Wellness Study Guide

based on

Ten Commandments to be Well

Developed for the Wellness Ministry of the Church of the Brethren by

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Bethany Church of the Brethren
Farmington, Delaware
2008
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by Phyllis Dodd

Produced by the Wellness Ministry of the Church of the Brethren, a collaboration of the Caring Ministries, Brethren Benefit Trust, and the Church of the Brethren General Board.

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This document in its entirety and many other resources are also available from the Caring Ministries website, www.brethren-caregivers.org.

For more information and additional resources for the Wellness Ministry, contact:
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# Wellness Study Guide

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction Preparation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this series of workshops based on the Ten Commandments to be Well, published recently by the Caring Ministries of the Church of the Brethren. We are glad that you have decided to explore the different dimensions of wellness and how this holistic view may strengthen you as you seek to live faithfully, healthier, and happier. We hope that you will find this curriculum helpful in supporting one another with your personal goals.

This course was developed to have eleven classes all together, including an introductory class. Meetings may be held weekly or bi-weekly using the Ten Commandments to be Well, and the materials provided can be used for either 60 or 90 minute sessions.

During the introductory class you may want to have each participant complete the “Dimensions of Wellness” activity which follows in this section. The first half of each subsequent class should allow time for the group to come together, hear general information on that session’s topic, with a story or other activity and selected discussion questions to follow.

The second half of the class provides time to explore scripture and discuss that scripture as it relates to the topic of the session. You may ask individuals to bring in their own scripture or you may use the selected scripture as a point of discussion.

Each session should incorporate how food, exercise, and prayer/study disciplines connect us to God, our families, and the extended global community. The class should challenge everyone to think about how self care is crucial to our own personal feeling of well-being and God’s plan for us. The sessions will also give everyone an opportunity to reflect, pray, and dialogue together. The support of a group or individual person is critical as we challenge ourselves to a new path of well-being.
PREPARATION

Following are several things you may want to do or look for in preparation for the series:

• Purchase a simple journal for each participant, or ask each to bring one to class.

• Consider asking members of the class to look for scriptures relating to the topic for the next week, in addition to the selected scripture.

• Classes 1 and 2 – The group leader can bring snacks the first week; for the second and subsequent weeks, ask each group member to select and bring a snack that costs NO MORE than 50 cents, to be shared at the table with the group.


• Class 6 – You may need a small box of raisins.

• Class 7 – Show #10 video (10 minutes) “Lump”, by Rob Bell from the Nooma Series and lead into discussion. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Call 877-776-7755 or check out www.nooma.com for this resource.

• Class 7 – Video Clip from Ted & Lee (something humorous) (Ted Swartz and Lee Eshleman at www.tedandlee.com


• Class 10 – Show “Noise” by Rob Bell from the Nooma Series #5 (in a series of 10; only 2 minutes 34 seconds long). Go to www.nooma.com to see clips and get information about this vignette, or call (877) 776-7755.
Except for our genetic makeup, every individual has influence over every area that can lead to illness. The chart below from MMA (Mennonite Mutual Aid) shows eight dimensions in wellness:

SPIRITUAL
Includes faith, prayer, meditation
Professing personal faith and belief in Christ
Making choices from a faith commitment perspective
Accepting personal responsibility for those choices

MENTAL
Includes intellect, will, and feelings
Growth in self-understanding affirmation
Learning to express anger constructively
Responding positively to life experiences

RELATIONAL
How well do we juggle family, church, community?
Building strong relationships within family, church and community
Sharing in one-to-one and group situations

VOCATIONAL
How do we handle our finances, work, leisure?
Finding satisfaction in a chosen vocation
Balancing work, service and leisure time

PHYSICAL
Relates to exercise and nutrition
Respecting, accepting and enjoying the body
Providing sufficient exercise and nutrition for daily fitness

