Abundant Life
Wholeness and Healthy Living

Diocese-Based Leadership Training Program
Mennonite Churches of East Africa (KMC/KMT)

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Lesson 1: God’s Plan for Healthy Living

God’s intention from the beginning of time was for his creation to experience fullness of life, to be whole in Him. God created the earth, the skies, the animals, and put everything into place to serve his creation. He declared everything he had created as “good” (Gen. 1:25). Then God created humankind in his image and said that was “very good” (Gen.1:27-30). God formed man from the dust of the earth (his physical body), then breathed into him the breath of life (his spirit), and man became a living being (his soul). God created man as body, soul, and spirit (Genesis 2:7).

God’s image does not mean a physical image, because God does not have a physical body. Rather, it refers to God’s character. God’s image includes:
- righteous and holiness (Ephesians 4:24)
- knowledge (Colossians 3:10)
- glory and honor (Psalm 8:4-5)
- responsibility and authority (Psalm 8:6-8).

God provided every blessing for Adam and Eve. God prepared a garden for them to live in (Genesis 2:8-9) and placed Adam in the garden (Genesis 2:15-17). In the garden, the man was blessed with:
- beauty (“pleasing to the eye” – verse 9)
- food (“good for food” – verse 9)
- freedom to choose (“the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” – verse 9)
- work and responsibility (“to work and care for” the garden – verse 15)
- companionship (“it is not good for the man to be alone,” creation of Eve – verse 18).

There were 2 special trees in the garden, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God told Adam he may eat from any tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:9, 16-17). The tree of life represents dependence on God. Adam and Eve were not prohibited from eating from the tree of life. Their life and wholeness came from God. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil represents the choice to depend on our own wisdom and strength, and Adam and Eve were commanded that they should not eat from it, “for when you eat of it you will surely die” (Genesis 2:17).

God walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the garden (Genesis 3:8). As long as they obeyed God, they enjoyed relationship with God, they were fulfilled and happy in their work and in their paradise. Adam and Eve enjoyed true wholeness, all their needs were supplied, and they lived in peace and harmony with each other, with God, and with creation. They enjoyed health in every area of their lives, physical, mental, spiritual.

In the next lesson, we will see how that peace and harmony was destroyed through Adam and Eve’s choices, and the result was conflict, pain, and hardship.

Study Questions:
1. Read Genesis 2:15-23. Describe life in the Garden of Eden. What blessings did God provide for Adam and Eve?
2. In your opinion, what kind of relationship did God have with Adam and Eve in Genesis 1-2? Write some words that describe their relationship.
3. God provided Adam and Eve with wholeness in every part of their lives (Genesis 2). How did God provide for their:
   a. Physical wholeness ________________________________
   b. Mental wholeness ________________________________
   c. Relational wholeness ________________________________
   d. Spiritual wholeness ________________________________

4. Have you seen people make choices that lead to death? Have you seen people make choices that lead to life? Give examples.

5. What kind of wholeness is most lacking in your home community?
Lesson 2: Sin and Illness

What happened to damage the good health of the earth and of humankind?

Satan brought temptation through words of doubt in what God said, Adam and Eve chose not to listen to God’s instruction and disobeyed what God had said. The disobedience of Adam and Eve broke their relationship with God and each other, and brought severe consequences of pain, hard work, and eventual death (Genesis 2:17; 3:1-19). People became sick in their bodies, in their relationships, in their spirits and in their minds.

Through the sin of Adam and Eve, we all inherited a sinful nature (Rom. 5: 12, 14) and we are subject to the consequence of death (Rom. 6:12, 1 John 3:4, Rom. 5: 12, 19). Sin disrupted God’s original creation. Without reconciliation between God and man, sin rules in our world, bringing disease, disharmony between others and in ourselves, and inequality of status and resources within our world.

Living outside of God’s grace, outside of relationship with him and with others, and outside of the best for creation can be described as bad health. It can lead to physical, emotional, social or spiritual disease. Followers of traditional religion believe that bad health is caused by spirits of the ancestors or witchcraft. Perhaps someone disrespected the traditions or did something to displease the ancestors. If the ancestors become unhappy they may send disease on that person, or place a curse on them. Some people believe that disease could be because they have committed a crime or sin. But the Bible is clear that sin and disharmony and even physical disease came through the original disobedience of Adam and Eve (Romans 5:12). Sometimes poor health is brought on specifically because of the disobedience of people (Leviticus 26:14-17), or the disobedience of one person (2 Sam. 11: 14-16,26, Joshua 7: 1-12), but that is not always the cause.

