

*Theme: Where Science and Religion Meet*

# “Freud, Jung and the ‘God Gene’”

Based upon a sermon series by the Rev. Adam Hamilton  
February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008 at First United Methodist Church – Durango

Psalm 42:1-2

*1 As the deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God. 2 I thirst for God, the living God. When can I go and stand before him?*

Ecclesiastes 3:11

*11 Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God’s work from beginning to end.*

Matthew 11:28-30

*28 Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”*

## **SLIDE “Freud, Jung and the ‘God Gene’”**

Please take out of your bulletin your sermon notes and your study guide. The sermon notes are a chance for you to follow along and there are places to write down things you might like to remember from today's sermon. The study guide is a chance for you to do some reading of the Bible on your own and to follow up on the themes that we are talking about this morning. Beginning this week we start a study in the book of Isaiah. I hope all of you will join me in the study of this book which we will do throughout the season of Lent which begins this Wednesday with Ash Wednesday services at Noon and 6:30 p.m.

Today we continue our series of sermons, "Where Science and Religion Meet." We turn today to the sciences that deal with the human mind. We are going to try and understand some of the things that psychology and psychiatry have to teach us and how we as Christians might look at their insights. We also will look at what we as Christians bring to the table as we try to understand the human mind—which includes the human soul and the human condition.

As we have been doing each week, we turn today to someone who is

more of an expert than I am on this area of the human mind. Dr. Doug Miller is a clinical psychologist here in Durango and a member of this church. Doug has preached for us on several occasions and we both attended the same seminary where Doug earned his Master of Arts in Religion. Dr. Miller then went on to earn his Doctorate in Psychology from the University of Denver. I met with Doug this week and asked him how he sees the body, mind and spirit coming together in our lives and here is what he said.

**VIDEO Doug Miller-BMS.**

**SLIDE The Human Condition as seen by Psychiatry and Psychology.**

Dr. Miller reminds us that religion and psychology overlap in many ways as we look at the human condition. They both look at what we think and why we think the way we do. They both look at why we do the things that we do, and both are helping humans to find healing and wholeness.

If you take the words “psychiatry” or “psychology” you will find that what those words stand for are the very things that priests and pastors did for hundreds of years. In fact the work of the psychiatrist or the psychologist is the definition of what the work of a pastor or priest was to do for at least 1000 years.

The word “psyche” in Greek means “mind,” or “soul.” The word “logo” is study. Psychology, therefore, is the study of the mind or the soul. Psyche once again is mind or soul and “liatry” means “healing,” or “the cure of.” Psychiatry then is interested in the healing or the cure of the mind or soul.

While the church did not use the Greek words to talk about the study or the healing of the mind or the soul, this is what pastors and priests were meant to do. The Roman catechism said that what priests and pastors were supposed to be doing is, ***"the administration of the sacraments, the preaching and teaching through their care for individual Christians they are to be concerned for the soul of each individual person in their charge."*** They are to be in charge of designing systems in congregations to encourage healing for the cure of the soul.

**SLIDE The Human Condition as seen by Christianity.**

This presupposes something. This presupposes that there is

something in us which needs to be cured. There is brokenness in us. There is a wound in us which affects our hearts and our minds. This brokenness needs our attention.

The central focus of the Christian faith and the focus of the Gospel is that there is something in us which is wounded or broken. God knows it needs attention and God himself is the answer to that problem. God is the primary answer to the problem. The Gospel is the solution which is laid out before us. Our aim, ultimately, is to become what God longs for us to be—to be whole and to be made well and to be saved.

Salvation in the Scriptures is the curing of the soul. It is a very spiritual act. We see that theology and the Christian faith is very interested in the same thing that psychology and psychiatry are also interested.

With this in mind let's begin to clarify a few things.

**SLIDE      The difference between psychiatry and psychology.**

First, let's look at the difference between psychiatry and psychology. This is no small task if you go about reading and trying to understand the difference between a psychologist and a psychiatrist.

Most of us know that a psychologist is interested primarily in talk therapy and helps us work through our problems by understanding our behavior and why we do the things we do. Psychiatrists might do this as well, but they are also a medical doctor and can prescribe drugs. One person I was reading this week said that the difference between a psychiatrist and a psychologist is about \$25 an hour.

Raymond Fowler who is the president of the American psychological Association offers this response. *"Psychologists are specializing in the practice of counseling and psychotherapy and in various non-intrusive methods of behavior change. Psychiatrists are remedicalizing and moving towards changing behavior through the use of drugs and other medical procedures and approaches.*

*"People who feel they need drugs or other medically oriented treatment to deal with their problems might want to begin by consulting with a psychiatrist. People who are seeking counseling or psychotherapy or behavioral approaches such as deep relaxation training or the modification of unwanted behavior, might want to begin with a psychologist."*

That gives us some idea of what psychiatrists and psychologists are

all about. These distinctions are very important. A psychiatrist might look at us and be most concerned about the physiological side of our mental illness or struggle. They will be looking at brain function and how the brain works and how chemicals interact with the brain. They will look at how depression, or at times other mental illnesses, are caused by chemical imbalances or trauma to the brain. Many are also trained in helping you talk through the other causes of the struggles in your mind. But they are uniquely qualified if medication is required to help bring healing or wholeness or wellness to your mind.

