

Stewards of health

The rhythm of life
2 Corinthians 4:7-18

"The object of the spiritual journey is the healing of body, mind and spirit."
– Thomas Keating, Invitation to Love

"... and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless."
– 1 Thessalonians 5:23. (NRSV)

How do we find a healthy balance in our responsibility to care for our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit?

Talking about our bodies isn't the easiest conversation to have. Many people obsess about our physical nature to the point where all that matters is being buff and beautiful. On the other hand, others seem to give little, if any, attention to these "jars of clay," as Paul describes it in 2 Corinthians 4. How do we find a healthy balance in our responsibility to care for our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit? Knowing how important humor is to our well-being, have fun with the following creation story that has made its rounds on the Internet – author unknown.

In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth and populated the Earth with broccoli, cauliflower and spinach, green and yellow and red vegetables of all kinds, so Man and Woman would live long and healthy lives.

Then using God's great gifts, Satan created Ben & Jerry's ice cream and Krispy Kreme donuts. And Satan said, "You want chocolate with that?" And Man said, "Yes!" and Woman said, "As long as you're at it, add some sprinkles." They gained 10 pounds. And Satan smiled.

And God created the healthful food yogurt for Man and Woman to enjoy. And Satan brought forth white flour from the wheat and sugar from the cane and combined them. And Woman and Man – they both grew.

So God said, "Try my fresh green salad." And Satan presented Thousand Island dressing, buttery croutons and garlic toast on the side. And Man and Woman unfastened their belts.



Everence

God then said, "I have sent you heart-healthy vegetables and olive oil in which to cook them." And Satan brought forth deep-fried fish and chicken-fried steak so big it needed its own platter. And Man gained more weight, and his cholesterol went through the roof.

God then created a light, fluffy white cake, named it Angel Food Cake and said, "It is good." Satan then created chocolate cake and named it Devil's Food.

God then brought forth running shoes so that His children might lose those extra pounds. And Satan gave cable TV with a remote control so Man would not have to toil changing the channels. And Man and Woman laughed and cried before the flickering blue light and gained pounds.

Then God brought forth the potato, naturally low in fat and brimming with nutrition. And Satan peeled off the healthful skin and sliced the starchy center into chips and deep-fried them. And Man gained pounds.

God then gave lean beef so that Man might consume fewer calories and still satisfy his appetite. And Satan created McDonald's and its 99-cent double cheeseburger. Then said, "You want fries with that?" And Man replied, "Yes! And super size them!" And Satan said, "It is good." And Man went into cardiac arrest. God sighed and created quadruple bypass surgery.

Thinking holistically

I am reminded of the comforting words of a nutritionist friend of mine who speaks of *everyday* foods and *occasional* foods. Not all that is sweet and savory is bad. It is more a matter of how frequently we enjoy such foods. Donuts, cakes and fries can be part of our occasional diet, but as is the case in many aspects of life, we are called to self-discipline and moderation with such pleasures.

As a way of getting in touch with our physical selves, take two minutes to get in touch with your heartbeat (for those who cannot find your pulse, have a friend dial 911). Pause in silence as you feel the rhythm of life-giving blood flowing through you.

Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

- As you feel the pulse of your heartbeat, consider the wonderful gift of life and the amazing physical bodies we have been given by God.
- Consider how fragile and precious life is in this world. We are literally one heartbeat away from entering eternity.
- What other thoughts come to mind as you get in touch with this body rhythm?

Besides our heartbeat, there are other healthy rhythms associated with being balanced and whole. Take time to discuss other aspects of life that we need to keep in balance – spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, socially, etc.

Discussion question for reflection and sharing

How well-balanced are the following parts of your life?

- Work and play
- Laughter and contemplation
- Time alone and socializing with others
- Name additional complementary pairings

Mind, body and soul

Read together 2 Corinthians 4:7-18.

Just as simple jars of clay can be used in many ways from practical functions to decorative, so too our physical selves take on many natures. Being stewards of health includes healthy eating and exercise, but these two aspects of self-care alone do not fully make us whole.

Let's take some time to reflect on the ways in which we are "fearfully and wonderfully made." (Psalm 139:14) So often it is only when part of our being is out of sync that we take time to appreciate what being healthy really means.

Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

- Share together what comes to mind as you consider the physical limitations you are most in touch with today because of your own or a loved one's health challenge.
- As you consider the aging process and all that means, what concerns come to mind?
- Read Psalm 139:13-16 and consider what modern metaphors or images we might make today.