Why does God allow illness?

- To remind us of our human limitations and our need for God. Daniel 4:30-33
- To bring glory to God. John 9:1-3
- To lead us as he did Joseph. Genesis 41:37-45; 50:20; 2 Corinthians 1:9
- To form us to be like him. Romans 8:28-29; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; James 1:2-3

Why does God not always heal?

If illness is the result of Adam’s sin, shouldn’t God heal when we turn to him in repentance and faith? Here are 2 reasons:

- To keep us from becoming proud and to show God’s power. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10
- The creation has not yet been fully redeemed and is “groaning.” Romans 8:22-23

Study questions:

1. Did Adam and Eve still carry God’s image after they sinned? Or part of it?
   - Name some things that were lost.
   - Name some things that remained.

2. How does Adam and Eve’s sin affect us today?

3. What do you think, do we suffer for Adam’s sin, or only for our own sin?
4. In your home community, what do most people think is the reason for disease and sickness?

5. Are there Bible verses that explain how our ancestors influence our lives today? What do you think about the role of ancestors? How should we show respect for them?
Lesson 3: Shalom – Restoring Wholeness

God’s intention for wholeness and good in his creation is best expressed in the Hebrew word **Shalom**, often translated “peace” in our Bibles. Shalom means harmony, peace within ourselves and peace with others in our world (Mark. 12:30-31; Luke. 10:25-37). It includes responsible care for God’s creation (Gen. 1:28-30; Isa. 32:16-20) and ongoing fellowship with God. (Genesis 3:8-9; Ezekiel 37:26-27; Malachi 2:5-6). **The goal of salvation is shalom.**

**Good Health (wholeness) therefore, is living in harmony with yourself, with God, with others, and with creation.** God’s plan for health and wholeness includes every part of us, body, soul and spirit. Every part must be whole for a person to be truly whole. Paul prayed that believers will be sanctified completely in their spirit, soul, and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). It is God who sanctifies and God is faithful. When Jesus healed the paralyzed man, he healed him spiritually – “your sins are forgiven” – and physically – “get up and walk” (Mark 2:1-12). True wholeness includes restoring the body, mind, spirit, emotions, and relationships.

Jesus explained (Luke 10:25-28) that the way to eternal life is to love God with heart (our affections), soul (our emotions), strength (our body), and mind (our thoughts), and to love our neighbor (our relationships). Jesus said, “Do this and you shall live.” One of the meanings of **Salvation** is “being made whole.” Salvation is restoring and redeeming what was destroyed. In his goodness, God planned a way for the reconciliation of fallen mankind through the gift of his Son, Jesus (Romans 5:15-17). Salvation is described in Jesus’ mission statement as he started his ministry here on earth – “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19). In another scripture, Jesus declares his intention for us, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly!” (John 10:10). Salvation is restoring wholeness to the spirit, mind, and body, that was lost through sin. The New Testament teaches that Christian believers are to be “conformed to the image of Christ” (Romans 8:29) and someday “we will be like Christ” (1 John 3:2).

**Shalom** is renewing our relationship with God (our salvation), described in Ephesians:
- Restoration of creation, to “bring all things together.” Ephesians 1:10
- Salvation is God’s gift of grace to us, redemption and forgiveness. Ephesians 1:7; 2:5
- Relationships among Christians as the dwelling place of God. Ephesians 2:22
- Filled with the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:19
- Unity is the gift of the Spirit. Ephesians 4:3
- Attain the fullness of Christ, to become mature and whole in Christ. Ephesians 4:13
- Imitators of God. Ephesians 5:1
- Loving as God loved us. Ephesians 5:1

**Study Questions**
1. In your own words, describe the meaning of Shalom.
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 5.23-24. The words “God of peace” are the same as “God of Shalom.” Who is the giver of Shalom?
3. Read John 10:7-10. What is the abundant life Jesus promises?
4. Can a poor person or one in poor health experience the abundance that Jesus promised?

