

NOW IS THE TIME TO IMPROVE OUR HEALTH JANUARY 3 2110
ST. LUKE'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
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Do you ever procrastinate or put off doing what you always intended to do? I suspect that all of us procrastinate and put off doing what we say we want to do at one time or another.

Today we will start a series of sermons intended to give us the spiritual help and community support we need to achieve some of the goals we say we would like to achieve.

This series is called NOW IS THE TIME and will encourage us to take the first steps towards achieving our goals. Today we will be thinking about NOW IS THE TIME TO IMPROVE OUR HEALTH. Everyone realizes that most of us should live more healthy lifestyles - now is the time to do it.

In his letters to the Corinthians, St. Paul encourages us to take care of our bodies as we would take care of the temple of God. Here is how Paul states it:

Read 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.* GOD'S TEMPLE IS HOLY AND YOU ARE THAT TEMPLE.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20: *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.* DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT YOUR BODY IS A TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN YOU?

2 Corinthians 6:16b: *What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.* FOR WE ARE THE TEMPLE OF THE LIVING GOD.

Prayer

During the time of Jesus, the temple in Jerusalem was the holiest place in the world for the Jewish people. The first temple was built by King Solomon but it was destroyed by the Babylonians in the sixth century BC when the Hebrew people were taken into exile. The second temple was started in the fifth century and completed by King Herod the Great in about 20 BC.

Jesus himself went to the temple to pray on numerous occasions. In the temple there was a room called the Holy of Holies and it was believed that the spirit of God actually dwelled in that room.

Because this was such a holy site, there was a large group of priests who took excellent care of the temple because they believed it was the house which contained the spirit of the living God.

The temple was destroyed in 70 AD by Roman armies and all that is left to this day is one wall and it is a place where thousands of people go every year to pray and is often called the Wailing Wall because people often weep when they offer their prayers to God at that sacred place.

I have been to the Wailing Wall several times and I always write a prayer for peace and put it in the cracks in the wall like many people do.

The Jewish Temple was cared for because it represented the place where a person could encounter God.

Now, in the New Testament, St. Paul told the Christians in Corinth that their individual bodies are the temple of God, this is the temple in which God lives and therefore should be well maintained and taken care of.

For example he wrote in 1 Corinthians 3: "DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT YOU ARE GOD'S TEMPLE AND THAT GOD'S SPIRIT DWELLS IN YOU? FOR GOD'S TEMPLE IS HOLY AND YOU ARE THAT TEMPLE."

1 Corinthians 6: "YOUR BODY IS A TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN YOU." And in 2 Corinthians 6: "WE ARE THE TEMPLE OF THE LIVING GOD."

Paul's analogy is that our bodies are like the temple in Jerusalem. The temple in Jerusalem contains the holy spirit of the living God and in a similar way our bodies contain the holy spirit of the living God. And just as people care for the temple in Jerusalem, so we need to take good care of our bodies because they contain the living spirit of God.

Think about that for a moment. The living spirit of God dwells in each one of us; the living spirit of God is the life force, the animating energy, the living soul that God has placed in each of us.

If you were to ask Paul: where is God? He would say that the living spirit of God dwells in each one of us.

This last week I heard someone say that the year 2010 could mean TO OWN ONE'S OMNIPOTENCE; to acknowledge that the omnipotence of God is within each one of us. We are the temple of the Living God.

I thought of this analogy. We once had a fish aquarium at our home with several tropical fish in it. We all enjoyed watching these colorful fish swim around in this aquarium. The aquarium was simply the container in which the beautiful fish lived.

However, we had to take care of the aquarium if we wanted the fish to thrive. We had to clean it out, keep it filled with fresh water and keep it circulating for the fish to have life-giving environment.

In a similar way, the spirit of God is the living energy within us but we have to take good care of our bodies to keep them clean and healthy as the container of this living spirit if we want the spirit of God to thrive in us.

So the question is how well are we taking care of the container, the temple, the aquarium in which the spirit of God lives? How well are we taking care of our bodies as a temple of the living God?

In many ways we are not taking good care of our bodies as a temple of God.

I read recently that the people of Indiana are among the least healthy people in the nation. Out of the 50 states in the United States, we are the 35th most unhealthy. Twenty years ago, we were 25th in the nation but we have dropped behind ten other states in the past 20 years in being healthy people.

