



Biblical Guidelines and Divine Sustainable Approach to Health Promotion, Diseases Prevention and Dietary Measures to Prevent and Control Non-Communicable Diseases

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Abstract

The Bible is the source of many ethical principles. As it is well articulated, every design has a designer who gives instructions on how to handle his invention. A scrutiny of the Word of God demonstrates that using a sustainable approach to health promotion, God provided universal dietary measures to prevent or control many ill conditions, including non-communicable diseases that have become pandemic. Adherence to divine health guidance can alleviate many preventable diet-related diseases.

Keywords: Bible; God; Health Disease Prevention

Introduction

The rapid growth in the number of Christian churches in the Sub-Saharan Africa coupled with an exponential growth in communicable and non-communicable diseases burden cannot escape the mind of all health advocates in the 21st century. Since God is a loving Father for all His creatures, are there any preventive measures that the Bible - God's word, can enlighten its believers to live by, to alleviate the disease and death's burdens? The compilation you are about to read highlights biblical guidelines in healthful living.

Health is a treasure, of all the possessions or inheritance, it is the most precious. Yet, sometimes, even many times, because of wealth, education, or fame, people neglect health preservation and promoting principles, thus, exposing themselves to risks of diseases, accidents, injuries or infirmity. The same people realise, but too late, that none of the above mentioned factors can secure happiness in the absence of a sound healthy body [10].

Therefore, it is of paramount importance, that every person be awakened from slumber, and take their position, to individually maintain, preserve, promote and adopt a healthy lifestyle. To those who believe in creation, from the creation week recorded in the first two chapters of Genesis in the Bible and thereafter, God instructed humanity on how to live based on some guiding principles, that are to a great extent preventive in nature of many diseases, injury, as well as social and psychological problems that befall humanity. Humans should not ascribe to themselves the pioneering role of public health advocacy, but God the creator has been the all-time public health-advocate among His creation.

Advocacy has been defined as an active process that uses strategic actions to influence others to initiate positive transformation and address the latent or underlying factors that contribute to a healthier community. Furthermore, advocacy is viewed as of structured efforts and actions that seek to uncover critical issues that have been ignored and submerged, to influence public attitude, and

to enact and implement laws and public policies so that visions of what should be in a just, decent society become a reality [6].

A close analysis of biblical writings shows that God has been involved in public health advocacy from the Old Testament to New Testament times, which applies to the contemporary world. For example, in the New Testament, God's desire for every person has been expressed through John the beloved disciple's message: "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers" [12].

The New International Version of the Bible puts the message clearer in the following words: "Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along" [13]. This verse shows that God's desire for humanity is that it enjoys health in all its dimensions while on earth, preparing to live in heavenly kingdom. The Old Testament also clearly shows that God's plan for His creation, even when it had gone astray was to restore spiritual and physical health (... if you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight, ... I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you (Exodus 15: 26). Jeremiah 30: 17 added the following: ... but I will restore you to health and heal your wounds, declares the Lord ...). The above verses show that God has been in the business of public health care and advocacy. Health principles were taught and sanitary laws enforced [28].

God was first to demand a population census for Israel (Number chapter 1): "Take a census of the whole Israelite community by their clans and families, listing every man by name, one by one." And it is known that there are health-related advantages of a census among which highlighting both the existence of problems and opportunities for interventions to improve living conditions of the people and their living conditions. A census can also guide local action in support of policy changes and improve programme's effectiveness. It is well documented that local health information can be a powerful vehicle for improving the health of a community [17].

The reader should be reminded that the first five books of the Old Testament also referred to as the Pentateuch or Torah was written by Moses between the years 1450 to 1410 before the birth of Christ (B. C). The book of revelation of Jesus Christ is believed to have been written by the Apostle John between the years 70 -

95 after the death of Christ (A. D). With so many health promoting teachings in the Bible which started as early as the 14th century or even before, one can safely say that God has been the first to have interest in the health and well-being of the public and its advocacy.