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. – 2 Corinthians 4:10

We are familiar with the idea of our bodies being a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), but how often do we consider what Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 4:10 as *revealing Jesus in our body*? Paul was probably more aware of his mortality and the fragile nature of life because he often suffered physically for being a disciple of Jesus. He saw his body as a means by which he gave testimony to his faith.

Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

Read 1 Corinthians 6:19 and compare to 2 Corinthians 4:10.

- How do these ideas written by Paul translate to our own day and time?
- In what ways do we view our bodies as a means by which Jesus is revealed?
- Read Romans 12:1-2 and reflect together on what it means to give our bodies as living sacrifices.

If we think of our body as a vessel created by God in our mother's womb (Psalm 139:13), we begin to comprehend that this body we call "ours" is really on loan. If we are created in the *image of God* (Genesis 1:26), we are in fact a reflection of God. It's not that we are called to be obsessed with being beautiful and buff, but there is an implied principle in this spiritual understanding that we are called to treat this physical body with honor and respect.

Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

Read Psalm 139:13 and Genesis 1:26.

- How would you describe the current cultural view of the physical body? In what ways is the cultural view of the body consistent or inconsistent with the biblical perspective?
- In light of Psalm 139, 2 Corinthians 4 and Genesis 1, what is the response we should make to the cultural messages we are receiving about the physical body?
- How does our body image translate to our feelings about our spiritual image? Is there a connection? Should there be?
- Does a positive or negative body image impact how we express ourselves spiritually to God or others?

Being stewards of health includes healthy eating and exercise, but these two aspects of self-care alone do not fully make us whole.

We are familiar with the idea of our bodies being a temple of the Holy Spirit, but how often do we consider what Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 4:10 as revealing Jesus in our body?

Health and attitude

Several years ago there was a show on TV called "Hee Haw." One of my favorite parts of that show was when several men with long, forlorn faces would come out and sing:

Gloom, despair and agony on me. Deep, dark depression, excessive misery. If it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all. Gloom, despair and agony on me.

The men would go on to sing about how bad their life was and conclude this sad saga by crying on each other's shoulders. For some reason, after watching this scene on the show each week, my own life didn't seem so bad. What strikes me as I think about my response to this comedy sketch is how much our attitude and outlook on day-to-day events can affect our overall view of life.

Take time to read the words of Paul from 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 and note the contrast in terms he uses in verses 8-9.

*Afflicted ... but not crushed,
Perplexed ... but not driven to despair,
Persecuted ... but not forsaken,
Struck down ... but not destroyed.*

Notice there are expressions of struggle – but also messages of hope. The song of this world is ultimately one of **gloom**, but the song of the church is ultimately one of **glory**. Life is filled with these contrasting, and sometimes polarizing, messages.

*The song of this world is ultimately one of **gloom**, but the song of the church is ultimately one of **glory**.*

Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (note the contrasts spoken of here).

- Who in our circle of acquaintances has a healthy attitude about aging – inwardly being renewed day by day (verse 16)?
- What are your fears about the aging process and the impact it may have on your body?

Finding alignment

We are a complex creation of interconnected parts all miraculously held together in this biological and chemical collection of organs, muscles and fluids. Each part of our being influences the others. We are more than the sum of our individual parts because within it all dwells the presence of our Creator – now is that amazing or what?

What should amaze us daily is how well it all works – even when individual parts may hurt or get out of balance. Being whole means being aware of interconnected internal and external, physical and intellectual, mortal and immortal aspects of our being.

Review the descriptions below on the Wellness Wheel (p. 31) and consider what areas may be in need of alignment and balance. Rather than being discouraged by what areas may be less than ideal, rejoice at how well we can function in spite of being less than perfect. No one is in perfect alignment, but we are able to use our areas of strength to help us in the areas where growth is needed.

Wellness wheel (see page 31)

Each of the spokes on the wheel represents one aspect of your health and wellness. Place a dot on each of the spokes indicating where you see yourself. When you have placed all the dots, draw a line connecting the dots. In the center circle, write a number from 1-10 indicating your current sense of closeness to God, with 1 being very distant and 10 being very close. Now connect the dots you placed on each spoke and see what kind of circle (or other shape) you create.

Discussion questions for reflection and sharing

- What does the shape you created by connecting the dots look like? Is it well-rounded, lopsided, perfectly aligned?
- What are your current areas of strength? What are your growth areas?
- If you were to identify one aspect of your personal health to work with this next month, what would it be? How will you work at strengthening this area?