We have the second highest death rate in the nation due to smoking related illnesses. More people die in Indiana due to smoking related illnesses than die from all the car accidents, murders, suicides, alcohol, and illegal drugs combined.

Sixty-six percent of the American people are considered overweight or obese and the people of Indiana are near the top of that list. The most people live in Mississippi and the fewest live in Colorado. The medical costs related to obesity in Indiana are about \$2 billion each year.

The truth is that as a state we are not noted for taking good care of the health of our bodies as temples of the living God.

In other words, we have let the aquarium of our bodies become polluted and they are not healthy environments for the living spirit of God to thrive within us.

Now we all realize this and that is the reason that the number one resolution people make on New Year's Day is the resolution to lose weight. However, the average person only keeps that resolution for about a week and by the middle of January the resolution to lose weight is completely forgotten.

So the question is: how can we give the spiritual support and community encouragement to each other to achieve the goals we want in terms of improving our health. I suspect that we have all made vows to lose weight on our own but may have failed to fulfill that vow by ourselves.

As a congregation, we want to say to all of us that "Now is the Time" for us to work together to encourage each other in achieving our own goals for improved health.

No one can tell anyone else what their goals should be. Each of us needs to decide for ourselves our goal is for improved health, tell someone else so we can have their encouragement and support, and then pray that God will give us the strength to achieve that goal.

Here are some of my goals for improved health this year.

First, my doctor told me that I should lose about 10 pounds to be at my optimum weight for my height and body type. I agree with him that I would be healthier, and probably feel better, and be a better temple of the living God if I were to lose about ten pounds.

Now, I know my habits which keep me from losing weight. I like to have a bowl of ice cream before I go to bed at night. When we used to visit with Minnietta's parents, every evening her dad would say: "Kent, it is time for some ice cream and conversation." So George and I would each get a big bowl of ice cream, sit down at the table and talk about life and eat ice cream.

George passed away about 20 years ago, but still I often eat a bowl of ice cream before I go to bed. I would like to blame George but I know I am the one who gets the ice cream out of the freezer and eats it.

Someone told me that you should not go cold turkey on these things; you should just cut back gradually, so I have decided that I will have non-fat ice cream just one night a week for the next month and I would like your encouragement and support on this so I might become healthier.

For all of us who may be a few or more pounds overweight, think about what one little step you might make to a healthier lifestyle.

One of our problems is that we set unrealistic goals to lose 10 or 15 pounds in a week and when we don't reach it, give up altogether. I encourage us all to set modest goals like cutting down on the number of desserts we will eat each week or cutting back on eating between meals, or cutting back on second helpings or the cookies and candy that are always in the church office.

I realized that we are not very good models for healthy eating here at the church because we always have donuts in Fellowship Hall every Sunday morning. So today we are adding some healthier alternatives with cheese and fruit at the table for the reception for the Williamsons.

Our bodies are temples of the Living God, and now is the time to care for these temples so the spirit of God can thrive and shine more brightly through each of us.

Exercise is generally considered another way for us to become healthier.

Minnietta has fibromyalgia which means that her muscles don't relax easily after activity. Exercising in warm water is one of the ways that helps relieve the pain of fibromyalgia.

A few years ago, Minnietta discovered that they make swim spas here in Indianapolis where you can actually swim and exercise in warm water at your home. She suggested that it would be good if we bought a swim spa where she could exercise in warm water and decrease the pain from fibromyalgia.

I looked at the price of a swim spa and I told her that I didn't think we could afford it. Minnietta replied by saying: "I CAN LIVE WITHOUT IT, JUST NOT AS LONG."

Kendall said, "Dad, she got you." We went out and bought a swim spa and now we both use it for our exercise.

However, I don't use it as often as I should so during the month of January, I am making a public commitment to exercise in our spa at least three times a week.

One of the easiest ways of exercising is walking. Doctors tell us that we need to take about 10,000 steps every day to maintain good health.

Next Sunday, during the open house, our Health Ministry will have a table where you can get a pedometer which is a gizmo you can put on your belt and it will keep track of the number of steps you take each day. If we find that we are not taking enough steps in our regular journey of life, we might want to add a daily walk to get in the steps needed to improve our health.