The concept of health in the Bible

The Bible defines health as soundness or fitness of the body (KJV: King James Version). Health is mentioned 15 times in the KJV. In Proverbs 4: 22, it is written that wisdom gives health, which means that adherence to divine instructions from the Bible, promotes good health. A good example can make the idea clear. The Word of God reminds His followers not to fornicate or commit adultery. Obedience to this commandment prevents many sexually transmitted infections, which have been devastating the world. Just imagine how the world would be if those who hear the word of God believed and put its principles in practice! Many lives would be saved and a lot of many spent on health care would be used rightfully.

Furthermore, God wishes that His followers use appropriate communication speech and words to promote health among believers (Proverbs 12: 18). Solomon, in Proverbs 16: 24 added an emphasis: pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones. These Old Testament texts show that God was and still is concerned about the health of His people, even when they were in captivity, suffering from some diseases that were found in Egypt. In the New Testament, we find that God wishes good health to His followers: 3 John verse 2 referred to earlier on. God was not only interested in His followers' spiritual health, but also social, economic and physical health.

God in healthy dietary guidelines advocacy

After God created man and the woman, He gave them guidance on what diet is suitable for them: plant-based diet. Right from the beginning, God advocated for a diet that would promote/maintain healthy bodies. "And God said, see, I have given you every herb that yields seed, which is on the face of the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed: to you it shall be for good" (Genesis 1:29; Psalms 104:14). God has fashioned man in His own image and knows better what is good to keep us in good health.

Even in the contemporary world, research scholars have come to the realisation that God's prescribed diet is the best for man.

Many investigators have explored factors related to health and disease among Mormons and Seventh-day Adventists. Both these religious groups have lower-than-average age-adjusted death rates from many common types of disease and specifically from heart disease, cancer, and respiratory disorders. Part of their protection unquestionably arises from the behaviours proscribed or prescribed by these groups. Seventh-day Adventists likewise tend to avoid alcohol and tobacco, and they strongly encourage (but do not require) a vegetarian diet [15].

These authors reported that in the past, there have been individual disease-preventing diets, which have been supplanted by one health-promoting diet designed to prevent multiple diseases by enhancing health. Whereas all support the goal of maintaining and promoting health by engaging in regular physical activity; eating appropriate sized portions of food; limiting the intake of saturated and trans fats; and eating relatively generous amounts of whole grains, vegetables, and fruits. Also encouraged is the inclusion of healthful polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats from such sources as nuts, seeds, olives, avocado, and olive and canola oils [15].

Rolfes, Pinna and Whitney [21] reported results of studies on dietary approaches to stop hypertension (DASH). A significant reduction in blood pressure can be achieved by following a diet that emphasises fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products and includes whole grains, poultry, fish, and nuts. The approach requires people to mind the quality and quantity of what is consumed and recommends more from the plant-kingdom in line with divine diet. A dash eating plan is even more effective when accompanied by a low sodium intake and physical activity. The maximum sodium intake recommended for people with hypertension is 1500 mg per day, the upper limit being 2400 mg. Regular low to moderate intensity physical activities such as brisk walk, improve both systolic and diastolic blood pressure.

God, through Solomon, had long ago hinted that eating the right quantity of food will be good: ... do not crave his delicacies ... put a knife to your throat... Proverbs 23: 1-3. In addition, God advocated for eating at the right time in Ecclesiastes 10: 17 "Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobles, and your princess feast at the proper time for strength and not for drunkenness!" The observance of temperance and regularity in all things has a wonderful

power. It will do more than circumstances or natural endowments in promoting that sweetness and serenity of disposition which count so much in smoothing life's pathway. At the same time the power of self-control thus acquired will be found one of the most valuable of equipment for grappling successfully with the stern duties and realities that await every human being [28].

The Bible records show that after the flood, God allowed meat consumption (Genesis 9:3). However, a close look at the subject matter makes a teachable mind to realise that in Leviticus 11:1-30, God instructed Israel on clean and unclean animals. In addition in Leviticus 7: 23-24, it is recommended that fat should be removed from the meat; in Leviticus 7: 26-27, there is a prescription of no blood eating. Eating blood is called haemochromatosis and health-effects do not appear until middle-age, including: tiredness, diabetes or cirrhosis, joints pain, weight loss and stomach pain [33].