5. Read the points under “Shalom is renewing our relationship with God.” Does this describe your experience of salvation? Does it describe your church?
Lesson 4: Identity, Purpose, Nature

We are made to live in harmony with God, ourselves, others, and the world around us. Knowing ourselves and accepting ourselves are important to experience wholeness. God has made each of us in his image, as unique persons, for bringing Him glory. As we recognize and accept all that we are and all that is part of our lives, and bring ourselves to him, we become whole. He delights in us as we live in relationship with Him and give ourselves for His purposes. To be whole, it is important that we understand our identity, our purpose, and our nature.

OUR IDENTITY – Who are You?
- Created in the image of God, male and female, equally valued by God, “very good” (Genesis 1:27)
- The object of God’s redemptive Love (John 3:16, Colossians 1:20)
- Worthy to be rescued and reconciled, to receive his blessing and inheritance (Romans 6:12-19; 1 John 3:4; Romans 5:19)

OUR PURPOSE – Why are You?
- Made for God’s glory (Isaiah 43:7,21; Colossians 1:10; 2:9; Ephesians 1:4-6). We are a visible reflection of our Father, most important of all created things, we are given worth, dignity, and honor by God.
- Made for relationship with God: to walk with God (Micah 6:8), to love God (Luke 10:27).

OUR NATURE – What are You?
- Temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16-17) individually and corporately, a dwelling place of God.
- Members of Christ’s Body (I Corinthians 6:15), carrying out Jesus’ mission, representing of Jesus to others.
- A Pleasing Sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1), offering our body, mind and soul as worship.

Study Questions
1. In the creation story, both Adam and Eve were created in God’s image. What does that say about their value before God? Is one more important than the other?
2. What was God’s purpose in creating humans?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. If our body is God’s temple, how should we live?
4. How can we bring glory and honor to God the Father?
5. Like 3 legs of a stool, to be complete we must know our identity, our purpose, and our nature. Which of these present the greatest challenge to you as a pastor?
6. Why do people in your congregation struggle to understand their identity, purpose and nature? How can you help them?
Lesson 5: Spirit, Soul, and Body – the Whole Person

Christian faith is not only a religion of the spirit. It encompasses every part of the person and the community in which we live. How then do we develop and maintain the Shalom (wholeness) God intended for us? Wholeness involves care of our relationship with God, care of ourselves including our body, care of our relationship with other people, and care of our environment. Care of our bodies is as important as care for our souls. Body, soul and mind cannot be separated. Our body is our outer person, how we participate in the created world. The soul is our inner person, our mind, ability to choose, and our feelings. Our spirit is our connection with God and the spiritual world. Each part affects the other and is dependent on the other. Notice how the psalmist’s physical health and relationships were affected by his mental and spiritual health in Psalm 38:3,5,7,10,11,17.

Health of mind and spirit depends on our relationships with God and others. Even our bodies respond in a positive way when relationships are nurtured. Throughout the Bible, love of God is given as the foundation for wholeness (Exodus 20:3-6; Mark 12:30; Psalm 16:11; Psalm 37:5). Our spirits are dependent on our relationship with our Heavenly Father since we were made in His image, created for fellowship with Him, restored into fellowship through His Son. Allowing God’s Spirit to live within us promotes health and wholeness. We become whole and are filled with the fullness of God as Christ dwells within us and we live in his love (Ephesians 3:16-19; Hebrews 12: 12-16). When we lack relationship with God, or do not love him as we should, we destroy our connection with Him. When we disobey the commandments which he gave for a guide to our lives, we break relationship with him. Brokenness in the relationship with God, our Creator and Father, causes our spirits to experience a deep void and yearn for healing.

Our soul is the innermost expression of ourselves, our thoughts, our beliefs, our emotions. It is influenced and shaped by our heritage and by what has happened in our life. This determines how we respond to life experiences and guides our behavior. Healthy responses to what life gives you encourage good relationships with others, but unhealthy responses many times destroy relationships and causes disease of the soul. Then people turn to other things to fill the emptiness of their souls. For example, a person who is having trouble within his marriage may seek a relationship outside marriage, expecting that another will provide the lack in relationship he feels. Or persons may turn to alcohol, drugs, money or sex to fill the emptiness in their souls. These behaviors often lead to physical illnesses, or create instability in themselves, their families, and communities. Lack of peace within our soul brings illnesses of the soul such as anxiety, troubles, stress, blame, doubt, and loneliness. They can also bring on physical illnesses such as high blood pressure, ulcers, overweight, or loss of weight. Unhealthy relationships or dependence on drugs and alcohol can also lead to sexually transmitted diseases or mental disorders.

