43-48 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

43 Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her. **44** She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. **45** Then Jesus asked, “Who touched me?” When all denied it, Peter said, “Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you.” **46** But Jesus said, “Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me.” **47** When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. **48** He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.” This is the word of God for the people God, thanks be to God.

Observations from this text that may be helpful in understanding the intersections of spirituality and health.

- 1) The unnamed woman had been physically and socially distanced because of her condition for 12 years. Her “issue of blood” rendered her ritually unfit. Nevertheless, the woman came out of isolation and found Jesus in the community. She understood that connection with Jesus was vitally important to her healing.
- 2) Upon being healed, the woman shared her vulnerability. She explained her situation and how she received healing. This woman was vulnerable physically, mentally, and spiritually until she connected with Jesus, in community. Communities of faith are strengthened by one another’s testimonies. I imagine that there were many in the crowd who were encouraged and empowered by her story.
- 3) When the unnamed woman connected with the fringe of Jesus’s clothes, she was healed and she found peace. Her healing was not just about the hemorrhage stopping, it was also about experiencing the peace of God.

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As human beings, we need community; we were created to be in community. Then the Lord God said, “It’s not good that the human is alone. I will make him a helper that is perfect for him.” Genesis 2:18 (CEB) It is a matter of mental and spiritual health that we congregate with one another. Moreover as Christians, it is a part of our spiritual practice. In fact, Hebrews 10:24-25 says, And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (NRSV) Community is embedded in our faith.

The feeling of connection is vitally important - it’s an expression of our humanity. According to an article published in *Pediatrics and Child Health*, connection is important for “the facilitation of growth and development.” (Ardiel, Rankin, 2010) However, for the sake of personal health and the health of our communities, we are strongly encouraged (and rightfully so) to practice physical distancing, which has to do with our proximity to one another. Physical distancing is crucial. I make the distinction between physical distance and social distance to underscore one’s ability to maintain social interaction in spite of quarantine. Most of us still speak on the phone, have Zoom meetings, and engage social media.

Spirituality is not the opposite of physical. It is by definition about relationality and the manifestations of our spiritual practices. Esteemed spiritual care professor and pastoral theologian, Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Y. Lartey puts it this way, “Spirituality is our capacity to relate with God, with ourselves, with one another and with the environment.” That is to say that the topic spirituality and health have huge implications for where we are today as a Christian community committed to health and wellbeing. If spirituality has to do with our capacity to relate to one another, in whatever form that takes, and our health is affected by how we relate - during this time where we must be vigilant concerning our physical health, how do we continue to be connected to God, in community with one another?

I suggest that we begin with the practice of patience and compassion - with ourselves and with each other. Jesus models patience and compassion in his interaction with the unnamed woman in Luke 8 by acknowledging her and inviting her back into the community. With patience and compassion, even in our state of physical distance, we have the ability to foster healing, wellbeing, wholeness, and peace to one another.

Scripture Reflection:

How do you relate to the unnamed woman in Luke 8? Reflect on a time in your life when “touching the hem of Jesus’ garment” brought you healing and peace.

Practical Lesson:

How might we respond to the health of individuals and communities as a church?

Prayer

God, creator of us all, thank you for the breath of life that we may live in accordance with the words of Jesus to love You with our entire being and to love one another as ourselves. To love in

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this way is to foster the health and wellbeing of our communities, the environment, and indeed the world. In the name of Jesus Christ, we offer this prayer. Amen.

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Ardiel, E. L., & Rankin, C. H. (2010). The importance of touch in development. *Paediatrics & child health*, 15(3), 153–156. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pch/15.3.153>