Psychologists will be looking at us and understanding that we are a result of our environment and there are many things that make us who we are. This includes the way we were raised as small children, the impact our parents have on our upbringing, and maybe even the impact of our grandparents upon our parents.

They might look at what birth order means and how we relate to our other siblings. They look at many other environmental factors that have affected us such as traumatic moments in life that we may have faced and how those have shaped our behaviors and our thought processes. All of these things have played a role in making us who we are and why we do the things that we do. Psychologists will try and help us see all of these things through a new lens or a new focus that can help us become healthy.

All of these approaches are helpful to us in healing our mind and our soul—the medications that can be used to help heal mental illness as well as the other kinds of therapy which can help us understand ourselves better.

Christianity sees another dimension to the human condition. Christianity understands that we are not simply a function of the programming we receive from our childhood or other experiences. Those things certainly play a role in who we are, but Christianity understands that we are more than a bag of chemicals or a collection of experiences. We are more than just the gray matter inside of our skulls.

**SLIDE      Christianity's understanding of our soul.**

We have a soul and that soul has needs and longings. The soul is in many ways wounded. The soul is broken and it is in need of healing and repair. Christianity and pastoral care givers would say that we will never be completely and authentically human until we are willing to embrace the soul

and recognize God's solution to our problems. We recognize that we were created to be in a relationship with God and until that moment where we enter into that right relationship with God, that shalom or peace with God, we cannot be fully human. We can't be completely well, and there will always be something that is missing in our lives, until that moment when we are reconnected with God.

This is how we as Christians see things. We embrace and appreciate what psychology and psychiatry have to offer, but we believe it is only part of the story.

### **SLIDE     The Conflict Between Psychology and Religion in the Twentieth Century**

While I am grateful for the fields of psychology and psychiatry I also am aware that over the last hundred years these two fields have sometimes been in conflict with Christianity, at least on the part of some who embrace their theories. Some of the leading figures in psychology and psychiatry have a lot to say about religion, and typically they have started from a perspective that we might consider atheism. They have begun with a perspective which said that the existence of God could not be true and was not needed for healing. They came from an era in which, if you could not see it or feel it or touch it, then it was not true. This meant that you had to explain religion in another way.

The fact is that people have been religious for as long as we have known the history of human beings. In every place and in every region and among every type of people religion has played some role in people's lives. So if there is no God then there must be some other way to explain this reality that people have been religious throughout human history.

### **SLIDE     Sigmund Freud.**

Sigmund Freud offered several interesting options for religion. I have had an opportunity to read some of Freud's work and he was fascinated by the area of religion. He had a strong interest in the role that religion played in life and had several theories about why this was.

One of his theories was that religion was sort of a delusion and a coping mechanism that was simply designed to help us through difficult periods of time. In this way Freud set the tone for what many people believed for quite some time. The idea was that religion was simply a crutch for weak people. Religion was a coping mechanism for humans to

deal with their neuroses, and in fact it was seen as kind of a neuroses itself at one point. He wrote this in one of his books

"Religion would thus be the universal, obsessional neuroses of humanity. Like any obsessional neuroses of children it arose out of the Oedipus complex of the relation to the father. If this view is right, it is to be supposed that a turning away from religion is bound to occur with the fatal inevitability of the process of growth."

Freud believed that human beings would eventually set aside religion and we would find our healing and cure in science alone. Science is what offers real salvation and until then we would still be dealing with the leftovers of religion.

### **SLIDE      Carl Jung**

Carl Jung was a contemporary of Freud and one of his disciples. He ultimately parted ways with Freud over a number of issues. Jung believed that religion was somehow hardwired into us. He acknowledged that if you look around you see religion prevalent in the human condition in almost every place.

Jung said, "I don't think is simply a neurotic obsession. Instead somehow this idea of God is passed on to us from generation to generation." He spoke about this as part of the collective unconscious. All of us are born with and hardwired with certain instincts that are passed on from generation to generation. It is like the instinct of an infant to cry knowing that food would come.

Young was interested in religion and had a more positive view of it, but he himself was certainly not willing to embrace Christianity as truth. But at least he recognized that there might be something more to this than simply religion being a neurotic obsession.

### **SLIDE      B.F. Skinner**

After Jung, B. F. Skinner would rule the day as the leader in psychology. This week I was reading an interview with him in which he spoke about our behaviors and the environment that shapes our behaviors. Skinner had a negative view of religion and suggested we should get rid of religion altogether. He recognized that this could not be done all at once and so we would have to put up with it until we might put it aside a little bit at a time.

Those are not very positive ways of looking at religion. We can understand why those of us in the religious sector might look at the sciences of psychology and psychiatry and struggle with them. These two areas started with a purely scientific method as they try to explain our human condition and what is sometimes being offered as not the cure of the soul but the destruction of souls.