Study Questions

1. How would you describe to someone what each of the 3 parts is, body, soul, and spirit? Write a short description of each, stating what it is.

2. When a person receives salvation by God’s grace, which part is most affected, his body, his soul, or his spirit? Or does it affect all three? Explain your answer.

3. Why is it important to care for our bodies and keep them as healthy as possible?
4. Read Mark 12:28-31. Jesus said we must love God with our heart, our soul, our mind, and our strength? Is it enough to love God with our heart, but not our mind? Can we love God with our mind, but not our strength? Explain your answer.
Lesson 6: Responsible Self Care

How do we then achieve or work toward wholeness? We must first of all remember that we cannot be whole without a healthy relationship with God. And we cannot be righteous (spiritually healthy) while neglecting or abusing our physical bodies. Our spirits must first seek wholeness in the God who created us, who knows our limitations and failures, but who also knows the potential within us. Through our minds, we can be renewed and transformed into the likeness of Christ, so that we are able to know the will of God and please Him (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23; James 5:13-16). Acknowledging our needs, our weaknesses, sins, and failures is important to pursuing wholeness (Proverbs 3:5-7; Psalm 6:2-9; Psalm 38:1-11; Isaiah 53:5; Isaiah 32:17-18; James 5:16). We seek fellowship with God through faith and seek his grace to live according to his will. This requires spending time with his Word, spending time communicating with Him in prayer, and opening ourselves up to his presence and his guidance. As he reveals himself to us we respond to him and acknowledge our sins, receive his forgiveness, surrender ourselves to his will, and walk in obedience to him. This allows God’s spirit to live within us to promote health and wholeness (Ephesians 3:19; Hebrews 12:12-16).

A healthy spirit influences our behavior and gives us a solid foundation for decisions and basic values that are godly (Titus 2:3-14). It also gives us freedom from guilt and anxiety, and it gives peace within our souls. Spiritual well-being comes through maintaining contact with God through a lifestyle of holiness and obedience to the teachings of Jesus. Living in close, intimate relationship with the Father provides security and the willingness to do his will (John 13:3-5).

When cares and worries arise within our souls we return to our source of strength and “cast our cares on Him” (Psalm 55:22; Matthew 11:30) and God gives peace and joy in return. We are not able to heal ourselves. As troubles and trials come we learn to trust in God’s love, and in his provision for us. The way to deal with pressure is to fill our minds with good things (Philippians 4:6-8), to hope in God (Psalm 42:5, Psalm 33:18, 22), and to remain cheerful (Proverbs 15:13; 17:22; 18:14). Sharing our burdens with others in the faith lightens our burden and stress (Galatians 6:2; Eph. 4:25). Acknowledging past hurts, forgiving others for wrongs done to us, and accepting forgiveness for wrongs we have done to others, are all important steps to take in the healing of our souls. Refreshing our souls includes taking time to renew our minds regularly by reading, meditating, and monitoring our thought life.

Another aspect of self-care and pursing wholeness is proper care for our physical bodies. God gave us physical bodies with which to touch, share, enjoy and bless others. Through our bodies we come in contact with one another and God. As we offer our bodies to God in doing right, we support each other and become instruments of grace and righteousness to each other (Romans 6:13-14; Romans 12:1). Through our bodies the life of Jesus is made visible to others (2 Corinthians 4:10). Christ held the fullness of the deity in his body (Colossians 1:19-20; 2:9-10). Christ lives in our bodies giving us faith and the power of resurrection (Galatians 2:20). He has chosen our bodies to be used to dwell in and to express his love and power to others.

