

Upstream Healing

The Pentecostal and charismatic movement is often defined by its belief that the works of the Spirit are ongoing—anyone can miraculously heal others the same way that Jesus did. But what if there was a way to heal someone before they were even sick? Dr. Mark Sherwood believes it's not only possible but God's will.

Sherwood—a naturopathic doctor who co-leads the Functional Medical Institute (FMI) with his wife, Michele—says the problem is that Americans often focus on healing the symptoms rather than fixing the root causes of illness.

"We've suffered spiritually, financially, emotionally and even intellectually because of it, because now we're paying all these needless bills that we didn't need to pay," Sherwood says. "It costs an average of \$5,000 to spend one night in the hospital. America spends more on health care per person than any other country in the world—at \$10,000 per person. And we lead the world in—get this—hospitalizations for preventable diseases. Can't that be used elsewhere?

Can't we truly use this God-given bountiful harvest of finances in this country in a better way?"

Sherwood believes it's possible. He was first inspired to start FMI after receiving a supernatural word from the Lord. Now, through his work at FMI, Sherwood's mission is to lead people down the pathway to healing.

"We have two mantras behind our mission statement," he says. "One is the elimination of all self-imposed, choice-driven diseases. The second is the elimination of all unnecessary usage of medication. ... That is where we all need to be: in that place of freedom."

Sherwood says it's not just the healthiest way to live, but

also the most God-honoring way. If Christians truly believe their bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost, then they need to behave responsibly with those bodies. That means not only avoiding sin, but avoiding unhealthy lifestyle decisions like sweets and laziness. He believes if Christians can do this, they have an opportunity to become powerful witnesses—especially in a world where fear of disease is currently running rampant.

“At this particular time in our world, with this pandemic going on, wouldn’t it be cool if all believers were walking well and whole and confident and without fear?” Sherwood asks. “Wouldn’t it be great to see that as an example for the world to see God’s hand in their lives and God living through them, as shining stars in a world full of darkness?”

A Difficult Directive

Sherwood says he first became a Christian when he was 8 years old and realized his own sinful nature and need for a Savior. As an adult, he became passionate about evangelism. But his walk with the Lord has also taken him through a variety of jobs and fields.

“I’ve been fortunate enough to have a couple of college degrees,” Sherwood says. “I have been very successful in athletics with physique and bodybuilding—I was with the Power Team for a number of years. It was quite an experience. I actually was even a bodyguard for Benny Hinn at one time. ... I was a police officer for 24 years, 10 years on the SWAT team, before reengaging academics and going back to school.”

During his time as a police officer, he says, he was in charge of a wellness program and noticed a disturbing trend.

“My colleagues were dying as soon as they retired—as soon as they had lost their identity, so to speak,” Sherwood says. “That was heartbreaking. I wanted to find out why. I knew there was more to it than just diet and exercise. There’s also

stress management, sleep and other issues. So that put me on a quest to figure it out.”

That quest segued with his own personal walk with God, where he was striving to hear God’s voice but only receiving silence. He remembers setting a notepad and pen by his bed, so if God ever spoke to him through a vision or a dream, he could quickly write it down. For years, nothing happened, and dust accumulated on the notepad and pen. He says he came to view them as a symbol of God’s distance.

Then, one night, he received a vivid message from God in a dream—and he wrote it down.

Sherwood says God gave him and his wife a directive to carry this message around the world: “My people have lost their power. They’ve lost their power because they’ve lost their peace. They’ve lost their peace because they’ve neglected the physical piece: our bodies.”

Then, Sherwood says, God gave him a Scripture, Matthew 22:37-39, in which Jesus says the greatest commandment is to “‘love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“The ‘as yourself’ part jumped off the pages,” Sherwood says. “And that’s where we’ve missed it. We’ve forgotten how to do that.”

Sherwood says he was excited that God had given him this directive for “about an hour” before it dawned on him how unpopular that directive might make him.

