

Spirituality and Physical Health Lesson 3

1

By Lahronda Welch Little

4/3/2020

This week's lesson is on spirituality and physical health. While it's always appropriate to think about how our faith impacts our health and vice versa, it's particularly important to think about this now in light of the coronavirus.

Before reading the text, I invite you to take a few moments to breathe deeply and slowly and pray.

Ezekiel 37:1–14 (NRSV)

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. **2** He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. **3** He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." **4** Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. **5** Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. **6** I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord."

7 So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. **8** I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. **9** Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." **10** I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

If we continue to read Ezekiel 37 we learn that the bones are representative of the whole house of Israel who is in exile and has lost hope. And God, through Ezekiel, is speaking to the children of Israel of hope and the promise to live and go back into the land.

This text, in all of its richness, helps us to understand the connection between spirituality and the physical body. We see how the spirit affects the body; how the physical enacts spirit, and how the physical effects that which is physical. But before we get into that I want to emphasize that as created beings of God, the body is good. God called us good, and by God's grace exemplified in the life of Jesus incarnate and as recipients of this grace, indeed, the body is good. (Genesis 1)

Spirituality and Physical Health Lesson 3

2

By Lahronda Welch Little

4/3/2020

Spirit affects or enlivens the body, verse 4 says, “Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.”

The children of Israel were in exile and struggling to exist. Their community was all but gone. But Ezekiel was instructed to prophesy, to speak, to pray over the bones. The practical lesson in this text correlates to our spiritual practices and the words we ourselves say. Studies show that those who maintain a spiritual practice, including public worship, experience lower levels of functional disability and depression. (*Ellen L. Idler, Religious Involvement and the Health of the Elderly: Some Hypotheses and an Initial Test, Social Forces, Volume 66, Issue 1, September 1987, Pages 226–238.*)

When we pray for each other, when we worship together in person or through social media, reading scripture, communion, love feast - these spiritual practices, executed in healthy and responsible ways positively affects the body.

Physical enacts that which is spiritual, verse 8 reads, “I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them.”

This verse underscores how the physical invites or even provokes a spiritual response. An example of this could be exercise as a spiritual practice, such as when you’re walking or swimming and you are moved to pray for someone or you come up with a fantastic idea that will help or bring healing to others. Also, the feeling one gets when the endorphins kick in as one runs, known as “the runner’s high” which is known to significantly reduce stress and decrease feelings of pain. Washing hands, eating healthy foods, and exercise are acts of prayer in that these facilitate increased wellbeing.

Physical effects the physical, verse 10, “I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.”

Breathing is both voluntary and involuntary; it is physical and spiritual. The Hebrew words for breath and breathe translate into multiple meanings that speak of the wind, the mind, and the spirit.

We have no control over our ability to breathe, and yet, we have the capability to use our breath in order to affect the rest of the body. Mindful Breathing slows down bodily functions. The more we practice deep breathing, fatigue decreases, reduced stress level and anxiety. The severity of headaches and migraines decrease as well. This practice of breathing calls our attention to what God does in and through our bodies. That is to say, as mentioned above, that our bodies are instruments of prayer.

Spirituality and Physical Health Lesson 3

3

By Lahronda Welch Little

4/3/2020

Systematic theologian, Jurgen Moltman states in his book entitled *The Spirit of Life*:

“When I love God, I love the beauty of bodies, the rhythm of movements, the shining of eyes, the embraces, the feelings, the scents, the sounds of all this protean creation. When I love you, my God, I want to embrace it all, for I love you with all my senses in the creations of your love. In all the things that encounter me, you are waiting for me.” (Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 1985, pg. 331)

Friends, do not grow weary in taking care of your bodies and looking out for the well-being of others. The church has left the building and we're it. We are the embodied church. We are the church in our homes; in the hospitals; in the grocery stores. We are the church in the pharmacies. We are the church in our secret closets of prayer.

Scripture Reflection:

What other biblical texts help to explore spirituality and physical health?

Practical Lesson:

Name ways in which your own physical practices intersect with your spirituality.

I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul. Amen. (III John 2)

Lahronda Welch Little is an elder track certified candidate for elder and a member of Stone Mountain First UMC. Presently, she is a PhD student in the Graduate Division of Religion at Emory University. She and her dear spouse, Tommy, live in Ellenwood, GA with their 2 sons, Lance and Kyle.