

Medicine & Ministry

Healing Then & Now:

1 Timothy 5:21-25

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As we opened the Bibles in our pew today, we read:

Don't drink only water. You ought to drink a little wine for the sake of your stomach because you are sick so often. (1 Timothy 5:23, NLT)

The Apostle Paul wrote these words to his apprentice in ministry, Timothy. He wasn't trying to convert a teetotaler into a drinking buddy. Truth be told, alcohol creates a lot of problems for our American family. Beyond vocational and relationship issues, the use of alcohol accounts for at least 100,000 deaths annually, including:

- 5% of all deaths from diseases of the circulatory system
- 15% of all deaths from diseases of the respiratory system
- 30% of all deaths from accidents caused by fire and flames
- 30% of all accidental drownings
- 30% of all suicides
- 40% of all deaths due to accidental falls
- 45% of all deaths in automobile accidents
- 60% of all homicides

The carnage created by the misuse of alcohol and love for neighbor forged the temperance movement of the 19th Century. Thomas Welch, a Methodist who for health reasons left pastoral ministry and was a dentist in Winona for a time, advocated abstinence and invented a process to preserve grape juice without fermenting alcohol. Welch's preserved grape juice began to replace communion wine in churches across the nation. Formed by that passion, I've only tasted alcohol in cough syrup, mouth wash and Lutheran and Episcopal communion wine.

When Paul wrote Timothy, “Drink a little wine,” he wasn’t advising his apprentice to relieve his stress through drinking. He was telling his friend to honor the God-given medicinal properties of fermented wine in his sickness. The New American Standard Bible gives us this literal translation:

No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. (1 Timothy 5:23, NASU)

Paul accomplished stunning miracles. He raised Eutychus from the dead after he was killed in a fall. In Ephesus people touched Paul with napkins and aprons and carried them to the sick, and they were healed. Also in Ephesus, seven sons of a Jewish priest named Sceva tried to duplicate Paul’s success in driving out demons. They were humiliated. Paul built the Corinthian church through signs and wonders including powerful healing. However, instead of laying hands on Timothy and seeing his frequently ailments leave, Paul told Timothy to change his diet and include wine because of its medicinal qualities. For Paul, there was no tension between medicine and divine power. Both were gifts to humanity. God actually instructed his prophets to use medicine.

In 2 Kings and in the book of Isaiah, King Hezekiah becomes deathly ill. It appears that his organs are shutting down from an infection that is carried in the blood. Today, I think we call that person septic or say they are suffering from septicemia. The prophet Isaiah told King Hezekiah to prepare to die. However, after a season of Hezekiah weeping, fasting, repenting and praying, God sent Isaiah to heal, not with the command “be healed,” anointing with oil, or laying hands on him, but by preparing a poultice of figs and applying it to an open sore. God used a season of prayer, a man of faith and medication to heal a king. In this case, medicine was like a hand in a glove of prayer that both cares for and cures the sick.

Without prayer Hezekiah's fate was sealed. He was going to die. Through repentance and prayer, God moved and sent a man with the medicine to heal. God was the source of healing; prayer and medicine were his gifts to receive it.

Is medicine the ordinary means by which God heals? I would call medicine an important method. I would say it is a divinely-given method, but I wouldn't call it the ordinary or normal method of healing. In Genesis 2, we are introduced to the Garden of Eden that is planted by God and worked by Adam and Eve. In its midst is a tree of life. The tree of life appears again in a vision recorded in Ezekiel 47. The leaves of the tree are medicine for the nations. Again in Revelation 22, we read about the tree of life and its leaves that heal. This herbal gift of God is something we ingest or apply.

Medicine is God's idea. However, it is not necessarily the ordinary path to healing. Since God is the source of healing, communication with God is the ordinary means of healing. How many of us get a headache and pop a Tylenol without ever asking why we have the headache? Perhaps, we overwork, eat a bad diet, or carry burdens that we need to release and attitudes that we need to change. Maybe the Tylenol masks our real problem and delays our real healing. This can be true for antidepressants, antacids, blood pressure medications and host of other medications that help people cope with conditions that must be solved by other means. A recent study suggests that 80 percent of what a General Practitioner sees in ill health depends more on the patients thinking than any medication they could prescribe.