PSYCHOLOGICAL
How easy is it for us to change? To deal with stress?
Possessing inner peace for times of change and crisis
Coping with daily pressures and expectations

ENVIRONMENTAL
Includes issues of resources, pollution, etc.
Accepting responsibility for wise use of earth’s resources
Developing personal strategies to reduce consumption

SOCIAL
Includes our priorities and our values
Living with a sense of purpose and direction
Having clear personal values and priorities
To test your level(s) of wellness, place a dot on each line on the chart below, indicating where you feel you are right now. The top characteristic in each circle would be the goal, e.g. for Spirituality ‘Active’ is what you are aiming for. If you feel you are at or close to this goal, your dot should be placed on the line close to the center goal of "Personal Well Being". Then connect the dots. The distance between your line and the ideal hub indicates your opportunity for growth. You may want to have someone who knows you well discuss your assessments with you.

Reprinted with permission from MMA
All those seeking wellness as Christians need the challenge to renewal and wholeness. Have the group read the following statements together or one by one:

Wellness is...

- Experiencing inner peace and harmony, even during times of misfortune
- Expressing emotions in ways that tell others how you feel
- Knowing how to build and keep healthy relationships with others
- Recognizing needs you have and ways to meet them
- Engaging in meaningful activities that match your values and beliefs
- Learning to know your physical body: its needs, rhythms, signals
- Seeing life as an opportunity for growth and service, rather than as full of problems
- Believing you have the strength and ability to grow and serve
- Knowing you are an interesting, vital person with freedom to act and enjoy life
- Being in charge of your life rather than just reacting to situations around you
- Taking responsibility for your personal health
- Having a sense of purpose which guides you in making decisions
- Recognizing how others can help you, individually or in groups
- Having a plan to continue working at your personal well-being
- Keeping faith in God as central in your activities and relationships

Wellness is a choice. As Christians, we begin the journey toward wellness with special advantages. We have the message of the New Testament. We have the strength and warmth of the congregation to support us.
SESSION 1:

LIVE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Preparation for this week:

✓ Purchase journals to hand out to participants if they don’t already have one.
✓ Pens or pencils
✓ This week, the group leader can bring in a healthy snack to share with the group.
✓ For next week and subsequent weeks, ask each group member to choose/bring a snack that costs NO MORE than 50 cents, to be shared at the table with the group.

PART ONE: Sharing/Educational Component

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Psalm 23:5-6

Opening Prayer

Introduction
One aspect of seeking wellness is to remember that we are living in the presence of God; nothing is hidden and only God knows our deepest intentions. The questions is, how do we “feel” the presence of God, how do we “see” God in our everyday life, how do we “hear” or “touch” his presence? The spiritual journey can affect our health and wellness but perhaps experiencing the spiritual journey is the one thing missing in your life. This is the time to be mindful of God’s presence, remembering that God is there with you all the way.

Wellness, and a healthy lifestyle, is not something we can purchase, it is something we must achieve for ourselves. If you believe God is the giver of life then the stewardship of our bodies and our spirit is a personal responsibility. Self responsibility and self care are something that the Christian should accept gladly. As we accept this responsibility to strive for wellness as a person, we also accept responsibility to work together with our brothers and sisters in helping each other towards our goals. Who do you know who can walk along with you in this journey?
**Educational Component**

Pass out journals. Suggest that everyone begin a Wellness Journal during these eleven weeks. Journaling means keeping notes about thoughts as one goes through the discussions and studies. Watch where you begin, set goals, and follow progress.

Being whole does not mean being perfect. We can work on completeness, we can expand and strive to reach our health potential: physically, emotionally, and spiritually. But it does not mean that we will be perfect. Each person has equal and indivisible dimensions of body, mind, and spirit and each affects the other. How do we become whole in body, mind, and spirit?