Since our bodies are the “temple of God” (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21) and we are to honor God with our bodies, we must be diligent in maintaining our bodies and staying physically fit. We need good nutrition, controlling the kind and amount of food. If we overeat or deprive the body of food, we destroy the body’s
ability to stay healthy. Abstinence from self-pleasures such as sexual sins, alcohol or drugs will also protect the body from disease (1 Corinthians 6:18-20; 1 Corinthians 10:31). The body also needs both activity (work) and rest to stay healthy. God planned work for Adam and Eve in the garden as part of their daily lives (Genesis 2:15) but even after they sinned, God instructed them to take time for rest and restoration of the body (Exodus 20:8-11). Overworking and not setting boundaries on their workload is often the beginning of poor health in many leaders. In order to be effective in ministry, we must evaluate and set priorities and maintain balance that keeps us healthy.

**Study Questions**

1. What are some ways we can strengthen our relationship with God, that is to nurture our spirit?
2. What are some ways we can nurture our soul, that is to strengthen our mind and emotions?
3. What are some things we do that weaken our spirit?
4. What are some things we do that weaken our mind?
5. Is it correct to say that sexual sins and use of drugs and alcohol are sins of the spirit, as well as of the body? Explain your answer.
6. Did your behavior change when you received salvation? Can you give an example?
7. Give examples of ways we can care for our bodies.
Lesson 7: Sexuality and Harmony between Man and Woman

Sexuality is a good gift from God. It is how we are in the world as male and female, and what defines us as male and female. It includes our attitudes toward our bodies and the bodies of others. Sexuality includes how we relate to each other as men and women in all of life. Healthy sexuality means we treat each other with respect and purity. It recognizes that both woman and man are needed for wholeness, neither is complete without the other. Physical sexual activity and relationship are appropriate only within marriage. Our culture affects our attitudes toward sexuality and sometimes encourages ways of relating between men and women that are not healthy. Examples include men seeking to dominate women, or sexual activity with someone outside the commitment of marriage.

The Bible talks about sexuality, it is part of God’s creation (Genesis 1:26-31). God had declared everything good, until he saw that Adam did not find among the animals any one that could be a helper and partner to him. God said this is “not good” (Genesis 2:18-20). Adam was incomplete. None of the animal kingdom satisfied his needs. God created Eve, as a co-partner to Adam to fill his need for human relationship. God’s plan was that Adam should not live alone. When woman was brought to him, his response was “Ah! Flesh of my flesh, similar to me!” She was not created just as a sexual partner, but was another human being with whom he could talk, share and work together. God called this final creation “very good.” God said, “Be fruitful and increase in number” (Genesis 1:28). Our bodies and our sexuality, male and female, were created for our pleasure and for procreation within the commitment of marriage (Genesis 2:24-25). Song of Solomon 4:10 says that love between two people is “more pleasing than wine.”

Man and woman together share the image of God and reflect God’s character. They were created equal partners and given the same task of stewardship of the earth. Woman’s characteristic role of birthing, nurturing, giving, caring, sacrificial love and availability reflect certain characteristics of God’s own divine role (Isaiah 66: 9,13-14), while man’s roles of provision, strength, honor, and power reflect God in other ways. Although we sometimes tend to place more importance on man’s role, this is not biblical. Proverbs 31 projects woman as the capable trusted partner of her husband, not only as the bearer and nursemaid of man’s children. In the Old Testament woman was a full member of the covenant community (Deuteronomy 29:10-11). In Israel, the congregation included all the family (see the Passover instructions Exodus 12:3-4). Women were also expected to bring sacrifices and gifts for the purpose of worship and cleansing (Leviticus 12:6; 15:28-29).

The New Testament affirms the body as good, as a beautiful work of God the Creator, worthy of honor and deserving our best care. In Jesus Christ we have a model for human maturity in relation to sexuality. Jesus accepted himself and his role in God’s plan. He was open to the world and established good relationships with men, women and children through acts of tenderness, strength, love and service. He healed women (Luke 8:43-48), allowed them to speak to him, they followed, supported, and worked with him (Luke 10:38-42). This was different from the society in which he lived. He related to women as human beings rather than sexual beings. His relationships with women were wholesome and pure, he was more concerned for their well-being than for his reputation about his own purity (John 4:7; John 12:3). He often reached out especially to the outcasts, showed no partiality to status but related equally well to those of high or low positions. Jesus delivered the message of God’s creating, forgiving, and healing love to all through inclusiveness and