In Mark's gospel is a detailed account of a woman who suffered the ineffectiveness of medicine. For twelve years she suffered a bleeding issue that sapped energy and isolated her socially. She exhausted all of her wealth on physicians and their treatments. Can any of you relate? Do any of you spend a large portion of your income on treatments and medicines that do

not cure you? The woman had no more money, but she had heard about Jesus. I suppose she imagined herself meeting with Jesus privately. After all, according to Old Testament law, she was unclean or defiled like a leper and not supposed to touch anyone clean. (I'm not going to comment today on the purpose and meaning of Old Testament laws about defilement. That is a helpful discussion that I'm reserving for another day.) When the woman saw the crowd pressing about Jesus, she reassessed. Against her religious teaching, she plunged into the crowd to work her way to Jesus. She could tell that she wouldn't have privacy and that it would be difficult if not impossible to get his attention. "I'll just touch him," she thought. Fighting her way, perhaps even rudely, she got near and reached out and touched his garment. Immediately, she felt something happen inside. Her bleeding stopped. Jesus wheeled around and asked, "Who touched me?" He felt power leave him. She fell before him, confessing what she did. Jesus reassured her. "Your faith has healed you," he said.

Was it faith in medicine that healed her? It was faith in God and his visitation in Jesus that healed this woman. The ordinary path to healing is God and his visitation in the Spirit of Jesus. Medicine is just one of God's gifts and works. If we sought God, would he bring us the right medicine? If we sought God, would some medicine that previously had no power now accomplish its purpose? If we sought God, would he lead us to changes that would bring the cure? If we sought God, would he heal us through the prayer or ministry of one of his saints?

In each biblical story I shared with you, sickness was not acceptable. Paul did not tell Timothy to put up with his frequent ailments. Hezekiah did not just prepare to die. The woman did not resign herself to live with the disorder. In each case, the key to healing was faith in God's visitation through human beings like Paul, Isaiah and Jesus.

Jesus has given us his Spirit so that we will do the same ministry that he did. We are called to two types of ministry. The first is intercession. Realize that Paul prayed daily for his friend and apprentice Timothy. Isaiah prayed daily and also for a special season for his king, Hezekiah. Jesus interceded for the lost sheep of Israel. Truth be told, all of you have been prayed for this morning. I and others have gone to God for every one of you. On the screen is an image of our intercession. We talk to God about you and ask him to do something for you. In response he does something for you. Intercession is the call of every believer. We are to stand in the gap between God's protection and blessing for your life and the work of our enemies. We are to intervene with God on your behalf.

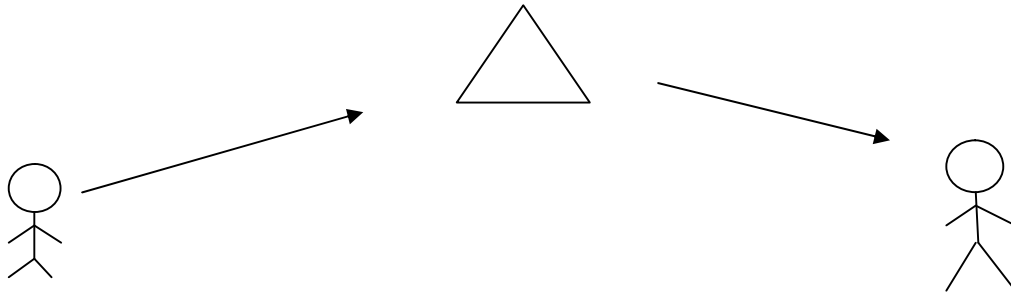
The second image on the screen is ministry. God gives us gifts to bless and heal one another. It maybe Paul's advise, Isaiah's poultice, or Jesus' power and reassurance. We are to minister. What is God giving you today to minister to those in need around you?

Critical to you praying, ministering and receiving healing is your faith. Will less than ideal circumstances, less than ideal people, prevent you from touching Jesus today? He is here where two or three have gathered in his name. He is here giving gifts to your brothers and sisters in Christ to be shared with you. Will you turn away or believe?

TODAY'S PROCEDURE:

- 1. Pray thanking God and rebuking Satan's deception of unbelief**
- 2. Instruct people for Corporate Healing**
 - a. Ask the Lord Jesus to visit you with his Spirit of power and counsel**
 - b. Ask the Lord to heal and bless individuals around you**
- 3. Pray for neighbor**
- 4. Minister: My God bless the medicines and treatments you've been given and bring you wholeness**
- 5. Lord, give me insight to minister what you want**
- 6. Personal Ministry of Healing**

INTERCESSION



MINISTRY