Different approaches to living in the presence of God:

- Take spirituality seriously, no matter how far along you are in your spiritual journey.
- Be responsible and take charge of your spiritual well-being.
- Explore and heal religious wounds, if there are any.
- Move forward and put healthy standards into practice.
- Be prepared to take time to delve deeply into God’s teaching and to enhance the inner peace that you find in God.
- Gather together with others of like-minded seekers.
- Recognize signs of dysfunction early and try to resolve it in a healthy way.
- Monitor your progress.
- Be in the presence of God; let Him guide you.

**Sharing time**

**Questions for discussion**

- What does it mean to you to be present with God?
- Name an experience that has brought you closest to God.
- How does spirituality benefit your life physically, professionally, socially, and personally?
- How does being in the presence of God relate to your prayer life?
- Are you committed to the health of your soul?

As discussed in the overview, each aspect of our lives affects every other. Our thoughts and emotions influence the health of our bodies, and the health of our bodies can affect our emotions and thoughts. Feeling at one with God can be the most fulfilling healing you will find. Living in His presence can be the healing touch that you are looking for. I heard somewhere that oneness with God is like a marriage; there is nothing as healthy as a good one and nothing as unhealthy as a dysfunctional one.
ASSIGNMENT IN SUPPORTING EACH OTHER IN CHANGE (optional)

To begin our quest to living in the presence of God, think about what you need to do to achieve that goal. Is it the need to open your heart, to open your mind, to listen for God to speak to you? Would a spiritual partner help you seek guidance and accountability in this quest? If you think a partner would be helpful, ask someone who you believe would support your goal toward complete health of body, mind, and spirit.

Tips on having a spiritual partner: Find a time to talk to your partner and choose an area in your life that you feel needs change. Could it be that you need more prayer time during the day, quiet time in the evening, more time throughout our busy days? Then each week call the person to report on how you are doing and to check on how the other person is doing. It is important not to badger each other, however. When thinking about change, realize that it is different for you alone to set a goal than to have someone else hold you accountable for that goal. Do not allow yourself to resist change in your life.

*What would you like to change?*

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

*Who can help you be accountable?*

________________________________________________________________________

Your signature                                        Partner’s signature
PART TWO: Bible Study

LECTIO DIVINA (10 minutes – optional)

This is a way to open your Bible study with contemplation and focus. Read the listed scripture and follow these steps. Be aware that this exercise could take up to at least 10 minutes. You may want to print out the scripture ahead of time so that each person has a copy. Have someone read the passage aloud. Have each participant to listen for a word or phrase that attracts. Each person quietly calls out the word or phrase. Then, ask the participants how the passage connects to one’s own life. Listen for what Christ is calling you to be or do.

Selected Scripture

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Psalm 23:5-6

Additional Scriptures:

Psalm 139:7-18 Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?
1 Timothy 4:8 Godliness has value for all things
Galatians 5:22-6:5, 9-10 Supporting Each other in Change
Psalm 46:1-3 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
Psalm 46:10-11 Be still and know that I am God!
Romans 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
Psalm 90:1 Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations

Note: The group leader can have the group participants pan through the Psalms and look at all the emotions David (the psalmist) is sharing with God. It’s like an ongoing conversation with God. God knows when we are having a bad day or doubts, joys, or jubilation. Clearly the psalmist believes in the presence of God. If not there would be no Psalms.

Remind participants to bring in a snack next week that costs no more than 50 cents—however small.

Closing Prayer
Encourage all participants to add to the closing prayer based on the topic of each session.
SESSION 2:

BE THANKFUL AND SHARE IT

“Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, Rejoice!”
Philippians 4:4

Preparation for this week:
- Paper and pencils or personal journals that were distributed the previous week.
- Be prepared for serving the snacks that participants will bring in today.
- For the remaining weeks, have a sign up sheet for those who would like to bring a healthy snack for the group.

