**The sound doctrine**

**By Gerard Feller**

**Introduction**

Promise stands for biblical thinking about health. God's Word has the pretense of being wholesome. With regard to biblical health, many Christians often think that it is only about prayer. Of course, this is also very important. But the Bible also calls us to account for our responsibilities when it comes to obtaining and maintaining our health. In several texts in the Old and New Testament there is mention about the healing (Greek: 'hygiainousa') influence.

In 1Tim. 6:3-4 (NASB) it says: "*If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with****sound*** *(****wholesome*** *in NKJV) words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness,* *he is conceited and understands nothing...".* See also 1 Tim. 4:3, Titus 2:1 and Psalm 107:20.

Health is a concept which is thought about quite differently in terms of contents and meaning. The definition of the WHO, the World Health Organization, is: 'A state of complete well-being'. According to others, this definition is outdated, because practically anyone can be considered a patient. A more contemporary term for health is the ability to adapt and manage in the light of the physical, emotional and social challenges of life. This emphasizes that it is much more about the *potential* to be or become healthy, even if there is a disease (1). Machteld Huber, a health psychologist, consulted practitioners, policy makers and patients and obtained various aspects of health, namely: physical functions, mental functions and perception, the spiritual/existential dimension, quality of life, social participation and daily functioning.

**The Biblical image of man**

This holistic approach to health comes close to the biblical thinking about it.

The Bible defines health and even life always in relation to God. Man is above all a moral being. From that relationship with God, all of the above dimensions receive a biblically healthy content. Although often in health a distinction is made between body (material), soul (relation fellow man and himself) and spirit (relation with God), man in his complex creation remains an inseparable unity.

Nowadays it is well enough known that sufficient exercise and good nutrition also have a great influence on our health. Perhaps more about that later in another article. Now I want to focus on the relationships inside and outside of man to which 'the sound doctrine' in the Bible pays attention. According to the biblical standard, modern man is in danger of becoming increasingly unhealthy due to the increasing secularization and individualization, caused by the loss of contact with his environment, with God, his fellow man and creation. This happens despite the development of medical science. The inner relationships are also devaluing more and more. Biblically speaking, after the Fall there is an ever-increasing disintegration of the inner relationships between spirit, soul and body. This leads to a degeneration of the inner coherence. And thereby a removal of the biblical total image of health. Through the gospel of Jesus Christ, the restoration of contact with God and the indwelling and communion of the Holy Spirit, there are opportunities for man to become biblically healthy.

This goes through a process, which of course takes time. The perfect eternal health, a gift of grace from God, will only be reached in the future in heaven with a perfect (sinless) and glorified body in a perfect connection with God and His creation. In this article I especially want to make clear that one can only become and remain healthy in the biblical sense by constantly learning and practicing, putting into practice.

**Practicing health**

Health must be learned! Many Christians do not realize that confirming or acknowledging theoretical and/or intellectual knowledge does not yet guarantee a biblically responsible health-making effect. To be born again is an important basis, but it does not mean that someone is healthy in the biblical sense. Only the constant practice ('gymnazo') and the practicing of the new man, (Eph. 2:14;4:24), the 'new software' (Rom. 12:1,2) has healthy-making consequences. What we know, must be put into practice step by step, must become 'flesh and blood' in us. In principle, biblical health can only be effective if two essential conditions are met. First, the old relationships and habits and standards must be recognized as wrong and negative, and this must lead to the understanding that new biblical relationships are needed. One must learn to think and act in a totally different way, guided by God and often contrary to what we usually think and do. *But you did not learn Christ in this way,* (Eph. 4:20). It is about "that the spirit of your mind must be constantly renewed and that you must put on the new-self created according to God's will in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:23,24). The change of the spirit of your mind requires not only intellectual insight but also a decision of the will, and then an actual practice process to put things into practice (12).

