What Dr. Luke says about Periodontal Disease (Gum Disease)

 Periodontal disease (gum disease) is a “silent” destroyer of the gums and bone supporting your teeth. It is silent because there is usually no pain until the very end stages when it’s too late to save the teeth.

 Because it is an inflammatory disease, it cannot be cured, only controlled, much like we do with diabetes or heart disease, which are also inflammatory diseases. An inflammatory disease occurs when the body over-reacts to some type of irritation. In the case of gum disease, the body is trying to fight off bacteria trapped in the gums, and this process causes the gradual destruction of the gums and the loss of the jaw bone around the teeth.

 Let’s look at the situation of one man who found out about this just in time to save his teeth.

 Mark had been noticing that his lower front teeth seemed to be getting darker over time. He wasn’t very concerned about it, because like most of his friends and co-workers, he smoked, and drank a lot of tea, and after all, that’s just going to stain your teeth.

 But one day, Mark’s 6-year-old daughter wouldn’t give him a hug. He asked her why and she said, “Daddy, your mouth smells funny and it scares me.”

 Mark loved his daughter and this made him very sad. He told his wife, and although she was very kind about it, she said that yes, he was starting to have very bad breath.

 So Mark went to the store and bought some mouth rinse, and although this seemed to help for a few minutes, he couldn’t get rid of the bad taste in his mouth and the bad odor. He started to become very self-conscious about this at home and work, and he also started to wonder why this was happening to him.

 Then one day Mark was eating and he felt something hard in the food he was chewing. He could also feel a sharp edge between his two lower front teeth, like something had broken. And his front teeth also felt loose.

 Now, he was getting very concerned. “I’m going to lose my teeth,” he thought to himself. And he felt fear.

 The Bible tells us that God’s people do not have to live in fear, even when things seem to be going against them. In the book of Joshua, it says, “Do not be terrified, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9)

 Mark had no real spiritual beliefs and thought he had no one to rely on but himself, but he felt powerless. This only made him feel more frustrated, angry and afraid.

 A few days later, he was walking through town and he saw a sign outside a small office building: “Free Cleaning And Exam For New Dental Patients.”

 He had never considered going to a dentist before, but now he did not hesitate. He went into the dental office and asked if he could get the free exam.

 He was introduced to Dr. Phillip. Mark told the doctor that he thought his front teeth were breaking and getting loose, and that he had bad breath and a bad taste in his mouth.

 The Dr. Phillip took some x-rays and then used an instrument to feel around Mark’s gums. Although the dentist was being very gentle, Mark could feel some pain in his gums and then he tasted blood in his mouth.

 “Mark,” Dr. Phillips said, “you have gum disease. I’m going to show you something. Your teeth aren’t breaking, but there is something hard stuck to your teeth, called tartar, that is causing the gum disease. I’m going to break off a little piece of it, because that’s what you felt in your mouth that time when you were eating.”

 He used a small instrument to chip off a piece of the tartar from Mark’s lower front teeth. It looked like a piece of dirty plaster and Mark could feel the space on his tooth where the piece had broken off.

 “We have to get this hard tartar off your teeth and out from around your gums, Mark, or you will eventually lose your teeth,” Dr. Phillip told him. “The tiny bacteria, or germs, that cause the gum disease live in this tartar.”

 “The other thing, Mark, is that you came here just in time to save your teeth. And I don’t think it’s just a coincidence, I think God is looking out for you.”

 He showed Mark the place in the Bible where it says, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “Plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jeremiah 29:11)

 Mark felt some hope and optimism for the first time in weeks. Dr. Phillip said it would take two treatments to take care of Mark’s gums.

 It’s estimated that 25-35% of adults have various stages of gum disease. The risk greatly increases if you are a smoker, like Mark, and if you do smoke and have gum disease, it’s much harder to treat. Dr. Phillip told Mark he would need to quit smoking, which would be very difficult, and that he should pray to God to grant him the strength to stop.

