

The Health Message



Week Eight

inTro



Read This Week's Passage:
Romans 12:1, 2

HEALTHY, HOLISTIC LIVING

Extensive research has identified Loma Linda, California as a “blue zone,” a region where a higher-than-usual number of people live longer than the average seventy years. Many Adventists live in this city, and it’s a commonly cited example when we say we tend to live about seven years longer than average and have one of the lowest rates of lifestyle illnesses like cardiovascular diseases and diabetes.

Most early Adventists prioritized establishing the church, studying the biblical time prophecies, and proclaiming Jesus’ return, not maintaining healthy diets and lifestyles. But there were a few, like Joseph Bates, who seemed to realize the importance of holistic living. He stopped drinking alcohol in 1821 and in 1827 helped organize one of the first temperance societies in the United States. He also gave up meat, butter, cheese, and rich desserts in favor of a plant-based diet. His dietary choices were far ahead of their time.

Standard medical practices at the time were little better than guesswork. People generally didn’t know the cause of most diseases, and many were subjected to treatments that we recognize today caused much harm. As God did with other practices, He faithfully led His church to a broader and more comprehensive view of how we ought to treat our bodies, and He helped us understand why. This week, we will explore how the command in Romans to “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice” (12:1; NIV) relates to healthy living in both body and mind.



inScribe

Write out Romans 12:1, 2 from the translation of your choice. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.



Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you

Draw **Arrows** to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?

Memorize your favorite verse. Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

Why do you think most Christians live as though physical health has little to do with being a true Christian?

What does it mean to be a living sacrifice?



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A TEMPERATE LIFESTYLE

Romans 12:1 makes the important point that our bodies need to be presented as a holy, living sacrifice to God—a point the early Adventists slowly began to understand over the course of a few decades. The believers accepted the practice of abstaining from alcohol and tobacco in the 1840s and 50s—very early in the church's official history. No one wanted to meet Christ in a drunken state, and the use of tobacco was discouraged for both health and proper financial stewardship reasons. The 1850s saw a few general health appeals from Ellen White and small groups of believers who had adopted some health reform, but there was not yet anything that spanned the whole movement.

1863 was a significant year for Sabbatarian Adventists. They had officially established themselves as a denomination early in the year, and in June, Ellen White had a forty-five-minute vision on health reform while she and her husband were staying at the Hillard home in Otsego, Michigan. As with previous visions, the information she received was not entirely new to the movement, as others had already emphasized the major points. Ellen White saw that the subject of temperance was far broader than just abandoning alcohol and included physical activity and healthful eating. She was shown the benefits of regular exercise, fresh air, rest, sunshine, and water, and she saw that a plant-based diet is the most beneficial.

Ellen White started to publicly share at camp meetings what she had seen in vision, but it wasn't until a year later that she wrote down a full overview of the vision in a chapter titled "Health" in the fourth volume of *Spiritual Gifts* (120–150). As these writings were shared amongst the believers, it was necessary to differentiate between what was simply the best practice and what was biblically mandated. Because our church is a global church and the Bible is relevant to all, the core principles of a healthy lifestyle transcend culture and geographic location. Although the Adventist Church today teaches that a vegetarian lifestyle is healthiest, it doesn't require its members to be vegetarian. It does, however, instruct believers to follow the biblical differentiation between clean and unclean meats that was established before the Flood and affirmed in the Mosaic law.

Making practical changes in our lives is the natural result of spiritual revival. All of Paul's epistles include both theological teaching and practical instruction. Paul wrote Romans as a letter to the church in Rome during his three-month stay in the city of Corinth on his third missionary journey. The book teaches broad, overarching doctrines such as sanctification by faith, justification by faith, and righteousness by faith. Chapter 12 marks the transition from a theoretical explanation to a practical application in the believer's day-to-day life. Paul is convinced that the logical response, after eleven chapters of learning about the theology of righteousness by faith, is that a believer would offer their life as one of self-sacrifice and service.

A DEDICATION OF THE ENTIRE BEING

Romans 12:1 is one of many places in his writings where Paul emphasized the idea that our bodies are not our own. He invited each member of the church to respond to the overwhelming “mercies of God” by presenting their bodies as a “living sacrifice” to God. Those who stand in awe of God’s love in presenting His Son as a sacrifice for our sins are moved to present their own lives to God as a living sacrifice ready for service.