PART ONE: Sharing/Educational Component

Opening Prayer

Introduction
If anyone has traveled to a third world nation (or even to the inner city), you have seen social and economic differences and that some individuals are more fortunate than others. In third world countries people are content with much less. If we could be more content with less, we would have more to share. It seems the more we have, the more driven we are at getting more. We become so busy getting more and more, but we become less grateful! We expect more out of life than we have. It is humbling and good for us to be more giving.

This session speaks to our sense of gratitude for the small things in life and how this affects our health. Being thankful for what we have is one of the key ingredients on our path toward happiness. So often we lose sight of what we have to be grateful for – our health, friends, material comforts, and most important, the gift of life itself.

Educational Component
Talk briefly about what being thankful means to you. Talk about how life can be more fulfilling and rewarding when we praise God and share our abundance. Give a personal experience if possible.

Every situation in life, even an apparent tragedy, has a “silver lining.” Giving thanks invokes this positive aspect and helps us realize its existence. Even
painful experiences become bittersweet when we understand how to accept God’s plan for us.

So what does being thankful have to do with our health? In working with many people who are depressed, I have found that if they can share friendship, abundance, talents, etc. with others they become less stressed and less depressed. Volunteering is a good way to beat depression. Sharing sufferings and joy, eating and worshiping together, and learning from each other can make a big difference in one’s life and in others.

One example of sharing is the sharing of food. Sharing food represents our desire to be part of a world where everyone has a place at the table, and all have enough. At this time have everyone pass around their portion of snack, no matter how small it is, and partake in the experience. Talk about the poverty in other countries, the richness we experience, and how we can learn to appreciate the little things in life. Have the group share through this symbol (“less is more”) and discuss how it feels. Compare this with the communion service as an example and symbol of God’s overwhelming love, poured out for us.

**Group Discussion**

Have paper available for people to make notes or have them use their journals:

- When do you find it easiest to be thankful? Most difficult? What conditions, physical or spiritual, cramp your capacity for thankfulness? What would need to change in your life for you to live thankfully? Journal on these questions, then plan to make one of the changes you identified.
- When have you shared something with a stranger or an enemy?
- Take a look at your life. Are you giving thanks for all your experiences?
- If you are reacting negatively to a specific situation, try a different approach. What would that be?
- Give thanks for a condition being just the way it is, then observe what happens. In other words, instead of trying to reject the situation, embrace it. Try to accept it as it is. As your attitude about the condition changes, the circumstances surrounding it will be transformed. Such is a miraculous power of giving thanks for all things.

One way to be more thankful is to use affirmations, which are ways to help move toward acceptance and change. One way to use affirmations is to take one sentence and repeat it over and over in your mind. Some people tape the affirmation to their bathroom mirror and repeat it every day as they look in the mirror. Positive affirmations help us change our thinking about ourselves or our situations, in a positive way. Thank God for all the blessings that have been bestowed upon us!
Possible affirmations:

“I give thanks for every experience that I have.”
“I say “yes” to life as I experience it.”
“I have faith things will work out.”
“Every experience in my life brings me closer to God.”
“In every aspect of my life, I am truly blessed.”
“I am a loving, caring, giving person.”
“Every moment is a gift from God.”

Write your own affirmation in your journal at this time.

Optional
Play the Iona Community song, “God Bless to Us Our Bread”.

PART TWO: Bible Study

“Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, Rejoice!”
Philippians 4:4

Additional scriptures
Mark 14:12-25  The Last Supper
Luke 24:13-35  The meal following the walk to Emmaus
Acts 2:43-47  The early church sharing joyful meals
Psalm 107  Give thanks to the Lord for He is good
I Corinthians 11:17-33  The Corinthian supper
I Corinthians 15:57  Thanks be to God. He gives us victory
I Thessalonians 5:18  Give thanks in all circumstances

Closing Prayer
Give thanks for a supportive community of faith. Ask God for a more generous heart. Give thanks for each other’s gifts. Ask God to nurture faith communities around the world. Give thanks for your health and ability to be a friend to others.
SESSION 3:

KEEP THE SABBATH AND GET PROPER REST

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy”
Exodus 20:8

PART ONE: Sharing/Educational Component

Opening prayer

Introduction
The Sabbath means to cease or desist. Sabbath’s origin comes from Genesis 2:1-3 where God speaks of ceasing from the work of creation on the seventh day and declaring it holy. Observing the Sabbath included a need to give servants, strangers, and work animals an opportunity to rest.

