Holiness, health and consumption

WHAT WE DO WITH

In the third of a three-part series, Salvationist eco-theologian MATT SEAMAN continues to explore the theme of holiness, health and consumption. His first article focused on “What we put on” our bodies, the second on “What we put in”. In this article, he reflects on the biblical stance of “What we do with” our bodies.

“Didn’t you realise that your body is a sacred place, the place of the Holy Spirit? Don’t you see that you can’t live however you please, squandering what God paid such a high price for? The physical part of you is not some piece of property belonging to the spiritual part of you. God owns the whole works. So let people see God in and through your body.” 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (The Message)

“But as the One who called you is holy, you yourselves also be holy in all your conduct and manner of living. For it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” 1 Peter 1:15-16 (Amplified)

In the previous two articles we have reflected on the significant interconnectedness between diverse areas of life, between people and the places we live in. The seemingly insignificant choices we all make every day can impact our personal health, the health of others, of communities, ecosystems and the land, locally and globally.

We have considered the impacts of what we put on our bodies, how “status anxiety” – unecessary worry based on what we buy and wear – can hinder our spiritual journey, and that what we put in our bodies can affect our engagement within the body of Christ. We discovered William and Catherine Booth’s endorsement of vegetarianism, and reflected on how food production and consumption can contribute to social and environmental issues.

We also contemplated holiness as encapsulating social and ecological issues, that holy living considers the wider impact of our lifestyles on local and global communities and ecosystems, and that living a life aiming for holiness requires continual recalibration and transformation.

I must emphasise again that I share my reflections in a spirit of love, care and encouragement. These are personal reflections on the challenges of living a holy and healthy lifestyle, yet my hope is that they may be of value and encouragement to you in your journey towards wholeness and holiness with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In this final article, we briefly consider what we do with our bodies living in light of the Gospel and God’s call to loving, holy lifestyles.

Personal health

First, linking with ideas and thoughts from the previous article in this series (what we put in) – how might the ideas and thoughts we put in correlate with what we do with our bodies? As an example for reflection, how might watching television maximise our physical, emotional and spiritual health?

In an interesting pilot research study, Dr Winifred Louis, a social psychologist, observed that pilot survey respondents who primarily used commercial media rather than non-commercial media were less likely to be engaged in their community and less involved in community activism. The varying circumstances we encounter throughout life can certainly impact our physical health and the amount of activity we can undertake. As we are finite beings, we have physical limits. Still, the health benefits of keeping active and exercising our bodies daily are well documented. Although, it can be easy to excuse ourselves from exercise through the feeling of pressure from the “to-do” list, with being too busy.

In today’s society we can at times be made to feel lazy if we don’t appear to be “busy”. However, if we are too busy to care for ourselves properly – both spiritually through prayer and scriptural study, and physically through exercise and rest – how might this impact on the “sacred place” of our body (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), and therefore our partnering with God and the church to share and live out the good news of Jesus?

Rest and restoration

Theologian Steven Bouma-Prediger states, “Work is good, but so is rest. We all – people, animals, land – need a Sabbath from our labours. We must allow for times of rejuvenation.” We are also reminded of – and even commanded to – consider this need for rest in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20: 8-11). Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. In this and other passages, such as Leviticus 25, we can see that the Sabbath is beneficial for the earth, for other creatures as well as for ourselves. Bouma-Prediger observes that “the Sabbath reminds us, among other things, that the world is in God’s loving hands and, therefore, will not fall to pieces if we cease from our work ... Where, then, are we? On an earth not of our own making, blessed by God.”

Contemplating how the Sabbath gives us freedom to live in humility and peace on God’s earth reminds us that we are members of God’s community here on earth – members of the earth community. As farmer and writer, Wendell Berry states we are “inextricably joined to each other, indebted to each other, receiving significance and worth from each other and from the whole.” In this, Berry also argues our living “must be the maximum of well-being with the minimum of consumption, which both defines and requires neighbourly love.”

Balance

To conclude this series, I refer to a relevant finding from a thesis I completed last year. Through this research, which involved interviewing a number of Salvationists, one idea that appeared repeatedly was “balance”. Responses underlined the importance of personal balance as followers of Jesus, collective balance in the life of the church, and the balancing of social needs and ecological health. For example, “The Salvation Army ... needs to be careful with what it does and seek not only to promote the well-being of the people and communities but also to seek the earth’s well-being, knowing that by balancing those needs you’re providing the best long term future.”

These views on balance are supported in this excerpt from a statement by the Canada and Bermuda Territory: “The earth is an interconnected whole, each part interdependent. As an intricately ordered system it must be kept in careful balance. Human sinfulness continues to contribute to destruction of the earth and cause significant degradations ... These imbalances have consequences for the poor, our global neighbours and future generations.”

Through our reflections on the voices of fellow Salvationists, the needs of humanity, the wider earth community and the Gospel story, let us continue to personally and collectively consider how we might balance our daily journey towards practical holiness.

In contemplating what we do with what we put in and what we put on our bodies, may we continue to be mindful of personal, social, spiritual and ecological health and well-being in light of the saving and liberating good news of Jesus.