So many in the Christian community have looked at psychology and psychiatry and seen them as destructive. Some have even seen them as evil forces that are counterproductive to the work of God in people's lives so they rejected them all together. Today if you go on the Internet you will find there are lots of Christians, primarily conservative Christians, who still altogether reject the ideas of psychology and psychology as offering anything helpful or beneficial for our lives today.

**SLIDE      The "God Gene" book.**

The latest entry into trying to understand the human mind in religion has been the field of genetics. Geneticists have been wondering if there is something built into our DNA that causes us to reach out to God. One scientist who has been on the forefront of this is Dean Hamer who has written this book called, "The God Gene." The subtitle is, "How faith is hardwired into our genes."

**SLIDE      Time Cover: The God Gene**

I read some excerpts from his book the past week as well as the articles in Time magazine. I found it very interesting. Hamer and his research team have looked at persons who have scored high on the Self Transcendence Inventory. These are people who are able to look beyond themselves and have powerful spiritual experiences.

Hamer then begin to look at their genes to see if people who score high on that test share anything in common in the genetic pool. They focused on just a handful of particular genes that released certain chemicals which affect the brain in a certain way. In fact they found that in a number of cases some of those people who scored high on the Self Transcendence Inventory also shared certain common genes. They identify probably a half a dozen particular genes that play a role in our spiritual experiences.

In the end, what they ask and suggests is that maybe faith is in our genes. Maybe we are genetically predisposed to have faith. Or maybe

there is a God Gene.

That is a gross oversimplification and many have questioned the conclusions of this book, but nevertheless it is an interesting idea. The idea goes something like this. Your genetic makeup is the result of billions of years of evolutionary history. In some way it was a positive adaptation for you to believe in something bigger than yourself. Those people who had a gene which allowed them to transcend themselves and believe in something bigger than themselves, or to believe in God, actually did better in surviving and in producing offspring than those who did not have that gene. Over a long period of time human beings pretty much all came to have this genetic predisposition for faith.

Palmer says this is not the only way to explain faith but certainly our genetics could play one component in our understanding of why we seek out God. Maybe we are hardwired by evolution to believe in something bigger than ourselves. All of these are very interesting ideas and of course many people have been intrigued by this. Some of you read the cover story in Time magazine a few years back about the “God Gene” which explored if our DNA compels us to seek a higher power.

What do you make of all this? I would like to offer a way of looking at this through the lens of at least one particular Christian—and that is me.

Actually it is not just me. I had a chance this last week to visit with Dr. Doug Miller who has preached here for me on several occasions. Doug is a psychologist here in town and he has his doctorate in psychology from the University of Denver. Doug also happens to go to the same seminary I attended and studied to be a pastor. He described for me how his journey has brought together this area of religion in psychology as he serves his patients here in Durango. Let's hear again from Dr. Miller as he talks about the connection between religion and psychology.

**VIDEO      Dr. Doug Miller – Religion and Psychology.**

**SLIDE      Where Christianity and Psychology Meet**

In many ways we are talking about some of the same things in psychology and in religion. I took a number of psychology classes while I was a student at the University of Colorado in Boulder. I was also active in the Wesley foundation which was the campus ministry for the United Methodist Church on campus. I remember reading the different theories in psychology and learning about the human condition. But the more I

learned about psychology I thought to myself, "Yeah, that's old news. We all know that as Christians. This is the gospel. This is the way it is."

If you are actually interested in becoming an authentic human being then you will transcend yourself and begin to look at yourself differently. When you do kind things for other people, then you will find that your heart is actually lifted up inside. When you are really willing to recognize your own shortcomings, then you will find it easier to forgive other people. Many things that happen on the inside in our hearts will manifest themselves in our behavior on the outside.

As a pastor, I look at the fields of psychology and psychiatry and I realize that there are a lot of places where bridges are being built. While I was in seminary my focus was actually on pastoral care and counseling. I was a research assistant for Dr. Larry Graham who taught many of those courses. What I realized is that it all just depends on which direction you're coming at this from. If you come at this from the perspective of an atheist you will spin it in a way that starts with your presuppositions. You will try to explain the data in a certain way because that is your perspective and that is your starting point.

But if you begin from the perspective that there is a God—and if there is a God, that God might be the kind of God that is in the Scriptures—and if God actually did come and walk human form in the person of Jesus Christ then this might explain that same data in another way.

### **SLIDE      What is your perspective?**

Let's take the idea of the "God gene." I am not really troubled by the idea that we might have a genetic predisposition to believe in God. In fact that ties in to what I believe. We as Christians have been saying all along that God created us in his image and that he created us for fellowship with him. If that is the case then what is it to God that through our genetic coding there might be something inside of us that tells our brain to reach out towards God from the time we are little. In fact, almost every child I have ever known, even those who were brought up in a home where there is no faith, begin to ask questions about God somewhere in their life.

All of us and seem to have some sort of spiritual experiences even though some of us begin to anchor those in poetry or art or something other than religion. That doesn't surprise me. Of course isn't this what we would expect from a God who created us—so we might yearn for and long for and

seek out and reach out towards God?

