

MESSENGER STUDYGUIDE

Food for thought, questions for discussion, and activities to help individuals, classes, and small groups use Messenger as a focus for study and reflection.

March 2007

Food for Thought: An Overview of the Issue

Healthy living for body, mind, and spirit is the theme of this issue. David Jensen writes about “Family Practices in a Hurried World” (pp. 8-10), a sidebar explains “Lighten Up, Brethren!” (p. 11), Vernne Greiner addresses “Meeting Great Expectations” (pp. 12-13), and Tammy Kiser gives “A Prescription for Wholeness” (pp. 14-15). A companion piece, “Getting Angry at God” by Ken Gibble (pp. 16-17), explores how the psalms provide a model for honest expression.

A reflection on the subject “**Multiculturalism Will Take Courage**” is by Larry Brumfield (p. 6).

The Bible study on “**Ezekiel: Stressful Times**” is by Stephen Breck Reid (pp. 18-19).

Activities: Connecting with the Content

Read Hebrews 12:11-13. **Explore the resources** for Health Promotion Sunday at www.brethren.org/abc/hps_theme/hps_07/index.html. “Christ Exalted in the Body: Congregational and Personal Health” is the title of the resources offered by the Association of Brethren Caregivers. Closely linked to the “Lighten Up, Brethren!” campaign, these resources offer ways to promote health living individually and as a church. **Choose an activity** from the website to pursue personally, such as the “Tips for Family Fitness Fun”; or invite others from your church to a suggested congregational activity, such as the “Progressive Pyramid Paces.”

Read Psalm 104:1-24. **Create a mural celebrating the diversity of God’s creation**, as an intergenerational exercise. Invite families with children, or a children’s Sunday school class with an older adult or young adult class, to take part. Start with a piece of plain fabric at least a yard in width and 10 or more feet long (a sheet will also work). Next buy a range of colors of fabric paint or large fabric markers. Add to the creative mix some glue and glitter, sewing notions such as buttons, felt pieces for cutting into creative shapes, etc. Set a time and place to gather; make sure you have table or floor space big enough to work on the fabric as a group. Invite children and adults together to create one large image or a collage of many images of God’s creation. To spark creativity, post pictures cut from magazines of planets, stars, people, animals, birds, insects, landscapes, and other images of creation around the room. When the mural is complete, find a place to display it at home or church.

Read two well-known visions from Ezekiel: the “wheel within a wheel” in 1:4-3:15, and the valley of bones in 37:1-14. **Listen to music inspired by the visions**, for example the spiritual “Dem Bones,” the jazz composition “Wheel Within a Wheel,” or others (find recordings at the library or on the Internet). What messages do you receive from musical settings of these visions?

Questions for Discussion

1. What makes for healthy living, according to Jensen, Greiner, Kiser, and Gibble? What factors in our world, and in our churches, hinder healthy living, according to the authors?
2. After reading this issue, what practices are you inspired to take up personally to improve your health? What can you or your family do to counter the time bind? Which of Jensen's ideas for playing, praying, and eating together will work best in your family, and why? If you are a pastor or church leader, what can you do to deal with the unrealistic expectations of your position? How do you deal with physical and emotional limitations, when you are in a very demanding job?
3. What new practices might your church take up to improve the health of the congregation? Would hiring a parish nurse be an option for your church? Why or why not? What could a parish nurse accomplish in your congregation and its community setting?
4. Gibble writes about the benefits of "getting angry with God." How do certain psalms, such as Psalm 88, model honest expression in prayer, and in one's personal relationship with God? What are the benefits to being ruthlessly honest to God? How is honesty an expression of trust?
5. Why is Brumfield critical of the statement, "God doesn't see color"? Why is this statement destructive, as he explains it? How may such a statement limit our understanding of God, and our appreciation for God's creation?
6. What do you think Brumfield means when he calls the church to a "celebration mode" rather than a "toleration mode"? How might a switch to "celebration mode" change the Church of the Brethren? What comfort zones will pastors and church leaders need to venture outside, in order for the church to become multicultural? In your opinion, how would becoming a multicultural church be "about healing and restoration" and be redemptive?
7. How does Reid describe Ezekiel? Why could the prophet be thought to have suffered from post-traumatic stress? What happened to Ezekiel's nation, the Hebrew people, and the city of Jerusalem that would cause such stress? How did Ezekiel's message change, from his initial call at the beginning of the book, to the vision of dry bones toward the end? How did his message become more hopeful, and why?
8. The disaster that befell his people also affected Ezekiel personally. Reid describes the prophet's reaction to the loss of his wife, "The prophet is told not to mourn...for the carnage is too vast to allow such sentimentalism (24:15-27)." How does this statement make you feel? Does it bring up your own memories of a personal loss? Call to mind situations of national or global loss that might be deemed "too vast" for individual mourning. When does our response to such situations become sentimentalism? Can the mourning of a personal loss become too sentimental? Why, or why not? How does God call us to respond to vast national or global situations of loss?

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