**Learning process of imitation**

Knowledge and learning processes have a common denominator, a common goal, namely Jesus Christ Himself. We must learn to live His life. In Luke 9:23 it says: *"If anyone wishes to come after Me (Jesus), he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life* (read: old life) *will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake* (new identity) *he is the one who will save it".* The basis of biblical health is the new identity in Christ! "*I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*" (Gal. 2:20).

Our learning process is to (start to) live in the new identity of Christ. This implies: learning to live as Christ in the previously mentioned dimensions of our health. The learning process of imitation also includes model examples, which are people who go the way of Jesus in their lives. In addition, Christian counselors, coaches, pastoral workers can encourage people to follow the way of Jesus. In the Promise Magazine we have often paid attention to the ‘Life Model’. This model maintains a biblically holistic model of health.

Besides the often enthusiastic responses about this ‘neurotheological model’, sometimes the criticism is expressed that it was not biblically founded. In this article I also want to prove that the learning process of the new-self to become healthy has everything to do with the skills that are mentioned in the Life Model.

**Learn to live in the new identity**

What’s central in the Bible and the Life Model, is the confession and maintenance of the new identity in Christ. In the hierarchical functioning of the brain centers is the center of the identity (in the prefrontal cortex) above the commanding structure (2). The most important factor of health is that we behave according to our identity (as God has intended it). To remind ourselves in all possible and difficult situations who we are in Christ and to think and act accordingly. Or in other words: "What would Jesus do?” (WWJD). Not by making efforts of the old self, but to be led by the Holy Spirit. This does not happen naturally, for the born again Christian must learn to lay aside and put on (Rom. 13:12; Col. 3:12; Hebr. 12:1). Intellectual knowledge alone is not enough. After all, skills must be exercised and streamlined. If that is not the case, the born-again man will not behave according to his identity in Christ but according to the 'flesh', so live in his old nature. Christians must learn to live and act in the new identity of Christ. Dying to the old identity is an important condition. *"Having concluded this that one died for all,* therefore al*l died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."* See 2 Cor. 5:14-15 (NASB) (7).

Considering the old man to be dead is an important skill to be learned and practiced (in terms of the Life Model: streamlined into the fast circuit of the right brain function). So no autonomy, self-justification, self-redemption, boundless freedom or a-morality. *We must prove ourselves doers of the Word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves."* (Jam. 1:22).

**To learn from intimacy with God**

The first skills that a born again Christian should learn, is developing intimacy in personal prayer with Christ, led by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

A.W. Tozer encourages us by his book ‘The pursuit of God’, to have an intimate conversation with God (3). “Lord, teach me to listen. Teach me to pray like Samuel: ‘Speak Lord for Your servant is listening’. Let me learn to listen to Your voice despite all noises of the world in and around me’. This speaking often happens through the Word of God, the Bible, sometimes through other believers or through other circumstances. Whatever the case, we must also learn to understand and test the voice of God. In neurophysiological terms, this means a skill of ‘the fast circuit’ of the right brain function. If only accepted for notification by the slow circuit of the left brain, it lacks the emotional context and connection needed to store the learning process (4). The ability to remain relational with God (and then with others) can be learned despite difficult feelings such as sadness, anger, fear, shame, disgust and despair. But more about that later.

According to Psalm 34, God will answer a seeking man. The postmodern man is generally superficial, easily irritable, impatient, insecure, autonomous, he knows better and holds on to his own assumptions. Psalm 34 indicates that God wants people to seek Him, for then He will answer, and that when they see Him (behold) He will give joy, that when they fear Him (take Him into account) He will provide for their needs. This is not about one single moment but a (learning) process (12).