C. S. Lewis looked at this as one of the proofs of God's existence. He said that people generally don't hunger for something that does not exist. You hunger for food because there is something called food that you are hungry for. You hunger for love because it is possible to be loved. You don't hunger or yearn for something inside unless it actually exists. So it is he would say as it comes to the yearning of God.

We yearn for the eternal life and we yearn for God and we ache for God because there is in fact a creator whom we can yearn after. Somehow, intuitively inside Hamer would say, is the information that tells us where our maker is. There is a little bit of software code inside all of us leading us back towards the One who programmed us from the very beginning. I appreciate this idea and I find it amazing that all these things tie in together so well.

**SLIDE      Our role with your soul.**

I do take very seriously as your pastor that what we are about here at First United Methodist Church is the cure of souls. If we are about the cure of souls here, then we are about wholeness or healing or wellness to the people who gather in this place. I take that seriously in my role as preacher.

I don't get to do much in the area of pastoral counseling because of my schedule. We have people like Doug Miller and others that I can refer people to and the reality is I don't have near the training that he does. But I will tell you, many times when I am meeting with you one on one there is a time where I can hear the pain in your lives and we can start to talk about that pain and where it came from. Many times what we as pastors are doing is what I imagine is happening in many therapists' office. We are trying to ask the right questions and listen carefully so that you can discover truth along the way about yourself.

But in that process we begin with a word of prayer and we ask God and his Holy Spirit to guide the conversation and help us to hear things we wouldn't hear otherwise. We ask God to help us see things we wouldn't see without God's guidance. We ask God to help us be whole in the process.

We look at the wisdom found in the Scriptures and we ask if there is anything that Jesus said which can relate to what you are experiencing right

now. I don't sit there and tell you everything you should do and what the answer is because I am not walking in your shoes. But I do suggest some things you might think about and some practices you might do, and in the end we gather and we hold hands and we pray for God's healing to come into our lives.

I find things happen in the midst of those caring kind of settings. I see God's Spirit bring healing into people's lives. There are people who could not find healing anywhere else and they find it from God in those moments.

### **SLIDE      Why Christianity needs Psychiatry and Psychology**

That does not mean we reject the areas of psychiatry and psychology. One of the things that I know from my own personal life is that psychology and psychiatry are indispensable when it comes to healing. One of the concerns I have is that sometimes we turn to the medicine first. We think that medicine will be the thing that makes us whole or well. We live in an environment where you look for the quick fix and we anticipate there will be a pill that we can take that will make it all better. But the truth is that it does not work that way.

Sometimes medication can help us to find balance and get us back on our feet and we need to be willing and courageous and bold enough to say, ***"I think I might need more help than I can get from simply my faith and talking to other people."*** Medication can be critically important.

Some of you know that I lived with my stepbrother for most of my growing up years. Jim was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic when he was 20 years old and I was around 13. He could not function without the medication and the medical skill of a psychiatrist. Many days I would come home from school and he would be hiding under my bed for fear that the CIA or the FBI was after him. He needed that medication to help him be able to function on a day-to-day basis. While it was not easy, it was what finally enabled him to live on his own for the last 15 years of his life.

Living with someone with mental illness is a difficult and challenging task. I know this from first-hand experience and I hope that if you are in that situation that you will not be afraid to ask for the help that you need and to seek out the professional care that is available today.

I have met with too many families who believed that all they needed to do was pray and they could be healed. I have seen persons who pray and pray and pray and read their Bible and still they did not experience healing

because they needed more. So please don't be afraid to ask because I have a whole list of providers that I feel confident can help you beyond what I might be able to provide as your pastor.

I am grateful there are good psychiatrists and good psychologists out there who also are people of faith and are willing to talk to us about the reality of our spiritual life and our mental health at the same time. Sometimes the chemicals in our brains are not functioning properly and there are imbalances that need to be corrected. How grateful I am for the people who are in the medical profession and who understand how our minds work.

Likewise how grateful I am that there are psychologists who understand family systems in ways that go far beyond what I understand. I had a handful of classes in seminary and I am trained in the spiritual aspect of the soul, but I'm grateful that there are some out there like Dr. Miller who are trained to ask questions and dig deeper into the background and the patterns in our lives. Sometimes they can help us hear things that we would not hear otherwise. They can help us make connections that we would not otherwise make and they will offer suggestions and ideas of ways that we can relate better to one another. I am so grateful for these people in the fields of psychology.

But I am also absolutely persuaded that psychology and psychiatry alone will never bring to us the wholeness we will find when we discover Jesus Christ and when we pursue the care of our soul through the Gospel. All three of these things have an opportunity to work together and partner together in bringing about the cure of souls.