Conclusion

- What new insights or valuable reminders have resulted from the discussion you shared as a group?
- How can you as a class work at supporting one another toward greater health and wholeness?
- Are there new initiatives that could come from this class and this discussion that could be taken to the broader congregation to encourage a stronger emphasis on health and wholeness? Brainstorm proactive ways you might help make a difference in this area in your congregation and maybe even in your broader community.

Additional reading and small group discussion resources

Chase-Ziolek, Mary. *Health, Healing & Wholeness: Engaging Congregations in Ministries of Health*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005.

Lind, Mary Beth. *Simply in Season Children's Cookbook*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006.

Moser, Ingrid Friesen. *BodyTalk: Speaking the Words of Health*. Goshen, IN: Mennonite Mutual Aid, 2009.



Everence

Everence helps individuals, organizations and congregations integrate finances with faith through a national team of advisors and representatives. Everence offers banking, insurance and financial services with community benefits and stewardship education. Everence is a ministry of Mennonite Church USA and other churches.

Everence

1110 N. Main St.
P.O. Box 483
Goshen, IN 46527
(800) 348-7468
(574) 533-9511

www.everence.com

Everence offers credit union services that are federally insured by NCUA. We also offer securities and other products that are not federally insured and are subject to loss of principal. All products not available in all states.

Student handout

Stewards of health

The rhythm of life

2 Corinthians 4:7-18

Getting started: Thinking holistically

As a way of getting in touch with our physical selves, take two minutes to get in touch with your heartbeat (for those who cannot find your pulse, have a friend call 911). Pause in silence as you feel the rhythm of life-giving blood flowing through you.

- As you feel the pulse of your heartbeat, consider the wonderful gift of life and the amazing physical bodies we have been given by God.
- Consider how fragile and precious life is in this world. We are literally one heart-beat away from entering eternity.
- What other thoughts come to mind as you get in touch with this body rhythm?

Besides our heartbeat, there are other healthy rhythms associated with being balanced and whole. Take time to discuss the other aspects of life that we need to keep in balance – spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, socially, etc.

How well-balanced are the following parts of your life?

- Work and play
- Laughter and contemplation
- Time alone and socializing with others
- Name additional complementary pairings



Everence

Mind, body and soul

Read together 2 Corinthians 4:7-18.

Just as simple jars of clay can be used in many ways from practical functions to decorative, so too our physical selves take on many natures. Being stewards of health includes healthy eating and exercise, but these two aspects of self-care alone do not fully make us whole. Reflect on the many ways in which we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” (Psalm 139:14)

- Share together what comes to mind as you consider the physical limitations you are most in touch with today because of your own or a loved one’s health challenge.
- As you consider the aging process and all that means, what concerns come to mind?
- Read Psalm 139:13-16 and consider what modern metaphors or images we might make today.

We are familiar with the idea of our bodies being a temple of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 6:19), but how often do we consider what Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 4:10 as *revealing Jesus in our body*?

Read 1 Corinthians 6:19 and compare to 2 Corinthians 4:10.

- How do these ideas written by Paul translate to our own day and time?
- In what ways do we view our bodies as a means by which Jesus is revealed?
- Read Romans 12:1-2 and reflect together on what it means to give our bodies as living sacrifices.

Read Psalm 139:13 and Genesis 1:26.

- How would you describe the current cultural view of the physical body? In what ways is the cultural view of the body consistent or inconsistent with the biblical perspective?
- In light of Psalm 139, 2 Corinthians 4 and Genesis 1, what is the response we should make to the cultural messages we are receiving about the physical body?
- How does our body image translate to our feelings about our spiritual image? Is there a connection? Should there be?
- Does a positive or negative body image impact how we express ourselves spiritually to God or others?

Health and attitude

Several years ago there was a show on TV called “Hee Haw.” One of my favorite parts of that show was when several men with long, forlorn faces would come out and sing:

Gloom, despair and agony on me. Deep, dark depression, excessive misery. If it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all. Gloom, despair and agony on me.