**Learning to practice the conscience before God and men**

In the Bible, conscience occupies an extremely important place, both in the liberation and redemption of all mankind and in communicating with God and learning about His will. The skill of behaving according to your identity in Christ despite all the temptations of the old self is also called self-control in the Bible (2 Pet.1:6). Biblically speaking, self-control is a fruit and also a characteristic of the Holy Spirit. In the regeneration, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in our hearts, minds (consciousness) and is forever connected to it (Rom. 8:35). The precious blood of Christ cleanses the spirit of man: his intuition, and conscience (Hebrews 9:14). It cleanses our consciousness of dead works to serve the living God. The 'neuro' theology of the Life Model claims that the control center of our (new) identity is seen by most scientists as something located in the prefrontal cortex. The center assesses stimuli and reacts according to the identity of the 'self'. In other words, this is about a good synchronization process between inside and outside, no matter what happens. Emotions often act as joy, sadness, fright, anger, shame, disgust, despair and humiliation. Sometimes they arise from within and sometimes they are evoked by others around us. When our control center is undeveloped and disorganized, the synchronization process does not go well and these strong emotions can cause us to lose control of our lives. However, if our control center is strong and well-trained, we are able to remain ourselves, regardless of the intensity of these feelings. Conscience tells us whether our relationship with God and with our fellow man is pure, whether our thoughts and actions come from our own will or from God. As we grow spiritually, we see the two come closer and closer together. Thus the Holy Spirit can speak to a believer, for example with Paul: "I speak the truth in Christ, my conscience bears witness with the Holy Spirit" (Rom.9:1). An important secret of a victoriously healthy Christian life is a pure, clean conscience. In Acts 23:1 Paul says to the Jewish counsel that he walked before God with a pure conscience (see also 2 Tim. 1:3). However, this is a matter of practice, in which every Christian should be trained (Acts 24:16). An important aspect mentioned in the Bible in the practice of conscience for God and men (which belongs together) is found in 1 Peter 3:15,16: "But *sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.".*

Important aspects such as identity formation, impulse control, socialization, self-control, group identity, processing experiences of knowledge and culture, developing empathy, synchronization and practical brain research and of course not least, spiritual life fit seamlessly into a biblical analysis of conscience and health. Of course the biblical view is normative and not only the scientific research (8).

**Learning to come to rest and return to joy**

*"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body."* (Col. 3:15). "*Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.*" (Mat. 11:28). Building joy is usually not considered a spiritual task. Joy is rarely seen as an important tool in character changes. Yet Jesus spoke of joy as an important part of His teaching and a central feature of prayer. *"These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full."* (John 15:11). "*But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves."* (John 17:13). Seen from the action of the brain, joy stimulates the growth of the brain involved in character building, strengthening identity and moral behavior. If we have the intention to change the character by brain changes, it is best developed and perpetuated by joyful relationships. Joy is as powerful as when we experience pain. It makes us feel good, when someone likes to be with us, when we suffer. When we fall into the arms of a friend who, like us, has rushed to the emergency room to wait for a loved one to survive, we cry with relief, but it is joy. Then there is someone with us, we are not alone. Joy makes us happy with people who are happy and cry with people who are crying, we feel deeply connected. Perhaps it is because of the lack of appreciation for this relational character of joy that we tend to see our spiritual development as a lonely experience and therefore do not see joy as a spiritual activity. Returning to joy is one of the most important skills to be learned in the Life Model (9).

After all, we may rejoice at any time in the Lord (e.g. Luke 1:47; Phil. 4:4).

Often inexperienced and unorganized brains get stuck for a long time in depression, anxiety, loneliness and hopelessness. Often people have not learned to build capacity in feelings and to process it in their brains. We do not often see Christians practicing and developing joy. The presence of too little joy may have something to do with this, but it is much more the result of the fact that we cannot hold on to joy. The joy we have accumulated, built up in the natural course of our lives is similar to the heat that in a non-insulated house that easily escapes through open windows and doors. It is easy to fall in love, but much harder to hold on to joy and to prevent divorce. It is easy to make people enthusiastic about the church, but it is harder to keep them there. These are the relational skills needed to prevent loss of joy; these skills are more difficult to learn than the relatively simple principles for building joy. In the Life Model this is referred to in the 'hierarchical brain functioning' as practicing at level 3, the right cingula cortex, the so-called 'mother core' (2).