Our culture has become comfortable in running constantly. We have a “hurry sickness” in that greed has given us luxuries and no free time to enjoy them. More than ever we are in need of a time of rest and reflection, a time to de-stress, a time to pray or meditate, a time to rejuvenate. Our society seems to be in a constant state of agitation and unrest. We lack the time necessary to “smell the roses”, breathe deeply, relax and take time to think rationally and constructively.

Educational Component
Talk briefly about what keeping the Sabbath means to you. Talk about how life can be more fulfilling and rewarding when we get proper rest.

Rest is very important to our health. It has been said that we sleep on average ninety minutes less at night than we did a century ago. When we are tired and hurried, we become emotionally and physically drained. When we rest, we build up our strength. God set aside time for rest and worship. God is wonderful. God refreshes and renews our spirits. Do not neglect this.

We need physical rest, but we also need emotional rest. Jesus tells us that if we adapt to his way of life, he will give us rest from our burdens (Matthew 11:28).

Ways to avoid stress:

- Plan ahead
- Think about your priorities
- Change your lifestyle as necessary
- Nurture a relationship with a mentor or like-minded person. Have you been working with your spiritual partner? Successful relationships
(husbands and wives, family and friends) all require time, as does quality time with God in prayer and Bible study.
- Choose to spend your time wisely

Group discussion
- How does lack of rest affect your health?
- What do you think “time poverty” is?
- What things create more stress in our lives? How do we prevent this?
- How can we all slow down and “smell the flowers”?
- How does eating slowly make a difference?

Optional Assignment
Ask everyone to use their journals to write a few sentences about their efforts in changing their stressful, hurried, lifestyle to a “slower” lifestyle.

PART TWO: Bible Study

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy”
Exodus 20:8

- The Sabbath was a day set aside for rest and worship.
- God commanded a Sabbath because human beings need to spend unhurried time in worship and rest each week.
- A God who is concerned enough to provide a day each week for us to rest is indeed wonderful.
- To observe a regular time of rest and worship in our fast-paced world demonstrates how important God is to us, and gives us the extra benefit of refreshing our spirits.
- Don’t neglect God’s provision.

Additional Scriptures

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philippians 4:11-13</td>
<td>How to avoid stress...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrews 4:1-13</td>
<td>The Sabbath rest of God</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matthew 11:28</td>
<td>Jesus tells us he will give us rest from our burdens through obedience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Genesis 2:3</td>
<td>God blessed the Sabbath day, and sanctified it, because in it He had rested</td>
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<td>Isaiah 58:13-14</td>
<td>Sabbath as a Holy Day offering great reward</td>
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<td>Matthew 12:1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exodus 33:13-16</td>
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Jesus was criticized by the Pharisees for healing and picking grain on the Sabbath. Is there a difference between the letter of the law and the spirit of the law? How do we keep it Holy? What won’t we do on Sunday?

Closing Prayer
SESSION 4:

LIVE “BY THE SWEAT OF YOUR BROW,”
AND GET PROPER EXERCISE

“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”
Genesis 3:19

PART ONE:  Sharing/Educational Component

Opening prayer

Introduction
Review the previous week, noting highlights. Allow group members to talk about an affirmation or a goal that they may have set for themselves. Which of the areas of discussion have intrigued or energized you into making changes? What direction do you sense God nudging you to move in the coming months?

