

This is week 3 in a series called “Flourish.” We are exploring how Jesus beckons us to lives of wholeness and wellbeing in every dimension of our *present* existence. I’ve used John 10:10 as the central verse for this series theme. At least as much as John 3:16, John 10:10 is a statement of purpose. Jesus says, “I came that they may *have* life and *have* it abundantly.” As we’ve already noted, the verbs in this verse are present, not future, tense. Translation? Do not postpone or defer Jesus’ invitation to living an abundant life!

This week I took part in a memorial for a friend and colleague who died last year. This is a stole his wife had made for him and has graciously given to me. I chose this one because it really reminds me of how my friend began living an eternal, limitless, flourishing life long before his passing.

Another core teaching of Jesus is rendered in the present tense; the teaching we refer to as The Great Commandment: “You shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.” In other words, there is no dimension of our existence that should be disconnected from our walk of faith. The gospel of Luke reveals that this is how Jesus’ life developed! Let’s look at Luke 2:52. After Jesus’ parents find their 12-year-old son in the temple, Luke writes, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years and in divine and human favor.” Luke is telling us that Jesus grew in wisdom (mentally), in years (physically), in divine favor (spiritually), and in human favor (emotionally and relationally).

Over the past 2 Sundays we have explored emotional and mental wellbeing as aspects of flourishing. If you missed those messages, or want to revisit them, they are available on our podcast. Next week we will explore environmental wholeness and then we will conclude the series looking at relational wholeness. Both of those messages will include interviews with resource people like the one I shared last Sunday. But this Sunday we are going to combine and explore the themes of spiritual and physical wellbeing.

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Physical wellbeing is something we probably talk about the least in the church context, while spiritual wellbeing is typically our primary focus. But I am taking my queue today from Jesus, who brought physical and spiritual wellbeing together in a teaching that all of us know very, very well. I’ll

pause for just a moment and invite you to ponder what teaching I am referring to where Jesus brings together both physical and spiritual wellbeing... Let’s listen to our scripture passage for this morning. [Video: Matthew 6:5-15]

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When I said Jesus brought physical and spiritual wellbeing together in a teaching we know very well, did you consider The Lord’s Prayer? I find it interesting that when Jesus’ disciples ask him to teach them how to engage in the spiritual practice of prayer, the prayer he teaches them includes the very prominent petition, “give us this day our daily bread.” In other words, give us the sustenance, the nourishment, our bodies need to make it through this day.

A geeky biblical side-note. The Greek word translated in this passage as ‘daily’ is a highly unusual word. It is what scholars call a hapax legomena; a word that occurs only once in the written record of language. In the Greek NT there are 686 words that are hapax legomena. Because these words are not found elsewhere in the written record of language, translators cannot be exactly sure if the word is translated correctly; because they have nothing to compare it with! Again, as I said, there are 686 Greek NT words that are hapax legomena. There are 1500 hapax legomena in the Hebrew of the OT! This is something learn in our *What is the Bible?* class, and it is critical to know that some of these biblical hapax legomena are significant when it comes to interpreting scripture faithfully. This will come up in our seminar tonight here at the church called “What the Bible Is (and Isn’t).” This 5-week seminar is 5:30-7:00 pm, and you are all welcome to join here in the sanctuary with Dr. Michael Lodahl from PLNU!

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But let’s start with physical wellbeing. Last week, the resource person I interviewed on mental flourishing made some suggestions for managing our mental health. His suggestions focused on physical practices. Did you notice that? He said, limit your news consumption, which is being aware of what is going into our bodies through our eyes and our ears, because that impacts our mental wellbeing. (More on that in a moment.) He also said to watch and reduce our alcohol consumption, to get outside, and to go for walk when we are dealing with challenges like this pandemic.

These suggestions recognize the mind, body, spirit connection. My favorite OT professor in seminary talked about The Lord’s Prayer and pointed out the obvious logic of what Jesus taught about prayer; that we will struggle to attend to matters of spiritual wholeness, like forgiveness and temptation, unless and until our basic need for food and nourishment has been supplied. And so the order of the prayer is first ‘give us this day our [daily] bread’ and then ‘forgive us our debts’. The word debts has a double meaning. Certainly it is about economic debts, but also debts before God. We tend to focus on the latter, but Jesus’ audience would have been focused on both basic needs like bread for the day, as well as release from financial burdens so that instead of using money to pay for debt, the money could be spent for... bread!

In our *Introduction to the NT* class we just learned that while the diet of those who lived in the first century was agrarian – olives, figs, dates, etc., -- every meal began with bread! In the time of Jesus, bread made up 70 percent of the calories a person would consume in a given day. Clearly, when bread makes up 70 percent of your daily calorie intake, a sufficient amount of bread is a necessity!

One more thing about physical wellbeing before we talk about spiritual wellbeing. I want to return to that recommendation, that we limit our news consumption. Every so often I poke around on cable news channels to see what’s being said. I can’t stand it for too long because I rarely hear anything that is going to help me love my neighbor (or my adversary) as Jesus taught his followers was foundational to being a disciple.

Sometimes I am a bit too indirect, so I am going to risk being very explicit here! I feel like I can mention this because some members send me emails or clips with links from some really biased sources. If we spend time engaging in NewsMax, OAN, and some Fox programming, or if we are engaging The Young Turks, the Huffington Post, and some MSNBC or CNN programming, I do not see evidence that these sources will help us follow Jesus’ teachings about loving others. And I can’t even start on some of the podcasts out there.

I’ve found 2 sources for myself that inform, but don’t agitate me to dislike people who are different than me. One is *The Week* magazine, which is a distillation of content from other news reporting agencies. The other is a Reuters app, where I can

watch a 15-minute news update at any time of day. My point is simply this: don’t consume physically those things that will impair your spiritual wellbeing, your ability to grow in Christlike love!

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Let’s focus more directly on spiritual wellbeing. This, understandably, is what we tend to focus on most as a church. As I think I’ve made clear, spiritual wellbeing does not happen in isolation from emotional, physical, mental, and relational wholeness. It’s all of a piece.

Now, in Matthew, Jesus teaches The Lord’s Prayer as a part of his larger teaching in The Sermon on the Mount. In other words, in Matthew, The Lord’s Prayer does not follow a request from his disciples that Jesus teach them how to pray. But that is how Luke says it happens. Luke 11:1 tells us, “He [Jesus] was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of the disciples said, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John [the Baptist] taught his disciples.” I like this version because I am moved by the thought of Jesus’s disciples seeing their teacher pray so much, and so faithfully, that they really want him to give them a lesson in prayer! How about us? Do we need a lesson in prayer?

If I were starting ministry all over again, I would schedule and lead more classes on spiritual practices! But, as they say, we can only go forward. And so I want to invite you to mark your calendars for October 27<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup>. On the evening of both days, I will lead a 2-part “School of Prayer” via Zoom. I will offer other opportunities going forward, so please sign-up only if you can do both sessions, which I anticipate will be 75-90 minutes each.

I share what has become my regular prayer practice and offer some spiritual and theological insights about the elements of my practice. I will ultimately invite participants to use the practice for 40 days and I haven’t decided whether or not we’ll regather participants after the 40 days to reflect on the joys and challenges of this experience. [Sign-Ups]

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Let me summarize this sermon in three points. 1) Attending to physical wellbeing is an essential component of spiritual flourishing. 2) Be careful that what you digest, even through your eyes and your ears, is actually nourishing, and 3) Invest time, as the disciples did with Jesus, in learning how to pray more like Jesus. Amen.