I just want to encourage all of us to support each other in our desire to become healthier as temples of the living God. I am not asking us to police each other or scold each other but just model for each other our own commitments to a healthier lifestyle.

Smoking is another unhealthy habit that reduces the health of Indiana residents. Twenty-six percent of Hoosier adults smoke which is the second highest rate in the nation.

Health related costs from smoking exceed \$3 billion annually in Indiana and an estimated 160,000 Hoosiers now younger than 18 will die prematurely from cigarettes. Furthermore, more people who don't smoke are dying from second hand smoke from simply breathing the smoke exhaled from smokers in public places. I suspect that stopping smoking is one of the hardest habits to break but is one of the most important for improving our health.

My dad smoked for about 30 years and got to the place where he woke up every morning with a terrible coughing spell caused by his smoking habit. One year, on New Year's Day, Dad simply told all the family that he would stop smoking the same way he stopped drinking by stopping one day at a time. He said to all of us: "I will not have a cigarette today, I'm not saying I will never have another cigarette, I'm just telling all of you I will not have one today."

The next day he said the same thing as well as the day after that. He never said he stopped smoking; he said he just wouldn't have a cigarette each day and eventually kicked the habit and didn't even want to have a cigarette.

However, I realize that many people need more help than that to succeed in stopping smoking. I read recently that the average person who stops smoking had stopped four times before they actually succeeded in stopping. So if you don't succeed the first time, try and try again.

I had another relative who smoked most of his life and eventually died of lung cancer. During the last weeks of his life when he was in the hospital it was very painful to watch him try to catch his breath when his lungs no longer worked properly. Anyone who has watched a loved one die of lung cancer might make a new decision about smoking or being around second hand smoke.

Each one of us knows what we need to do personally to live a healthier lifestyle. For some it might be to slow down and not be a workaholic, to spend more time relaxing and enjoying life with those we love.

For others it might be that we simply need to get more sleep. I read recently that Americans have become grouchier because so many of us don't get enough relaxing sleep.

For some it might be to live with less stress. We encourage people to come to our meditation classes to learn how to meditate and reduce our stress levels.

God has given us this one miraculous body in which to make this journey through life and calls us to take good care of it as the container for God's spirit. Each of us needs to make our own personal decision about how we will care for this temple God has given us.

On Christmas Eve, I used this illustration which I hope we will remember. We are not human beings who have spiritual experiences - we are spiritual beings who are having a human experience. We came down from God; we were given a human body in which to live; someday it will wear out and we will return to God. But while we are spiritual beings inhabiting these bodies, God calls us to take good care of the vessel in which we make this journey through life.

Several years ago, I knew a man who went to a hospital for open heart surgery. They discovered that he had five blocked arteries and would have to have by-pass surgery where they take veins out of his leg and put them in his heart to by-pass the blocked arteries.

The day before his surgery, the surgeon came in to talk to him. The doctor told him that he could do this surgery successfully and by-pass those blocked arteries. But then the doctor said to him: "I want to know if you are worth saving."

The man was shocked and asked, "What do you mean?"

The doctor said: "You smoke, you're severely overweight and you don't exercise. I can do this surgery and fix your heart but if you don't stop smoking and start eating better and exercising regularly, your arteries will just plug up again and you'll have the same problem you have now. I'll do my part; I'll fix your heart but will you do your part; will you stop smoking and live a healthier lifestyle? Are you worth all this effort to save you?"

The man heard this as a life and death question and he promised the doctor that if the doctor would fix his heart, then he would change his lifestyle and live a healthier life.

The surgery was successful and afterwards the man came to my office and told me about the conversation he had had with his doctor. He said that doctor scared life into him and he told me he had stopped smoking, was walking two miles every day, was eating a more healthy diet and had lost about 20 pounds. He also told how much better he felt.

He said, "I thank God that doctor was so bold and strong with me because it finally got to me and I am feeling better than I have in years. He woke me up."

A new year is the time for a wake-up call for all of us. I hope that each of us will make a new decision today to become healthier in whatever way we can, tell someone else about it to help hold us accountable, and then whenever we are tempted to do something we know is un-healthy hear the words of Paul:

Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit of God within you. Take good care of it.

Now is the time to become healthy. If not now, when? Don't wait until it is too late.

Prayer