We need to talk about the road to wellness as much as we do about our illnesses. We have the knowledge and insight to care for ourselves, yet it still seems to be difficult to do so on our own. Are we justifying our bad habits and going to great lengths to justify what we do or don’t do? Let us take time now to make a change!

Educational Component
Give a personal example about what keeping fit means to you. Talk about how life can be more fulfilling and rewarding when we shape up through exercise.

Some have found that exercise is a fantastic preventive medicine. It helps prevent hypertension, chronic fatigue, obesity and arteriosclerosis. Regular exercise contributes to strengthening the cardiovascular system and heart muscles. It can keep blood pressure down and at normal ranges. Exercise also sustains other systems such as our body weight, and increases vital lung capacity. It helps regulate cholesterol and body circulation. It increases the blood supply to the brain and improves mental alertness. Perhaps it can even delay the aging process. Our muscles become more sound and our body posture and appearance improves.

Exercise promotes optimal health and is the best way to keep the body in good physical and emotional condition. It is also a key ingredient in therapy for the ill. It improves the quality of life and contributes significantly to health and happiness. Regular exercise contributes to our overall well-being
by improving self-esteem and energy for daily activities. It may help relieve tension and stress, enabling us to be more efficient on the job and at home. It can help us recover from illnesses easier. It helps us become more alert and also can enhance our ability to sleep at night.

So if exercise and hard work is so beneficial to our health, why do we neglect to have a physical exercise plan? It is important to begin an exercise program with positive reasons, attitudes and goals. Without these, we will tend to lose interest and exercise could cause additional stress.

The greater the variety of exercise activity included in your program, the more likely you are to continue. Whatever types of exercise are finally selected, begin slowly and practice temperance. Overdoing it could produce negative results and cause loss of interest. Check with your doctor before beginning and start with a minimum amount of time – every other day for 5 to 15 minutes depending on the specific exercise selected. With positive results, slowly increase the length of time and number of times you exercise. Make it fun. Share the time with others, but keep the competitive aspects to a minimum. Enjoy attaining those goals. Talk about your goals with your wellness partner.

Group Discussion

- How do we feel when someone says “don’t eat too much”? Do we consider that an insult or an indication of caring?
- Share with others ways in which you have successfully exercised.
- List positive reasons for exercising (to relax, to discover ourselves, to become spiritually aware, to find contentment, to build a more wholesome lifestyle, protecting ourselves from a heart attack or losing weight, to relieve tension, etc.)
- Most of us recognize that physical inactivity is linked to stress, depression, and degenerative diseases. How does exercise give us the incentive to be renewed in body, mind and spirit?
- Is there a moral imperative in caring for what God has given you?
- Compare exercise to conditioning a well-run machine. Are we an expensive race car running on one cylinder and bald tires?

OPTIONAL

Walking

Walking remains the most common exercise for many Americans. People who walk regularly tend to live longer and enjoy life more for these reasons:

1. Walking uses calories – a way to get or stay lean
2. Walking helps clean out your arteries (improves HDL)
3. Walking lowers blood pressure, which reduces risk of heart attacks and strokes
4. Walking helps control your blood sugar
5. Walking conditions your heart; your resting heart rate decreases
6. Walking stimulates your bone marrow
7. Walking improves other physical functions, including strengthening leg muscles
8. Walking promotes the deposition of calcium in the bones, making stronger bones and reducing bone tendency to de-mineralize
9. Walking is a useful tranquilizer
10. Walking energizes mental functioning
11. Walking is an efficient form of exercise

Download and distribute a chart listing the amount of calories burned in a variety of activities. An excellent list may be found at www.nutristrategy.com. Click on the box "Calories Burned Doing Exercise".