These negative health effects of haemochromatosis were confirmed by studies done at Harvard University: "Haemochromatosis can lead to iron overload., which can injure the liver... hepatic damage secondary to excessive iron depositions produces fibrosis... cardiac dysfunction can occur with very little tissue iron deposition [34].

In Exodus 23: 19, God advises not to eat meat and drink milk at the same time. Deuteronomy 14:8 advocates for not eating swine. All these instructions were given for the good of humanity to prevent diseases that will be common among disobedient children of God. Exodus 15: 26 recorded the promise "If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you, which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you." It seems that the promise has been fulfilled among some who practice divine lifestyle instructions. God's followers are a royal priesthood and should portray abstinence in all things hurtful and moderation in those that are good. They should be man and women of integrity, who do not indulge in things that they can regret having done. They cannot sing the praises of God while sickly. 1 Peter 2:9-10: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; who once were not a people, but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy, but now have ob-

tained mercy.” The scripture shows that God’s people are particular and should therefore live up to the expectations of their Creator. Princes and princesses eat and drink selectively, according to their social and economic status of people from royal families.

It is important to note that Leviticus is God’s guidebook for His newly redeemed people, showing how to worship, serve, and obey a holy God. From the land of slavery - Egypt, God’s nation was to abide by guiding principles we learn in Leviticus and other parts of the Bible. They were written for our admonition in good and bad times. Again we find God wishing good health to His people.

White (1890) stated that all warfare is useless unless Christ's power is combined with human effort. Could it be that the world’s contemporary uncontrollable disease burden might have been contained if divine disease prevention measures had been hid? The author did not purpose to undermine the great works of reputable epidemiologists and public health great men and women who dedicated their time to make the health and well-being of humanity better, but to draw the mind of the reader to the source of life and health for counsel in times of need or dilemma [26].

This compilation has shown that God’s wish is for His people to enjoy health to the fullest and die at full age like Abraham: Genesis 25:8 then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people. God promotes a wholesome lifestyle that caters for the physical, social, spiritual, psychological, environmental as well as moral health. Health preservation and disease prevention advocacy has been introduced by God and all those who believe in Him are expected to be advocates of a healthy lifestyle.

Christians are the salt of the earth and expected among other things to live to glorify God and promote healthy living - those who see them may glorify their father in heaven (1 Corinthians 10:31). If Israelites had obeyed, they would have been the world’s role models in health and prosperity. They could have been preserved from the diseases that afflicted other nations at the time as promised in 2 Chronicles 7:14-15: “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. Now my eyes shall be open, and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place”.

Though spiritual Israelites as a nation failed to uphold and promote a healthy lifestyle, the Bible gives ample role models like Daniel, Joseph, Elisha to learn from about strict obedience to godly health promoting principles that can preserve humanity in this world and prepare us to live in heaven and the earth made new.

Health-promoting activities usually contribute into the prevention of a variety of diseases and enhance a positive feeling of health and vigour. The activities consist of non-medical efforts at individual level, such as changes in lifestyle, foods, drinks, and the environment. Health promotion is cost-effective and can be applied to non-communicable and communicable diseases.

Conclusion

An analysis of biblical writings shows that God used a sustainable approach to health promotion and diseases prevention. Therefore, in addition to governments and other stakeholders’ efforts, individual lifestyle choices determine their resiliency or vulnerability to diseases and condition of health. Anyone can be God’s partner in promoting healthful living. You can, like Joshua and decide: “... But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” through a lifestyle that promotes health and prevents disease and make an effort to control modifiable risk-factors of many diseases of affluence. It is remarkable that all the Bible’s authors don’ts have an element of prevention of diseases, stress, and injuries among other things, however, God has given enough guidance to His followers that can help in the prevention and control of a good number of health challenges of the contemporary generations.

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