 Other risk factors for gum disease include people with diabetes, and those with a family history of periodontal disease. If you don’t brush and floss your teeth every day, you are also at higher risk. Dr. Phillip gave Mark instructions on how to do this.

 There also seems to be a connection between gum disease and heart disease. People with periodontal disease are at greater risk of stroke and heart attack.

 A healthy body starts with a healthy mouth!

 After the second gum treatment, Mark asked Dr. Phillip if he was a Christian, and what did Christians believe. Mark could not explain it, but he felt something in his heart that was leading him to find out more about Dr. Phillip.

 “What do you need to do to become a Christian?” Mark asked.

 “There is nothing you can do, it’s a gift from God,” Dr. Phillip explained. “You only need to believe in God’s son, Jesus Christ, and you will receive the gift of forgiveness of your sins, and eternal life.”
 Dr. Phillip told him that the one and only Lord God created the universe many years ago, and also created humans. But humans decided to disobey God and sin, and because sinful humans could not be in the presence of a holy God, they would have to die.

 “But God loved people so much that instead of ending the human race, He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to die a horrible death in our place, about 2,000 years ago. He also raised Jesus from the dead and He will do the same for you if you believe.”

 “I try to be a good man,” said Mark.

 Dr. Phillip showed Mark the place in Romans where it says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). And salvation from God “comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:22-24)

 This seemed almost too good to believe for Mark. Eternal life, even after I die! Someone like Jesus who loves me so much, he would die for me! He went home and told his wife. The next day, he and his wife went to Dr. Phillip’s office because Mark wanted him to examine his wife also.

 And he told Dr. Phillip, “My wife and I believe in Jesus Christ, we want to be saved.”

 Dr. Phillip told them that they will receive the Holy Spirit, who will show them areas in their life where they need to repent of their sins, and to strengthen them when they are fearful or are tempted to sin.

 Paul, the first Christian evangelist, says that Christians “are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.” (Romans 8:9)

 Dr. Phillip invited Mark and his family to join them at his house once a week where other Christians in the area get together to worship God, study the Bible, and strengthen one another.

 Mark noticed that after his gum treatments, his bad taste gradually went away and his breath no longer scared his daughter. He gave God praise for this good turn of events.

 Have you noticed any of the following signs of gum problems? Persistent bleeding, red, puffy or swollen gums, loose or separating teeth, lingering bad breath or a bad taste in your mouth, missing teeth, teeth sensitive to hot or cold foods, root exposure, a gummy smile or short teeth. These could all be signs of a periodontal disease.

 What should I do, you might ask?

 The first step is to go to a dentist for an evaluation of your teeth and gums. The dentist, or dental hygienist who cleans your teeth, will check your gums for deep “pockets.” These pockets are one of the first signs of gum disease. They will also look for unusual bleeding of the gums, and check to see if any of your teeth are getting loose.

 They will also look for buildup of plaque or tartar around the teeth, which is where the bacteria live and grow.

 The dentist will also take x-rays, which will show if you are losing any of the jaw bone around the teeth.

 Treatment for gum disease involves a deep cleaning under you gums to remove the hard tartar buildup and the harmful bacteria. This might take 2-4 appointments and sometimes requires that the dentist numbs your jaw first so the procedure won’t be uncomfortable.

 This process helps shrink the deep gum pockets, and reduce bleeding and inflammation.

 After this, you will need to return every 3-4 months to have your gums checked and your teeth cleaned.

 And probably most important is what you do at home every day to keep your gums healthy. Using dental floss on a daily basis will help clean out the germs that settle in between the teeth and causes the gum disease. Dental floss may be hard to get but it’s much more effective than toothpicks.

 Remember, you won’t be able to completely eliminate gum disease, but you can control it. If you have already lost some of the bone around your teeth, it can’t be replaced, but you can prevent additional loss.

 Like Mark, you might also have noticed that you don’t feel right in your heart, that you are fearful about many things, or tempted to have sinful thoughts. Take Dr. Phillip’s advice and look to the Lord Jesus Christ.