**PART TWO: Bible Study**

“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

*Genesis 3:19*

So what does the Bible say about hard work and exercise? It is clear that we are to take good care of our bodies (I Corinthians 6:19-20). Ephesians 5:29 tells us, “After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it...” The Bible also warns us against gluttony (Deuteronomy 21:20, Proverbs 23:2, 2 Peter 1:5-7, 2 Timothy 3:1-9, 2 Corinthians 10:5). At the same time, the Bible warns against vanity (1 Samuel 16:7, Proverbs 31:30; 1 Peter 3:3-4).

What does the Bible say about health? Be healthy! How do we achieve that goal? By engaging in moderate exercise and eating reasonably. That is the biblical pattern of health and exercise.

**Proverbs 13:4** – The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied. (If diligence brings wealth what does laziness bring?)

**Proverbs 19:15** – Laziness brings on deep sleep, and the shiftless man goes hungry. (If you are lazy, what can you expect?)

**Mathew 25:41** – Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.

**Romans 7:15** - We often find ourselves bound in our own perplexing struggle of “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (challenge the group with this one).

**1 Corinthians 6:19-20** Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own. You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.
Romans 6:12 -14 – Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

Closing Prayer
Pray for the strength to not settle for less. Pray for God to give you meaningful work. Pray that you will never tire from forgiving one another. Pray that God will help you restore this fine-tuned machine for the Lord’s service. Pray for God’s peace as you become transformed.
SESSION 5:

SIMPLIFY YOUR DIET – SMALLER PORTIONS, GOOD CHOICES

“Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see. So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.”

Daniel 1:12b-15

PART ONE: Sharing/Educational Component

Opening prayer

Introduction

Think about how our culture has affected our decision-making when it comes to food intake. Almost all of our holidays and special family get-togethers involve the over-indulgence of food. Food is associated with wellness, abundance, wealth, and gluttony. Our culture, through all its advertising and television, endorses the use of food to make us “feel” better, to celebrate the family and to celebrate the holidays.

We are constantly bombarded with advertisements, through the media or just by riding down the road, encouraging us to eat, indulge, and splurge. The food distributors entice our food purchases with toys and colors. The food industry tries to sneak sugar into food as often as possible. Why? Because the taste of sugar is addicting; you’ll tend to eat more of that product if it’s sweetened. The food manufacturers want to sell you more food and they don’t care about obesity. Added sugar tends to make you eat more food; for example, that’s why there’s so much sugar in ketchup and mayonnaise. Our nation tends to put simple carbohydrates into the form of salty snacks which are empty calories. Put them together with fats and it is a combo that can hurt more than help.

Educational Component

Talk briefly about what “simplifying your diet” means to each participant. Talk about how life can be more fulfilling and rewarding when we simplify our diet and use smaller portions.
According to many nutrition professionals, the most important things you can do for your health are:

1. Keep your weight in the healthy range by keeping meals simple, with fewer choices. Try fasting once per week especially before a big meal. Take smaller bites and savor each bite. Thank God for His goodness.
2. Replace saturated fats and trans fats with unsaturated fats.
3. Substitute whole grain carbohydrates for those made with refined grains. Whole grains protect against diabetes and heart disease, improve intestinal health, and may reduce cancer risks. To better understand the role of carbohydrates in the diet, see Willett’s *Eat, Drink, and Be Healthy* (2001, pp. 85-100).
4. Let people who are serving food know ahead of time what foods you can or cannot eat, so that you don’t offend them. They are usually ready to oblige.
5. Choose healthier sources of proteins. If you eat meat, choose the most nutritious options with the least amount of saturated fat and watch your portions. Use chicken or turkey instead of beef in dishes where either will do. Increase your intake of salmon, tuna, or other fish. Try tofu.
6. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables; you can add as many of these to your diet as you like. It’s OK to try new foods or dishes, just learn to spread them out over several meals, not all at one time. And you don’t have to have meat at every meal!
7. If family get-togethers are always centered around food, encourage a physical activity like skiing or bike riding, or a service project. Include exercise in your goal to avoid large meals.
8. Try switching to organic vs. non-organic produce, eggs, meat, and dairy. Organic milk is the healthiest and most important change you can make for your family. It contains no pesticides, growth hormones, or antibiotics. (This is especially important for children who have ADHD or autism.)
9. Find out how others eat who are starving, as well as those who live in your area who live on a very low income. Put yourself in their shoes and experience their reality.