**Study Questions**

1. Why did God create humans both male and female?
2. After God created man in his image, both male and female (Genesis 1:27), he saw that “it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). Do you agree that it was “very good?”
3. Sometimes people consider their bodies “not good.” Why do think this happens?
4. What are some ways Jesus showed a healthy attitude toward sexuality?
5. What are some unhealthy attitudes towards sexuality you see in our world?
6. What can you do to develop healthier attitudes towards sexuality in your church?
7. Discuss ways to encourage attitudes of respect and equality between men and women in our churches.
Lesson 8: Intimacy in Marriage

Relationships between men and women take many forms. Sometimes the relationship is one of simple friendship with the opposite sex, sometimes it is one of courtship, sometimes it is marriage, sometimes it is sexual. Sexual intercourse is a special kind of relationship, appropriate in a particular setting and is sometimes referred to as “becoming intimate.” Intimacy is a close, sustained familiarity with another’s inner life; it is to know another person from the inside. Sexual activity is physical activity, but it touches the person’s spirit in a very deep way, so it is sometimes called “sexual intimacy.” True intimacy includes sharing, trust, affection, mutual understanding, acceptance, and self-disclosure between two people.

God made us to need true intimacy. The problem is that so many people define intimacy only by one of its dimensions – sexual intimacy, but the craving for intimacy can only truly be satisfied by relationship that is more than physical. Intimacy that does not honor and respect the other person is misguided. Sexual intimacy is only truly satisfying to partners after they have established intimacy of spirit and soul and in fact is often damaging to the relationship if it precedes or is outside of a commitment to partnership in marriage.

It is important to establish boundaries to guide interactions between males and females. By our words and actions, intentionally or unintentionally, we may communicate sexual messages that lead to inappropriate intimacy and actions. Men and women may develop a relationship with each other based mainly on physical attraction and it may lead to sexual intimacy that does not include true intimacy of spirit. The church has responsibility to teach and demonstrate proper sexual boundaries, with open and honest communication about sexuality, to promote wholeness in our communities.

The following scriptures lay a biblical foundation to understand intimacy and as a guide for honorable sexual relationships:

- Genesis 2:24. “Leave..., join..., become one flesh.”
- Proverbs 18:22. Finding a wife is a good thing, receives favor from God.
- Song of Solomon 4:10. Love in a faithful covenant relationship is better than wine.
- I Corinthians 6:13; 15-20. The body is for the Lord; temple of Holy Spirit.
- Ephesians 5:28-33. Love relationship between husband and wife is a symbol of Christ and the church.
Four principles for healthy marriages:

1. Learn to know each other before committing to marriage. Marry one who has similar values and goals. Develop the spiritual relationship before marriage and physical intimacy.

2. Do not marry an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14-15).

3. Do not have sex before marriage (Genesis 2:18). Leaving mother and father comes before knowing each other sexually. Knowing each other sexually first tends to focus the on the physical relationship rather than on commitment to the person.

4. Faithfulness in marriage provides the security needed for a healthy relationship. Unfaithfulness in marriage is one of the main reasons for unhappy marriages.

Study Questions

1. What are some situations in normal life where men and women relate to each other? Discuss what level of intimacy is appropriate in each of the situations you have named.

2. Why is it risky to develop a relationship based on physical attraction?

3. What is the foundation for meaningful sexual intimacy?


5. What reasons do believers give for sexual unfaithfulness to their spouse? Do you think these reasons are permitted, according to scripture?

6. Discuss ways your church can provide teaching on marriage and intimacy.
Lesson 9: Care of Others – Social Health

God calls us to bring wholeness and Shalom into our world. He created us to desire relationships with others, to love and care for others – that desire is part of the image of God in us. We do not live in isolation but we live in relationship with family, friends, and other people at home, in our work, and many living situations. We are part of a community.

In the Old Testament, God established guidelines for his people to promote physical, relational, and spiritual health and wholeness in their communities. Relationships in the communities and obedience to God’s guidelines determined the health of the community as a whole. The Ten Commandments were a set of basic guidelines for social health (Exodus 20). God said if they listen to the voice of the Lord, he will protect them from the diseases of the Egyptians (Exodus 15:26). He said he will bless Israel if they obey him, and punish them if they disobey (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). God also gave instructions to his people to provide for the basic needs of the poor, orphans, widows, and strangers (Deuteronomy 10:17-19; Deuteronomy 14:28-29). The story of Ruth and Boaz is a practical example of how these laws worked in their society (Ruth 2:1-23).