God does not ask us to do for Him what He is not willing to do for us. God wants total commitment from us—He wants us to bring our entire being—body, mind, and soul—to Him. Health of mind and soul depends largely on the condition of the body. We see this principle elsewhere in Paul’s writings when he refers to the body as a “temple” (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). When the body-temple is rundown, its ability for service and worship becomes enfeebled.

Satan is well aware of this principle and does all he can to twist it to his benefit and our detriment. One of the many philosophies he spreads to achieve this goal goes something like this: “It’s your body, do what you want with it.” The issue at hand comes down to ownership and ultimately origins: do we own ourselves or does God own us? How we treat our bodies demonstrates what we truly believe about this important question.

We belong to God, first because God created us and second because He redeemed us from sin. Based on all God has done for us and all the mercy He has shown us, Paul appeals to us to be a living sacrifice—to present ourselves alive, with all our energy and power dedicated to God’s service. Paul calls this service reasonable or logical precisely because of God’s mercies. As we glorify God in our bodies, we will experience the same physical and mental blessings Daniel and his friends enjoyed in Daniel 1. By putting God first in their diet, Daniel and his friends made choices that optimized their health and gave them a significant advantage over their peers. Because of strict discipline and temperance, they were physically and intellectually unrivaled. God is focused on our whole being. He wants us to achieve peak physical, mental, *and* emotional health. Having the best health in every area of life allows us to make a greater impact in others’ lives.

Like Daniel and his friends, we also decide whether our diets will conform to this world or be transformed by God. The Bible speaks of three diets: the ideal, the acceptable, and the unacceptable. God gave the ideal diet to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when He gave a plant-based diet that to this day promotes the best health and longest life (Gen. 1:29). After the Flood, God permitted us to eat of clean meats while prohibiting the consumption of blood and unclean meats (Lev. 11; Deut. 14:3–11). These Old Testament dietary categories were upheld by the Jerusalem counsel in the book of Acts when deciding which Mosaic laws new Gentile converts to Christianity needed to follow (Acts 15:20, 29).



inTerpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks seem to point to overall?



What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

What benefits would you see from making healthier lifestyle choices?



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What relationship do the following verses have with Romans 12:1, 2?

1 Corinthians 3:16, 17

1 Corinthians 6:12–20

3 John 2

Exodus 15:26

Genesis 1:29

Leviticus 11:1–23

1 Corinthians 10:31

Daniel 1:8–15

Proverbs 23:19–21

What other verses come to mind in connection with the primary passage?

(Cont. from inTerpret, p. 68):

Some would say diet is a more sensitive issue than some theological issues since the way we eat is personal, cultural, and habitual. What we do with our bodies is a personal choice, but we must always remember that we belong to God and therefore must treat our bodies as His possession.

There are two contrasting verbs in Romans 12:1 that represent two very divergent paths that lead to very different results: conform and transform. The transforming power of God can never accomplish what it needs to in our lives unless we are willing to break out of the mold of this world. We cannot conform to God and conform to this world at the same time. Accepting one is rejecting the other. The power of God does not bring only a superficial, fleeting change; God's transformative work on our hearts is reflected in our innermost being—in our very nature. It happens from the inside out.

Review your memorized verse from Romans 12:1, 2.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Romans 12 tells us how we ought to respond to God's love by making changes in how we live our lives. Health reform and lifestyle changes are too often done from the legalistic mindset that we can earn our way to salvation. While there's an immediate benefit to healthy eating, if we do it from a place of legalism, our physical health improves while our spiritual health suffers. Jesus is always interested in foundations, for they are the most important part of any structure, and the foundation of the Christian life always comes back to the word "why." It comes down to our motives. Doing the right thing for the wrong reasons always results in limited benefits.

The "why" behind living healthfully is clearly stated in verse 1: "the mercies of God." None of us deserve life and we only have it thanks to Christ's sacrifice. This simple truth ought to drive our choices. Too often, though, we seek a healthy lifestyle so we can live longer, feel better, avoid disease, and enjoy ourselves more. These are good, but they should be secondary motivations, not primary ones. Jesus gave us life and gave His life for us. In response, He asks that we give our lives to Him not only intellectually or spiritually but physically as well. He loves us and lives for us, and He wants us to reciprocate that love and commitment.