“I realized, if I’m going to carry this message, that’s going to be a little uncomfortable for people,” Sherwood says. “Because now we’re going to start talking about food and habits and the standard American diet and not sleeping and

just putting garbage in our body—not caring for the temple. I sat on that message for well over a year and a half, not wishing to do that, because I was an evangelist. I was speaking in churches 20 to 30 weeks a year, having a great time. And when I decided to step out and do what I was called to do and start preaching this message, the message became challenging for people to accept.

“But since then, the message—though challenging—has been amazing. We’ve seen unexpected healings in our clinic. Wherever we go speak, people get well. And the last I read, that’s exactly what Jesus did, and that’s what He expects. He expects believers to be whole and healed. That’s what our mission is, and that’s what we’re called to do.”

Upstream Health

Sherwood says it begins with discussing what it means to be living in wellness. It’s not a purely physical definition. Wellness is a holistic term that affects every area of life—including the physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and even financial. He says the key is to think about how to be “debt-free” in each of these five areas.

“Debt creates stress,” Sherwood says. “So when we’re experiencing debt in any area, we will experience a sort of a counterbalancing effect. If we have debt in one area, we’re going to be paying more than we should to try to pay that off. So we need to be debt-free in all those areas. Our mission statement here is to lead people down a pathway of true healing—in other words, to be debt-free in all those areas. And to that end, we educate people on how to determine what are the upstream causes of these processes and when it goes wrong.”

Sherwood uses the phrase “upstream health” to illustrate the importance of prevention and treating the root causes, rather than the obvious symptoms. He gives the metaphor of a flooding

dam. You could pile up sandbags to try and stop the floodwaters from breaking through—or you could find out what is causing the flooding in the first place.

“Sandbags would be synonymous with acute care medicine, which is not bad—it’s great,” Sherwood says. “But we go way back upstream and say, ‘What caused the flood?’ And we correct those underlying root causes upstream. So our system here is based not upon looking at diagnoses, but instead examining the symptoms and asking the question, ‘What caused those symptoms? What in the body has gone awry? And how can we fix that?’”

Sherwood says FMI also conducts a spiritual and emotional analysis of patients to detect whether those factors may be contributing to disharmony in the body. He calls it FRAUDS analysis, an acronym that stands for Fear, Resentment, Anger, Unforgiveness, Disappointment and Shame. He believes the enemy can exploit those six factors by the enemy to disrupt God’s plans for health and wellness.

“We look at all those areas,” Sherwood says. “Is somebody—from a spiritual angle—are they broken? Are they holding bitterness or unforgiveness, or have they been abused or molested and not let go of that? From an intellectual angle, perhaps they need to learn some information about the physical body or some Scriptures. From an emotional angle, maybe they’re just wounded and hurt, and we’ve got to get behind that and give them a safe place so they can release those wounds. ... So the people who come to us, they really get a good education and inspiration in all five areas, so there can be healing, wholeness and peace in all areas.”

Sherwood says too many Christians sadly devalue and neglect their physical bodies in ways they would never neglect their spiritual practices. But it should matter, because our bodies are not our own.

“If we believe our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and

we believe He lives in that, it makes sense that He would give us directions on how to protect that,” Sherwood says. “The temple being sick would not be His will. That doesn’t line up. So it’s important that we ... in the church don’t continue to destroy our temple because it’s convenient or we’re not thinking about it. I find that very grievous.”

He says there’s a biblical precedent for this: “When Jesus walked into the temple in his last week alive, He saw the money-changers, and that upset Him, of course, because the temple keepers and Pharisees had allowed something to come inside the temple that created an environment that was improper,” Sherwood says. “It created an environment where God couldn’t do what He wanted to do. ... In those days, the temple was a building. But today, it’s not a building. It’s not made of brick and mortar anymore. The temple is us. Our job is to keep out or drive out anything that disturbs God’s presence and His ability to do what He does, which is absolute, unequivocal, 100% health.”