God’s plan to promote wholeness is stated best in Micah’s instruction to the children of Israel, “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6: 8). God is more pleased by our service to the poor, oppressed, and outcast than by our efforts at humble worship and fasting (Isaiah 58:6-14). God honors our service to others as the highest form of worship.

Teachings of Jesus. Jesus reaffirmed the Old Testament tradition in his answer to the Pharisee’s question “What is the greatest commandment?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:35-40). Jesus’ love for God led him to love and serve those in need. Jesus met people at the point of their need, whether physical, spiritual, or social, and ministered to them to bring healing and wholeness (Mark 1:21-27; Mark 2:1-12; John 4:7-26, John 5:5-9). He allowed people to come to him, to touch him, to ask him questions. He listened, heard and cared about their problems. He accepted them as worthy of his time and attention, creating an atmosphere in which healing could take place. When people feel secure, accepted and loved, they lay aside barriers of fear and distrust which keep them from good relationships with others and opens them up to both inner and outer healing. Christ is our best example.

The family of God. We, his followers, are called to fulfill God’s mission of bringing wholeness to others – heal the broken hearted, set captives free, give good news to the poor (Luke 4:18-19). As we become whole through relationship with Christ, we reach out to others, bringing wholeness to them. Together we form a community of people in relationship to each other and to God (Ephesians 4:14-16). This is sometimes called the family of God. We become members of each other in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:25). United by our faith in Jesus, our responsibility is more than a spiritual relationship with God. We are commanded to love and serve others (Galatians 5:13-14). Our faith is expressed even by showing love to our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48; Romans 12:20).

A life directed toward wholeness expresses itself in patience, kindness, and gentleness not only to the lovable but also to the unlovely. It is God’s intention that we love others, even as we love ourselves (Mark 12:31; Philippians 2:4; Ephesians 4:23-5:2). This is possible only
through constant renewal of our spirits in communion with God, our Father. As we experience divine grace, forgiveness, and love, we are also able to live in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24). As God draws us together and we respond to God and to each other, God dwells in our relationship. We “are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22). God’s love dwelling in us is a witness to those around us and draws others to the family of God. Notice some of the effects of the gospel on relationships as described in these scriptures:

- In the early church eating together, sharing of their personal goods for the benefit of others (Acts 2:44-47; Acts 4:32-34).
- Practice sensitivity to each other’s views, cultures and seek to make peace (Romans 14:4-21).
- Christ in our lives calls us to live with respect, encouragement and thankfulness (I Thessalonians 5:12); with contentment (Philippians 4:11; 1 Timothy 6:7); and generosity (1 Timothy 6:18; Mathew 6:19).

Poor relationships are a form of disease bringing poor health to individuals, families, and communities. Paul told the Galatians, “If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other” (Galatians 5:15). Quarreling, fighting, anger, envy, and greed are examples of social ills that damage our relationships and destroy God’s intended Shalom for his creation. See the consequences of these in the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:8-12). Poor relationships can cause irresponsibility in family duties, such as lack of care for children or for the elderly. They can be the source of tension and conflict in marriages, at work, or in organizations, including churches. When people live for themselves and demand their rights, when they take what is not their and do not consider the needs of others, the result often is unfair distribution of work load or goods. When people consider some more important or worthy than others, it leads to poverty, hunger and servitude.

**Eternal life.** The way we live now determines our life in the future (after death). Read the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The rich man’s disregard for the needs of the beggar at his gate during his life on earth brought damnation to his soul. At the final judgment (Matthew 25:31-46), those who do service to others such as feeding the hungry, hosting the stranger, visiting the sick and in prison will be blessed and rewarded.

Abundant life begins with our relationship with God. If we love God with our heart, soul, mind and strength, and love our neighbor as ourselves, we have eternal life. Those who do not live according to God’s purposes will be eternally punished (John 3:16; John 5:24-29; Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:12-15; Revelation 21:27).