In view of the life of service Jesus lived for us, our highest desire should be to live a life of service for Him. We choose to lead healthy lives so we can maximize our service to God. We don't want to cut God's plan for us short because we're suffering bad health from unwise choices and poor habits. Good physical health should enable us to accomplish a greater outward-focused mission in life. Some say healthy living makes us self-centered and egotistical, but if we live that way, our healthy life becomes more of a curse than a blessing. If healthy living adds ten years to our lives, may those extra ten mean another ten years of blessing others and advancing God's work rather than another ten years of serving ourselves.

Healthy living not only potentially lengthens the years of our service but also increases the quality of the service we do in the present. Our minds become dull when our bodies are sluggish, and we find ourselves unable to execute our work with the same skill. People who carry heavy responsibilities at work or in ministry are tempted to neglect health for the sake of keeping up with their heavy workload. However, the greater the responsibilities we carry, the more important caring for our health becomes so we can do the very best we can in our work.

Paul describes whole-hearted service to God as "reasonable" (Rom 12:1). There are aspects of our lives that don't make sense, but this is not one of them. Isaiah 1:18 says, "Come now, and let us reason together," showing that God longs for an intellectual relationship with us that can handle questions, doubts, worries, and fears. He never expects blind obedience; He always gives us a choice, and He asks that we use that choice to love Him with our hearts, minds, and bodies.



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Meditate on the primary passage again and look for where Jesus is.



How can we make sure we aren't making choices from a legalistic mindset?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

What is He saying to you personally through these texts?

Prayer Response:



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Review the memory verse.
How does it apply to your
life this week?

After this week's study of
the chapter, what are some
personal applications you are
convicted of in your life?

What are some practical
applications you must make in
your school, family, workplace,
and church life?



Read more inSight from the
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THE RIGHT HAND

"I was again shown that the health reform is one branch of the great work which is to fit a people for the coming of the Lord. It is as closely connected with the third angel's message as the hand is with the body. The law of ten commandments has been lightly regarded by man; but the Lord would not come to punish the transgressors of that law without first sending them a message of warning. The third angel proclaims that message. Had men ever been obedient to the law of ten commandments, carrying out in their lives the principles of those precepts, the curse of disease now flooding the world would not be..."

"Ignorance is no excuse now for the transgression of law. The light shines clearly, and none need be ignorant, for the great God Himself is man's instructor. All are bound by the most sacred obligations to God to heed the sound philosophy and genuine experience which He is now giving them in reference to health reform. He designs that the great subject of health reform shall be agitated, and the public mind deeply stirred to investigate; for it is impossible for men and women, with all their sinful, health-destroying, brain-enervating habits, to discern sacred truth, through which they are to be sanctified, refined, elevated, and made fit for the society of heavenly angels in the kingdom of glory..."

"The apostle Paul exhorts the church, 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.' Men, then, can make their bodies unholy by sinful indulgences. If unholy, they are unfitted to be spiritual worshipers, and are not worthy of heaven. If man will cherish the light that God in mercy gives him upon health reform, he may be sanctified through the truth, and fitted for immortality. But if he disregards that light, and lives in violation of natural law, he must pay the penalty." (Ellen White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods* [1938], 69, 70.)

"Pure air, sunlight, abstemiousness, rest, exercise, proper diet, the use of water, trust in divine power—these are the true remedies. Every person should have a knowledge of nature's remedial agencies and how to apply them." (Ellen White, *The Ministry of Healing* [1905], 127.)

"Anything that lessens physical strength enfeebles the mind and makes it less capable of discriminating between right and wrong. We become less capable of choosing the good and have less strength of will to do that which we know to be right." (Ellen White, *Christ's Object Lessons* [1900], 346.)

"Between the mind and the body there is a mysterious and wonderful relation. They react upon each other. To keep the body in a healthy condition to develop its strength, that every part of the living machinery may act harmoniously, should be the first study of our life. To neglect the body is to neglect the mind. It cannot be to the glory of God for His children to have sickly bodies or dwarfed minds." (*Mind, Character and Personality*, vol. 2 [1977], 373.)



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



In what ways has the health message benefited the SDA Church? In what ways have various health movements detracted from the church's work?

What can we learn from how long it took the early Adventists to adopt these new practices? How should their example inform the way we treat others who are learning about them for the first time?

What might be some wrong motives for healthy living? How are health benefits weakened when done for the wrong reasons?

How do we avoid developing a superiority complex when we have good health?

How do we tactfully, humbly, and lovingly decline something that we have decided not to partake of?

Why should the health message be closely connected with the three angels' messages?