

**What Is the Pathway to Being Wholehearted?
A Bible Study on Wellness
By Deaconess Janet Nicol
Isaiah 45:7 "I form light and create darkness;
I make well-being and create calamity;
I am the Lord, who does all these things."**

Session One

"We were good, we were gold
Kinda dream that can't be sold
We were right 'til we weren't
Built a home and watched it burn

Mm, I didn't wanna leave you
I didn't wanna lie
Started to cry, but then remembered I

I can buy myself flowers
Write my name in the sand
Talk to myself for hours
Say things you don't understand
I can take myself dancing
And I can hold my own hand
Yeah, I can love me better than you can"

~Some of the lyrics from "Flowers" by Miley Cyrus

Can I, though? Can I really love myself better than anyone else can? This is a popular thought today, as is evidenced by lyrics to pop songs such as Miley Cyrus's "Flowers" song, not to mention the plethora of self-help books, podcasts, and websites one can find on the topic of self-help or self-love. The real question we as Christians face is: How can we be at our best for the Kingdom of Christ in this world in order to serve our neighbors? What does well-being even mean and is our worldview going to make an impact on that? Additional questions to ask are: How does the world (society, etc.) talk about self-care and self-love? How does the world talk about the purpose of life, work, and family? How do these differ from the way we as Christians should be talking about them?

This Bible study will explore those questions and more during this month of October, which focuses on awareness of breast cancer, disability employment, work and family, domestic abuse, and mental illness, among other things. The issues I mentioned all center on wellness. Therefore, this study will explore the biblical ideas behind well-being and how that compares to the worldly idea of it.

The study will be in four sessions for use through the four weeks of the month. The first session will define well-being and briefly discuss how both Scripture and the world address

them. The second session will center on the pillars of wellness and explore how Scripture looks at it. The third session will focus on emotional intelligence, with examples of some men and women in Scripture. The fourth will center on how Lutheran doctrine, as exemplified in the Small Catechism and all of the Book of Concord, can be helpful in our understanding of well-being.

Let's begin with a definition of well-being. Here is a basic definition from the Miriam Webster dictionary: the state of being happy, healthy, or prosperous. There are many ways to express it. **1) How would you express the meaning of well-being?**

Then there is a basic definition of wellness: the quality or state of being in good health, especially as an actively sought goal.

2) How do you compare the two words--wellness and well-being--and what would be your understanding of them?

Read John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

3) Who is speaking here?

4) What do these words tell us about how God cares for our well-being?

The world will tell us that we can improve ourselves by looking at ourselves in a way that is unrealistic. How often have you heard this? "*Believing in yourself is the first secret to success.*" Or something similar such as: "*Stop looking for the magic, you are it.*" Or a particularly disturbing one to me: "*I am myself. Whether I am good or bad, it is up to you. Decide that for yourself.*" The intention for many of these phrases is to boost self-confidence, which is a good trait to have.

However, as Christians, we must look at this from a different, better perspective. It might also be worth noting that the current philosophical mindset of today is highly fueled by an attitude about God as a being who created the earth and oversees human life on earth. God desires people to be good, nice, and fair to one another. The overall goal of life is to be happy and feel good about ourselves. God is involved in our lives only when we need Him to fix something, and when we die, if we have been good, we go to heaven.

It is most interesting that in a time when we have so many people believing God looks at us from a distance and we need to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps, we are facing record numbers of people--especially our younger people--who suffer from anxiety, depression, and addiction. And yet we are inundated with self-help therapies everywhere we look.

Read Psalm 29:11_(from the NASB): "The LORD will give strength to His people; The LORD will bless His people with peace."

5) According to this verse, where do peace and strength come from?

6) According to the world, where do peace and strength come from?

Read

- Psalm 51:5: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”
- Psalm 14:2-3: “The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.”
- Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”
- Ecclesiastes 9:3b: “Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.”
- Proverbs 14:12: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”

7) What do all of these verses say about mankind’s heart or inclinations?

8) How does that differ today’s way of thinking?

9) How does the difference between these two worldviews (the world vs Scripture) help us to understand the beginning of being well or having peace?

Read

- Proverbs 2:6: “For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.”
- Acts 4:11-12: “This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”
- Ephesians 2:1-3: “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

10) According to these verses, where does wisdom come from?

11) From where do we get our salvation?

12) What was our state of being before we became Christians?

Read

- Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."
- 1 Corinthians 1:30: "And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption."
- Romans 6:22: "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life."
- Romans 7:15-20: "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me."
- Romans 7:22-25: "For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin."

13) What is the state of our being after becoming Christian?

Summary

It is important that we constantly remind ourselves of who we are and where we look for our help in ALL THINGS, including our own well-being. Satan is always at work trying to separate us from the truth. As we will discuss further in the fourth session, our Lutheran doctrine as exemplified in Scripture and the Small and Large Catechisms, gives us an arsenal of knowledge concerning what it means to live in faith and how that can affect our well-being. The first step to understanding our purpose in life is to begin with the reality of our own sinful nature from conception. That lays the groundwork for understanding everything there is to understand about life and salvation. The next step is knowing that only Christ is our way to salvation. The next is to understand that putting our trust in Him and Him alone is the pathway to true healing and well-being. Of course, understanding these things is nothing without the practice of them. I like the terminology of "wholeheartedness" when speaking about well-being.

14) Discuss what it means to you to be wholehearted. Do you think it is a good word to describe well-being? What word or phrase might work better for you? Explain

why.

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, we give thanks to You for Your redeeming love in Jesus, Your dear Son. As we reflect on what it means to be wholehearted and have the well-being of a true Christian, give us the knowledge and foresight that we need through Your Holy Spirit. Help us to discern and know our sins and to repent of them so that we can have a clear conscience and be able to live a meaningful life that pleases you and serves our neighbor. Amen.