**SLIDE      Sanctification=being made perfect, holy, whole.**

The Bible speaks about this as sanctification. Sanctification is the idea that we are being made perfect or being made whole. Being made whole means that we are able to love God wholly and completely. We are connected to God in such a way that we are able to receive God's love. We open ourselves up to God and we say, **"God mold me and shape me. You are the Potter and I'm the clay. Make me the person you want me to be and not the person I am. I am not finished yet oh God, and so I pray that you will be able to work in my heart and in my life."**

It is not just about asking God's perfect love to move in us and transform our hearts, but it is also about learning to love our neighbor as we

love ourselves. Jesus said that these two things together define the goal of our lives. We are to love God wholly and completely and we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. When you are doing these two things you will find there is a balance in your life that is most remarkable.

The cure of our soul or the salvation of our soul is taking ourselves from the self absorbed mess that our lives can become and seeing our lives transformed day by day, by the power of the Holy Spirit. And as we open ourselves up to God's will and as we study and understand God's will for our lives it is there that healing can happen.

**SLIDE      “The Dark Night of the Soul.”**

Throughout the ages there are Christians who have talked about how we experience, "the dark night of the soul." Today we look at the dark night of the soul and what we sometimes recognize as depression. We want to be delivered from that place. I believe there are times where we enter into clinical depression. I can't help you with that kind of depression in many cases and it is then you really need to seek out a doctor.

But I also look back and I wonder if there would ever have been a Protestant Reformation were it not for Martin Luther's dark night of the soul. Would John Wesley ever have founded Methodism were it not for his own internal struggle with accepting himself and accepting the salvation that God had to offer? John Wesley had to go through his own depression and his own dark night of the soul. Would he have ever discovered or ever have pressed through that point where God grabbed hold of his life and he felt his heart strangely warmed, and that he did trust in Christ and Christ alone for his salvation, if he had taken medication?

Sometimes, a part of being human is going through the dark places. When those dark places lead us to a point of absolute despair we need to recognize that is not reality and there is a time where you need to reach out and ask for help. You may need to talk to a pastor and beyond that you may need to talk to a psychologist or psychiatrist. You may need to talk to your medical doctor and you may need some medicine to help you through a dark place.

But I also feel like we should be careful about looking to get through those moments of darkness and thinking we need to get delivered as quickly as possible even if that means medication. Sometimes those darkest moments when we feel so alone and we cannot sense God's

presence at all in our lives are the moments when God is molding our soul.

Sometimes it is those dark moments were something most profound is happening.

I know that the most important things that have happened in my spiritual life were usually those moments where I needed to go through that dark time. It might have been easier to take medication, whether it is one that is prescribed or alcohol or some other drug, but then I would have missed out on what God was doing in me through those moments.

Please, hear the balance here between the medication like my stepbrother needed to survive and the story of Wesley or Luther or any one of us when we have to wrestle with the dark night of the soul. Both of those are part of the human condition and at times we need one and at times we need the other.

**SLIDE      “Your Faith Has Made you Well.”**

Last week we learned that there was a woman who came to Jesus and she reached out and touched him and she was made well. Jesus turned her and said, "Your faith has made you well."

One of the things I realize is that those psychologists and psychiatrists who are not prone to talk about faith have plenty of ammunition when it comes to faith and the kinds of faith which have not made people well, but instead have caused people more pain. There are a number of religions that don't make people well but make people sick. There is a book that has been written about this called, "Toxic Faith: Experiencing Healing from Painful Spiritual Abuse."

**SLIDE      Toxic Faith.**

This important book chronicles how it is possible for religion to make someone sick instead of well. There are all kinds of ways that religion is abused and misused.

Positive religion is summarized by the positive impact that it has in your life. The apostle Paul says that the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control. That is what is supposed to happen when we have the Holy Spirit working in is and it looks to me like a pretty healthy life. If this is so then toxic religion, or religion that brings about a lack of wellness, is something that produces the opposite of these.

Sometimes we can see that in our own lives. We can get too involved in our faith and get unbalanced even in a good church. You can find yourself becoming bitter as the joy of serving wears off. You can find yourself being frustrated and constantly angry instead of being filled with patience and goodness. That is telling you that there is some kind of imbalance in your spiritual life. Even here at First United Methodist Church this can happen when you over-commit yourself.

There also are churches that seem to create people who are overly dependent, not God but on a preacher or on a particular way of expressing faith. Many of these we think of as cult groups. There have been preachers who have been able to have absolute control over people's minds and lives.

When I attended the Wesley foundation at the University of Colorado in Boulder, each year there was a man who came to speak to our group. His sole job was to keep track of the 200 plus religious and cult groups that were on campus. He would speak to us about the groups we should look out for and the ones that tried to do this kind of toxic religion which caused more harm than good. Some of these were Christian organizations who did some pretty wacky things. The most extreme was a pagan group that the Boulder police found sacrificing animals up in Chautauqua Park just above the college.

I learned something during that time that I tell every student that leaves this church and goes off to college. If you ever find yourself in a religious group that refuses to let you ask questions then you should leave immediately. If you ever find yourself in a group that simply tells you what to believe and doesn't encourage you to explore why you believe that then you should find a new religious group to be a part of. This includes Christian groups as well.