**Study Questions**

1. Do you think the 10 Commandments are still helpful today as a guide for relationships in our world?
2. Read Micah 6:8 and Isaiah 58:6-14. What does God require of us when we see another person in need? How does our care for others express our spirituality?
3. What were some ways Jesus showed his compassion for others?
4. Name some things that destroy our social wholeness in our world today.
5. Discuss ways your church shows your love for God and people in need.
Lesson 10: Care of God’s Creation – Living in harmony with our world

If we understand that God created the earth and everything in it, including the land, grass, and trees, animals and human life, we will know that God is owner of all that he created. We human beings were created as a part of nature, formed from the earth and given the task by God to care for the earth, make it fruitful, subdue it (Genesis 1:28; 2:15). God’s first instructions to man were, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Genesis 1:28). When man was given dominion over the earth, it did not mean the right to use the creation for his own purposes. It gave man the responsibility to value it and care for it. Man was accountable to God to lovingly care for the world God made. God put man in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (Genesis 2:15). Every plant was given to him and to the animals for food (Genesis 1:29-30), except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17). A restriction was put on that tree because God knew that eating of it would not be good for them. When Adam and Eve were tempted by the serpent and disobeyed God’s instruction, their relationship with God was broken. They were sent from the garden and a curse was brought on the land and on animals. Working the land became painful and frustrating after sin came to the world and Adam was told he would eat by the sweat of his brow (Genesis 3:14-19).

The original sin of Adam and Eve affected their family. Cain worked the soil and brought an offering of his labor instead of the offering God had asked for. God rejected Cain’s offering and he became angry with his brother Abel and killed him. By shedding innocent blood on the ground, Cain polluted the soil and “it no longer yielded its crops” (Genesis 4:12). As people multiplied, their sins brought even more corruption on the earth until God decided to destroy the earth with a flood, saving only Noah and his family, and two of every species of living things (Genesis 6:1-8:19). God made a covenant with Noah after the flood and promised to never again destroy the earth with a flood. This confirmed God’s love for his creation and his plan to redeem it. God’s plan to redeem the creation, both nature and humankind, continues to the present. The New Testament says “the creation has been groaning,” waiting for redemption (Romans 8:22-23).

After the flood, land became extremely important to the people of God. God’s promise to Abraham included land. Canaan was “the promised land” to the children of Israel after their journey through the wilderness. God gave specific instructions to them about living in the land, how to use it and how to remember that it ultimately belonged to God. In the Old Testament God showed his concern for his people’s needs and provided food for them. Examples are Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 47:12), and manna for Israel in the desert (Exodus 16:1-31). God provided what they needed, warned against hoarding and over-consuming. He gave water in the desert (Exodus 15:22-27). God also gave laws about food to protect the health of the people (Leviticus 11:1-47).

God intended for man to live in harmony with nature – plants, animals, soil and water – and intended the earth to provide enough for all people. Over the centuries, humans have misused their dominion over creation. We have misunderstood our responsibility over the earth as permission to do anything we please with the resources of the earth. We have cut trees for firewood without giving time for the trees to grow back. Without trees, the ground is washed away by heavy rains and land becomes unusable. We have polluted rivers and lakes, which spreads disease. The problem has become worse with population growth.
Another form of misuse of nature is using grains for producing alcoholic beverages and tobacco for smoking. These are harmful to our bodies and our spirits and brings many social problems (Genesis 9:20-22; Exodus 32:6).

Shortage of resources and inequality between those who have and those who don’t have is often the result of poor management of natural resources of land and water.

Hunger and poverty are often a result of injustice and unfair distribution of goods. The New Testament speaks to the need for Christians to address the unequal distribution of resources within our communities by responsible sharing (2 Corinthians 8: 13-15). This was discussed in the lesson 9.

We are stewards of God’s creation. A proper view of stewardship and an awareness of needs throughout the world should lead to more responsible use of resources and bring us more fully into the process of redemption and harmony that God has planned for his creation.

**Study Questions**

1. What was God’s plan for man’s relationship to the rest of creation?
2. When God created, he said “it is good.” What happened to change creation so it is no longer “good”?  
3. God created the earth to provide for our needs. Why is there so much imbalance and poverty in the world today?  
4. Describe some ways God expects us to care for the earth and for all of creation.  
5. Give some examples you have seen of problems that result from poor stewardship of nature.  
6. Should the church do more to encourage good care of creation and the environment?