**Learning process: learning how to suffer**

It is important to learn to suffer the good way. Usually we try to prevent suffering. We can distinguish different 'capacities' to suffer: namely from a baby, child, adolescent, parent and eldest. In the Bible, suffering is often connected with love. Those who love must also learn to suffer (1 Peter 4:13). *"But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation”.* If you share the life of Jesus, you will also share His feelings, and that also means the suffering in this world. If you are connected in love, you also share in the suffering of the other. In Rare Leadership (10) Jim Wilder shows how Jesus suffered on the cross and yet showed His perfect love: He thought of his mother's need and provided for her that John became family for her. He prayed on the cross for those who crucified him: "Father, forgive them". He connected with the thief next to Him in a relational way on the cross and He played the role of Redeemer for him. (He behaved towards His identity). He endured the insults and mockery of His opponents and did not allow himself to be tempted into aggression. He referred to the Word of God, His Father, to remember who He was. He remained in all pain in a relational manner with His Heavenly Father. Although Jesus was also God, He suffered fully as a man (Phil.2:5-7). Read also about the suffering of the heroes of faith in Heb.11. To learn how to suffer in a biblically good way, we can learn to remain relational in difficult circumstances. Relational to God and to our fellow man. The relationship is always more important than the problem. During the expression of emotions one can keep in constant contact with the thoughts and experiences of the other person. Every emotion must be recognized with the intention to achieve a better bond, connection with the other, which is also a biblical motivation. The relational circuits (RC) must remain active and one must be prepared to pause if necessary for the other person's processing, with the aim of improving the relationship. This does not mean that we always agree with the other, but that we stay in touch with the thoughts and feelings of the other. This principle gives us insight into the extent to which someone can return to joy from the earlier mentioned six unpleasant emotions with an individual, family, group or culture. One wrong, ‘poisonous’ motivation is often the cause of the inability to return to joy from the six unpleasant emotions.

If our relational brain doesn't know how to maintain a relationship during such a feeling, it wants to be left alone and one is not able to create that peace. We are often trying to avoid painful feelings, and this even becomes a pattern of motivation in our relationships with others (6).

**Learn about health by exercising the brains**

The difficulty to respond from the new identity in Christ is explained neuro-physiologically in the Life Model by the fact that the nucleus accumbens is not under control. This is the pleasure center in the brain that plays an important role in positive experiences such as desire, motivation, passion and satisfaction. When the brain functions healthily, the identity center controls this pleasure center; in biblical terms, this is called self-control. Self-restraint of the nucleus accumbens means that we must control brain pain and our 'craving center'.

By postponement of reward we learn to tame this center, the nucleus accumbens and to resist our desires and drives. If children learn to tame their desires before puberty, they will have an easier learning process by the time the sex hormones start influencing the nucleus because they are even more difficult and irritating to control, and sexual self-control is therefore more difficult to exercise. Untrained brains of adolescents find pain a horror, and find postponement of pleasure mind-killing and agonizing. Therefore, masturbation in their view seems better than laboriously building a relationship with a partner. They want satisfaction as soon as possible. Also born again Christians are often addicted to all kinds of things: alcoholism, smoking, too much food, masturbation, porn, money, power, status and so on. From a Christian identity perspective, the Holy Spirit can help to curb the pleasure center. Self-control is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. This must also be practiced again (2 Pet. 1:10). In 2 Pet 2:19b it says: "*for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.*" (See also John 8:34).

Faith communities can also help addicted people through buddies, small groups with spiritual exercises such as prayer and worship, involvement, joy, and sharing their lives. In that way addicts can develop a spiritual fruit: self-control while growing in their relationship with God and each other. That is really an invigorating factor!

**Learn to be healthy by fighting against the evil one!**

In James 4:7,8 it says: "Resist the devil, and he shall flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. The learning process of self-control, and control of Christian identity over often wrong drives of the nucleus accumbens is, as said before, a struggle or practice and learning process in which the old self must die and the new self must start to rule. That old self is ruled by Satan. He is a spiritual reality that rules over the old self. To think from and behave in this new nature, we must also learn to fight against the evil one with the spiritual armor. "*Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm."* (Eph. 6:11-13).