This kind of mind or soul control is not what we find in the Scriptures. In the Scriptures we find the way of discipleship is to be empowered by the Holy Spirit and as you learn and grow in your faith you are becoming less dependent on your preacher over time. The disciples found themselves in a place where literally Jesus had left in a physical form—and it was only then that they really began to grow in their faith.

My role is not to tell you what to do. I am going to challenge you and I'm going to encourage you. I am going to try and help you understand how the Scriptures relate to your life. But my job is not to control you.

My job is to invite you to open up your hearts and your life to the work of the Holy Spirit. If you are in a church and over time you find yourself becoming narrow minded, bitter, judgmental of other people, and the people around you no longer see love emanating from you but instead all they see is the opposite of love, then you have entered into a church or relationship that is toxic. That is not a healthy kind of religion and there are plenty of those opportunities that exist even within the Christian faith.

I think of positive religion as one that gives us life and does not take it away. It causes us and encourages us to think for ourselves and does not ask us to take every word that the preacher says as gospel. It is the kind of faith that causes us to love other people more and not less. It is a kind of faith that challenges us to live out our faith in real ways which demonstrate the love of Christ to other people. It produces over time the fruits of the Spirit in our lives. This kind of faith gives us strength to rise above self-absorption. It calls forth the best in us.

**SLIDE      The importance of healing in community.**

Part of that faith comes when you are connecting with other Christians. This is part of what I love about the gospel and one more place where I see a connection between Christianity and what psychology and psychiatry has to teach us. In those two fields they say that it is really helpful to get together for some group therapy once in a while. It is good to have people with whom you can connect and when you connect with them they challenge you and they hold you accountable. When I listen to psychologists talk about this I realize this is exactly what early Christianity was about.

Early Christianity was about a group of people bearing one another's burdens and so fulfilling the law of Christ. Christianity is about holding one another accountable and lifting one another up.

Once again I turned to Dr. Miller and I asked Doug what his perspective on small groups was. I found his answer enlightening and one that is important for us to hear.

**VIDEO      Doug Miller—Community**

**SLIDE      The importance of community.**

I've talked to you about this a number of times. Someone I know in the community starting coming to our church and they shared with me that

the hardest thing is that the church feels so big and there are so many people. The first thing I told him was that if he would come and sit in the first two or three rows the church actually feels pretty small because you don't notice all the people behind you!

But in addition to that, when you get plugged into a group with 10 or 12 other people meeting in a home or studying the Bible together you find in that group you have a small church. You will find people who care for you and pray for you and encourage you. I will tell you that there is only so much wellness that can happen when you spend time personally in prayer pursuing spiritual discipline. There is only so much wellness that happens when you gather in church as a large body and we offer you the sacrament of Holy Communion and we try to preach the word. Full wellness, emotional maturity, spiritual salvation and sanctification come when you are working out your salvation with other Christians, who are encouraging you and helping you to grow in your faith.

You need to be connected with other Christians who can bear your burdens. You need to be with others who need YOU to contribute and sometimes bear their burdens. You need to be with other Christians who can help you grow and who have something to learn from you. You need to be with other Christians so you can become more like Jesus Christ and share that love with others in the world.

**SLIDE      Our human condition.**

This last week, as I read through the Scriptures looking for the Bible's answer to our human condition, I found something interesting. The Bible says that we are all born in the image of God but that image is just off a little bit. There is something in us that is just not quite right. We are broken and there is a wound in each of us. The Bible talks about this as sin.

We all have a predisposition towards this. It does not mean we are terrible people and that there is not a lot of good in us. The Bible says. God created us and it was good. There is a lot of good in all of us, but there is also this tendency to become self-absorbed and self consumed and focused on ourselves. We all have a tendency to say the things that might hurt other people as we try to put them in their place. There is a tendency to pursue things that we know will hurt us. We know they are not right and yet we have a longing to do them.

There are things we know that are best for us and yet we can't find

the strength or the discipline to pursue them. This is part of the human condition. We are alienated and separated from God. We can't see God and yet somehow inside we are yearning for God.

We all need and long for and yearn for love. We want to know meaning and purpose in our lives. We want help and we hope for joy in our lives.

We need fellowship and we need community. This is the human condition.

Our faith tells us that all of these things are what Jesus came to offer us. This is part of what we find in the context of Christian community.

This is what God does for us in the process of sanctification. God changes us from the inside out. The therapist might be able to help us and medication might help to balance this out, but in the end the kind of heart surgery we are all in need of only God can do. The Holy Spirit came to give us a new heart.

Ezekiel shares God's words this way in Ezekiel 36:26-28.

**SLIDE 26 And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations.**

**28 “And you will live in Israel, the land I gave your ancestors long ago. You will be my people, and I will be your God.**

A couple in our church had a marriage that was ready to collapse. This story I know can be repeated in many marriages and in many churches. They were ready to throw in the towel and by the time they came into my office they were so angry with each other, and they were so bitter towards each other, and they had said so many hurtful things to one another that there seemed to be no hope. In fact I really thought the situation was virtually hopeless.