This lack of focus on the body puts many believers in a position where they are reliant upon supernatural healing—when they don’t need to be. Sherwood compares the situation for many believers to the relationship between a parent and a child. If children get injured or sick, their parents will not hesitate to help heal them. But if the injuries or sicknesses were self-inflicted because of their own bad choices, a good parent will also teach their children how to avoid further pain. That means if those children do not listen to their parents, they will keep suffering the consequences of sickness and illness—even if the parents continue to help them through it.

“When we make ourselves sick, it renders it impossible for us to walk well, because we’re creating it,” Sherwood says. “It doesn’t mean God doesn’t love us or that He doesn’t want to heal us. It means all the more He wants us to walk healed, but when we create it, it’s nothing more than a consequence. ... If

I drive down the street, and I continue to speed, and I continue to get tickets, whose fault is that?"

He says the problem is particularly pronounced in America, where personal responsibility is low and bad food choices are plentiful.

"I've heard people joke during the coronavirus, 'I'm cooped up at home, me and my ice cream,'" Sherwood says. "I mean, that's not OK. 'Me and my cereal, my best buddy'—that is not OK. We need to get that stuff out of our lives. This may seem a little bit terse, but it's not intended to be: There doesn't ever need to be a doughnut ministry. That's not a ministry. God never directs us to put anything in our mouth that destroys the temple."

Sherwood believes the irresponsibility many believers have embraced when it comes to food and nutrition grieves the heart of God. And he believes it's just a continuation of the devil's original strategy from Genesis 3.

"What was Satan's first, best strategy?" Sherwood says. "He said, 'Hey, I want you to have one bite of this. Maybe God doesn't want you to eat just salads. Just have one bite; it won't hurt you.' Well, we know how that story turned out. And we're still doing that today: 'Have one bite; it won't hurt you.' There are a couple of lessons there. No. 1, don't talk to demons. And No. 2, don't take one bite. Stay focused and locked into what God called you to do. It's living in abundance, not in restriction. He tells you what to eat and what to do. He's not going to lead you astray, and He's not going to lead you to do something destructive. ... Pastors and leaders must draw the lines and say, 'Not in this house.'"

Healthy Witness

Sherwood believes a healthy body of Christ could be an incredible witness to the world—at any time, but especially during a global pandemic. He has a few tips for how believers

can strengthen their immune systems and experience wellness in every area of their lives.

“First, you can’t be afraid,” he says. “[That includes] what you’re listening to and hearing. What is filling your mind every day? If it’s fear and panic, that will weaken your system and produce massive amounts of cortisol.”

He says the second step is to maintain adequate sleep—about seven to eight hours per night—no matter how old, young, active or sedentary you are. He also says basic hygienic measures—like avoiding handshakes, coughing into your elbow and being cautious around shared surfaces—can be helpful. After all, he says, during a pandemic, “We don’t have to touch people to love them.”

He also recommends staying hydrated, getting out in the sun and maintaining healthy doses of vitamins and minerals. Each day, he recommends getting 5,000-10,000 international units of vitamins A and D, 3-5 grams of zinc and 20-40 milligrams of vitamin C. Most importantly—and challengingly—Sherwood also recommends modifying your diet to eat real food—like fruits, vegetables, and organic proteins and fats—rather than boxed, processed or genetically-modified foods. As a guideline, Sherwood says, “If something has more than five ingredients, you need to put it back.”

“We need to rethink what we do,” Sherwood says. “I’d rather have someone eat one apple than a hot dog or a hamburger. That is not blessing somebody. We have the ability to give them real food, but we give them less. We’ve got to do better than that.”

Sherwood says it’s not always easy or convenient to live healthy, but for those who do, they’ll be rewarded with abundant living and a stronger witness.

“It’s just like eating one spiritual meal per week is not good enough [for a healthy spiritual life],” he says. “We need to

become a devourer of the Word of God. And when we devour the Word of God, we become a devourer of what He teaches us to do—to take care of His temple and to carry His Word in a stronger manner.”

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