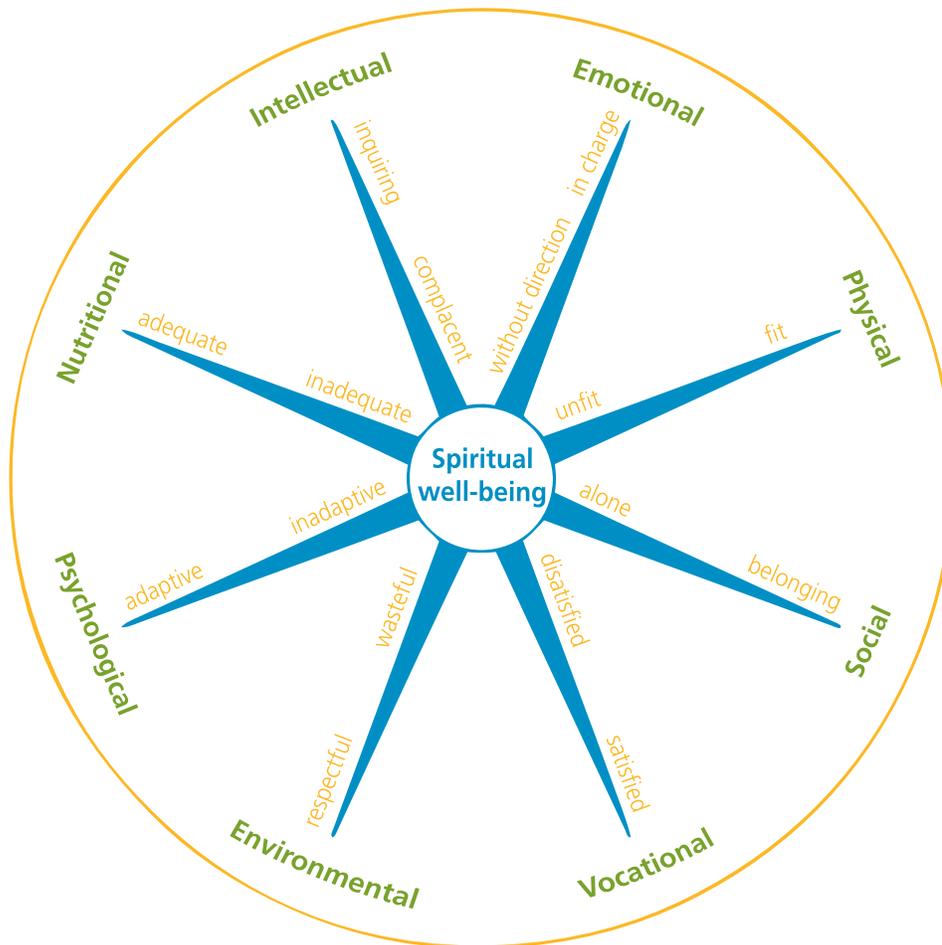
Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 and note the contrast in terms he uses in verses 8-9.

*Afflicted ... but not crushed,
Perplexed ... but not driven to despair,
Persecuted ... but not forsaken,
Struck down ... but not destroyed.*

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (note the contrasts spoken of here).

- Who in our circle of acquaintances has a healthy attitude about aging – *inwardly being renewed day by day* (verse 16)?
- What are your fears about the aging process and the impact it may have on your body?

Each of the spokes on the wheel represents one aspect of your health and wellness. Place a dot on each of the spokes indicating where you see yourself. When you have placed all the dots, draw a line connecting the dots. In the center circle, write a number from 1-10 indicating your current sense of closeness to God, with 1 being very distant and 10 being very close. Now connect the dots you placed on each spoke and see what kind of "circle" or other shape you create.



- What does the shape you created by connecting the dots look like? Is it well-rounded, lopsided, perfectly aligned?
- What are your current areas of strength? What are your growth areas?
- If you were to identify one aspect of your personal health to work with this next month, what would it be? How will you work at strengthening this area?

Conclusion

- What new insights or valuable reminders have resulted from the discussion you shared as a group?
- How can you as a class work at supporting one another toward greater health and wholeness?
- Are there new initiatives that could come from this class and this discussion that could be taken to the broader congregation to encourage a stronger emphasis on health and wholeness? Brainstorm proactive ways you might help make a difference in this area in your congregation and maybe even in your broader community.

Additional reading and small group discussion resources

Chase-Ziolek, Mary. *Health, Healing & Wholeness: Engaging Congregations in Ministries of Health*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005.

Lind, Mary Beth. *Simply in Season Children's Cookbook*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006.

Moser, Ingrid Friesen. *BodyTalk: Speaking the Words of Health*. Goshen, IN: Mennonite Mutual Aid, 2009.



Everence helps individuals, organizations and congregations integrate finances with faith through a national team of advisors and representatives. Everence offers banking, insurance and financial services with community benefits and stewardship education. Everence is a ministry of Mennonite Church USA and other churches.

Everence
1110 N. Main St.
P.O. Box 483
Goshen, IN 46527
(800) 348-7468
(574) 533-9511

www.everence.com

Everence offers credit union services that are federally insured by NCUA. We also offer securities and other products that are not federally insured and are subject to loss of principal. All products not available in all states.