**Learn to live healthy in a community**

Faith communities are often equipped to deal with the wide range of human problems because they confess the "transcendental" reality with God, who is able to heal and recover man from the most devastating traumas, addictions and failures. We live in a broken world where many people struggle with existence, never reach maturity and often choose self-destructive "solutions. Yet man is created with a nature to withstand the attacks of the world, and has the ability to become that person God wants him or her to be. Maturity is the reaching of one's potential given and intended by God. It means the developing of skills and talents and using them well while growing optimally in the development of our individual plans. What is true for the maturity of the individual is also true for a religious community. To achieve the unique potential of the plan given by God, one must choose to develop the skills that are effective in a process of growth and change. Real spiritual communities become spiritually mature through a process of constantly focusing on the real needs of suffering people in their midst and environment. A spiritually mature community can meet the need of people to bind within a context of meaningful, personal relationships, which they love (11).

**Gymnazo = Exercise**

The Bible is realistic about new behavioral principles, standards and programs. They should be practiced until it has become a habit, a lifestyle in all sectors of life. We often make it far too easy for ourselves by slipping back into our old standards after a one-time experience of a new program. That is why the Bible calls us to gymnazo (gymnastics) in various places. The Greek word can be translated with (practice), streamline (Hebrews 2:11). In neurological terms: to be practiced as long as it takes so that a skill of the left brain function is anchored in the right hemisphere. During the exercise process to become healthy, there is often also a relapse. Often relapse also represents a possibility to 'reset'. In His great long-suffering and love, God is merciful to us, raises us up, comforts us, fights battles with us, carries our burdens and blesses us with His presence. Biblical health is therefore also a continuous practice and learning process in which we as the Promise Foundation want to be helpful.

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Notes:

1 [https://www.actiz.nl/ledennet-onderwerpen/gezondheid/ openbaar/nieuwe-definitie-gezondheid](https://www.actiz.nl/ledennet-onderwerpen/gezondheid/%20openbaar/nieuwe-definitie-gezondheid) (subjects/health/public/new-definition-health

2 <https://stichting-promise.nl/jim-wilder/4-hersensynchronisatie.htm> (Brain synchronization)

3 <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/25141> (free to download)

4 <https://stichting-promise.nl/specifieke-pastorale-onderwerpen/het-belang-van-het-ontwikkelen-van-relationele-hersenvaardigheden.htm> (Specific pastoral subjects/the importance of developing relational brain skill)

5 <https://stichting-promise.nl/pastorale-onderwerpen/hoe-kom-ik-tot-rust-vanuit-moeilijke-gevoelens.htm> (pastoral subjects/how do I come to rest from difficult feelings)

6 <https://stichting-promise.nl/jim-wilder/tien-belangrijke-vaardigheden-van-therapeuten-dl-1-en-2.htm> (ten important skills of therapists)

7 For similar texts, see 2 Cor.4:11; Gal.2:20; Acts 20:24; 21:13; 1Cor.15:31b

8 [https://stichting-promise.nl/ pastoraat/het-geweten.htm](https://stichting-promise.nl/%20pastoraat/het-geweten.htm) (pastoral care/the conscience)

9. <https://stichting-promise.nl/jim-wilder/vreugde-verandert-alles.htm> (Joy changes everything)

10 Rare Leadership, Moody Publishers, Chicago 2016; ISBN 13 978-0-8024-1454-0, verkrijgbaar in de web shop van St. Promise.

11 <https://stichting-promise.nl/jim-wilder/verslaving-en-volwassenheid.htm> (Addiction and adulthood)

12 Bijbels omgaan met stress, deel 2 Psychosomatische aspecten door Kurt Blatter (verkrijgbaar in de webshop van Promise) (Dealing with stress Biblically, part 2 Psychosomatic aspects by Kurt Blatter) (available at de webshop of Promise)