But there is one thing that I remembered. God is able to do things that the rest of us often can't see. God specializes in resurrecting dead things. So as we talked and recognized that there was a lot of hurt a lot of pain in their relationship. I told them that I could talk with them a couple of times but in terms of really finding a solution to some of this they were going to have to visit with someone who has more time and more specialized

training in helping them to work through some of marital problems.

Part of what I could help with as their pastor was to understand some of the spiritual things they might try doing.

You need to remember what God intended marriage to be. Do you know what God intended marriage to be? God intended it to people would come together to minister to one another and to bless one another. God's dream is that you would come together and encourage one another and care for one another and literally be the presence of Jesus Christ to other each every moment of each and every day.

God never promised that you would be madly in love with one another all your days. The mission is that you would try and bless this person.

I told them many couples have found it helpful when they begin to pray together—husband and wife just praying together and asking God to bless their spouse. I encouraged them to pray aloud together. I told them that they might be uncomfortable with this at first but to just give it a try. I even wrote up the words so they could just read them when they first begin. The point of praying together was for them to remember the mission that God has for marriage and to see what might happen if they would do this for a few weeks.

I also encouraged them to begin to pray for one another even when they were not around their spouse. I invited them to pray and ask God to make themselves a blessing to their mate. Pray something as simple as this, "God help me to be the kind of husband that she needs. Change my heart so I might love her with your kind of love.

"Lord, help me to be the wife that you want me to be. Help me to love him even though I feel nothing inside."

I asked them to try this and see what might take place when they begin to pray together and to open themselves up to God's goodness for their life together as a couple.

We met a couple of more times and then three months later these two people came up to me holding hands and said, "It is amazing. We have been through counseling before and we have tried other things, but the one thing we never tried was praying together and for each other. Our prayer time has helped us remember God's will for our lives as a married couple. As we began to pray together and then pray for one another something

changed inside of us. Today we have discovered a love that we never knew in all the years we were married."

The couple is still married and they still hold hands and I still see that little smile and twinkle in their eyes when I run into them. They discovered what God had in mind for healing in their relationship.

Prayer is powerful medicine for the mind. Doug reminded me of this at the end of our interview this week. I asked him if there was anything else he wanted to share about religion and psychology and here is what he said.

**VIDEO Doug Miller-Prayer.**

**SLIDE The "Therapy" of Christianity: Where Wholeness is Found**

Finally, as I began to pray about the sermon, I remembered a woman whose story could be told by many of you. She was sexually abused as a child by her father who hurt her in ways that she could not begin to understand. Therapy helped her deal with these hurts and helped her find healthy and constructive ways to deal with her anger and her pain.

But it was only as she came to faith in Christ, and she invited the Holy Spirit to come into her life, that the bitterness and the anger and the hurt began to be transformed. God took a heart of stone and gave her a heart of flesh. She was able to find joy even in the pain. She became a person of tremendous beauty as God began to work in her.

Thursday and Friday I went to do an on-site interview for a candidate in our Ministry process in the United Methodist Church. It is the last step for someone before they are ordained by our denomination and several pastors who have worked with this person met with a number of people from her church about how effective she has been as a pastor the past three years serving in that church.

The laypersons gave us great feedback on the candidate and I was especially moved after our meeting when a woman from the congregation came to me and said she wanted to share something with me she couldn't share with the group. She told me that the week before she had been in the hospital and her husband had called the church. The senior pastor was not available and so he sent the associate pastor who was the candidate we were there to interview.

She said she had been in so much pain until her pastor had come. The pastor had touched her hand and prayed with her. She read her a few

Scripture passages about God's love for her and she felt a great peace come over her even though the future was uncertain and the doctors were unsure if the treatment they had prescribed would help her. The next morning, the doctors came in and told her she was going to be just fine. The medication that they were using was working better than they had anticipated.

She just wanted me to know that while this young pastor had been in her room crying with her, she felt a clarity about God's presence and that she would be okay. She had a powerful and profound sense that God was her healer and your strength.

You can call that what you want. You can come up with a neurosis to call it if you like. But I will take that neurosis any day of the week.

That is no neurosis but is the cure of our souls. It comes from knowing a God who created you—who loves you more than you can imagine or believe—who is involved in your life and who sends his Holy Spirit to transform you into a person with flesh for a heart—and a person who becomes fashioned into his image.

That is what the Lord has offered to you. I think that is what Jesus had in mind when he said:

**SLIDE**      ***“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”***

Let's pray.

*Jesus, we are grateful tonight for the rest that you give to us. You are the healer of our souls. You, oh God, are the one who created us in your image and formed and fashioned us, maybe even at the genetic level, to long for you—to, as a deer pants for water, long for your spirits work in our lives.*

*Lord, we recognize that you set eternity in our hearts. We are grateful for the change that happens in us when we accept your grace. Today we pray, oh God, that you would help was to be whole—you would heal our brokenness, our emptiness—that you would be the lifter of our heads—and that you would draw us near to you.*

*Lord, we thank you for all of those who have committed their lives to the field of psychiatry and psychology and counseling. We thank you for their desire to bring healing and wholeness and wellness to others. We*

*pray that you would bless them and use them.*

*And we pray oh God that we might never forget that ultimately our hearts will be restless until we find our rest in you. In Jesus name, amen.*

## **Theme: Where Science and Religion Meet “Freud, Jung and the ‘God Gene’”**

Psalm 42:1-2

*1 As the deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God. 2 I thirst for God, the living God. When can I go and stand before him?*

Ecclesiastes 3:11

*11 Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God’s work from beginning to end.*

Matthew 11:28-30

*28 Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”*

### **Introduction: The Presenting Problem**

- A. The Human Condition as seen by Psychiatry and Psychology
- B. The Human Condition as seen by Christianity

### **I. The Conflict Between Psychology and Religion in the Twentieth Century**

A brief survey...

### **II. The Geneticists Weigh In: The “God Gene” and Experiencing God**

A summary of Hamer’s work...

### **III. A Look at Psychology and Genetics Through the Lens of Christianity**

Sin, brokenness, a yearning for God, and wholeness

### **IV. Where Christianity and Psychology Meet**

- A. Why Christianity needs Psychiatry and Psychology
- B. The “Therapy” of Christianity: Where Wholeness is Found

**STUDY GUIDE - Introduction to Lenten Study of Isaiah** – During the season of Lent we are challenging every person at First United Methodist Church to read the greatest of all of the writing prophets: Isaiah. This will require a fair amount of reading – at least one chapter each day. The study guides throughout Lent will have historical information that will help you understand what you are reading, and questions aimed at helping you hear God’s word to you through the text. Beginning in two weeks we will offer sermons on Isaiah, capturing the major themes of the book and looking at the Christian gospel through the lens of Isaiah. Allow God to speak to you through this beautiful, haunting and powerful text.

**Background to the Book of Isaiah** – Isaiah began his ministry around the year 742 B.C. and seems to have ended around 681 B.C. He thus, lived to be an old man. Tradition says that he was martyred by being sawed in half. Isaiah likely came from what would have been the upper class of society in his day. Most of his ministry takes place in the capital city, Jerusalem. He had access to kings and to the royal courts, and he played a critical role as an advisor to, and even in a sense a doctor for, King Hezekiah of Judah, one of the better of the ancient kings of Judah.

**Setting of Isaiah** – When King Solomon died in 930 B.C.; the kingdom of Israel was divided in two with the northern portion retaining the name, “Israel” or sometimes, “Ephraim.” The southern kingdom was then called, “Judah.” Each had its own king. Israel’s capital was Samaria while Judah’s capital was Jerusalem. Around the time Isaiah began his ministry, the Assyrian Empire began exerting some pressure on the northern kingdom of Israel - sending troops, threatening to wage war against them, and requiring them to pay tribute. But it was not simply Israel that was threatened by Assyria – Judah, too, would be threatened by this ominous power. In 722 B.C. Assyria would finally crush the northern kingdom of Israel, looting, killing and carrying away its people as slaves. The northern kingdom would never be heard from again. This was quite traumatic to the people of Judah, where Isaiah was ministering. In the decades that followed Assyria became a threat to Judah as well, capturing and destroying many Judean cities. Isaiah’s early ministry was focused on the judgment of God – the primary topic of this week’s readings.

**Monday, February 4** – Read Isaiah 1 – a word of judgment on Israel. How does God view Judah’s worship? Why? What was her real sin? Notice the words of judgment are followed closely by words of hope and promise. What do the passages of judgment teach us about God’s will in our lives? How do the words of hope speak to you?

**Tuesday, February 5**– Read Isaiah 2 – Notice this chapter begins with a description of the “last days” (vs. 2-5) – a passage, which Christians read as referring to the time, when Jesus returns. These are words filled with hope (they are also engraved on the wall adjacent to the U.N. in New York – why would these words have been chosen for this place?). Verses 6 through the rest of the chapter are words of judgment once again – what is the sin of humanity in these verses? How do they speak to you?

**Wednesday, February 6** - Join us for Ash Wednesday services today at Noon or tonight at 7:00 p.m. as we begin the Season of Lent. Read Isaiah 3-4:1 – Isaiah is foretelling a day of judgment upon Jerusalem – a day that would come again and again until, in 586 B.C., Jerusalem was finally destroyed. What are Judah’s sins in this passage? Notice the leading men have died in battle.

**Thursday, February 7** – Read Isaiah 4:2-6. Isaiah is filled with words of judgment, followed by words of hope. Here God promises through Isaiah to raise up a “Branch” – a title referring, in most places in the Old Testament, to a messianic figure. Read Isaiah 5:1-7. Note the tender way God is described here? Jesus draws upon these words in Luke 20:9-18 and particularly in John 15. How is God portrayed here? How are Judah and Israel portrayed?

**Friday, February 8** – Read Isaiah 5:8-30. What are the sins God denounces here? Do you ever wrestle with these? God is about to use the Assyrians to discipline and bring justice to Israel and Judah. Do you hear God’s frustration in what you have read in Isaiah so far? Pray that God will deliver you, and our nation, from the types of sins Isaiah describes.