**Group Discussion**

- Name ways you have been able to simplify your food intake and meals.
- How are our faith life and our food life connected? (Leviticus 11:1-12)
- How does our culture and upbringing determine our beliefs and decisions about food and eating?
- Where do you eat? Make a list of all the settings where you consume food. Which ones encourage you to eat well? Which ones discourage you?
- What helps and supports us in making good choices?
- What changes will you make in your eating habits?
Optional Activity

Once a week, have a meal of beans and rice. (Or better yet, eat beans and rice three times a day for one week as many do in Latin America). Focus on its simplicity and remember much of the world lives on beans and rice. We are among the wealthy that have both and can pick and choose what we feel like eating. Many are lucky if they have a meal at all.

Eat simply so others can simply eat!

We lose track of how our demand for great variety in the grocery stores contributes to others having less. Consider how much food we waste.

PART TWO: Bible Study

LECTIO DIVINA (10 minutes – optional)

This is a way to open your Bible study with contemplation and focus. Read the listed scripture and follow these steps. Be aware that this exercise could take up to at least 10 minutes. You may want to print out the scripture ahead of time so that each person has a copy. Have someone read the passage aloud. Have each participant to listen for a word or phrase that attracts. Each person quietly calls out the word or phrase. Then, ask the participants how the passage connects to one’s own life. Listen for what Christ is calling you to be or do.

Selected Scripture

“Lo, everyone who thirsts,  
Come to the waters.  
And you who have no money,  
Come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
Without money and without price.  
Why do you spend your money on that which is not bread?  
And your labor for that which does not satisfy?  
Listen, carefully and eat what is good  
And your soul will delight in the richest of fare.”

Isaiah 55: 1-2

Additional Scriptures:

Daniel 1-12b-15 - Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see. So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days
they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.

- As God’s people we may adjust to our culture as long as we do not compromise God’s laws.
- Daniel and his friend learned all they could about the new culture so they could do their work with excellence.
- Culture need not be God’s enemy.
- If it does not violate his commands, it can aid in accomplishing His purpose. We who follow God are free to be competent leaders in our culture, but we are required to pledge our allegiance to God first.

Matthew 26:26  This is the blood of the covenant....
Acts 10: 9-15  Peter goes into a trance and sees heaven open... “Get up Peter, kill and eat”.
John 4: 32-38  The food that Jesus was speaking about was his spiritual nourishment.

Closing Prayer
Lord, help us to remember all who labored to bring us our food. Help us to be a people that make no demands of our neighbors. Help us to be satisfied with smaller portions, so more can come to the table. Remind us when we have taken too much. Help us to treat others before we treat ourselves.

Reference
Willett, Walter C., M.D., *Eat, Drink, and Be Healthy*, chapter 5, pp 85-100.
SESSION 6:

LIVING IN THE PRESENT

“...but one thing I do; forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:13b-14

Preparation for today’s class – bring in a small box of raisins; only one raisin is needed for each person.

PART ONE: Sharing/Educational Component

Opening Prayer

Introduction
This session is about being internally authentic and genuine, appreciating the now, and living a satisfying life. As a therapist, I often ask the person what it is that they would like to achieve in therapy and many times the answer is, “I want to have peace in my life. I want to leave behind all the pain and suffering I have experienced in the past. I want to be able to accept where I am today and feel a peace that will carry me on to a better future.”

It is very easy to live life in the future or in the past. When we do this we constantly relive past sorrows, joys, or opportunities lost. Or, we yearn for better times to come. In both cases we fail to experience life as it happens.

Educational Component
Give a short explanation about what living in the present means to you. Talk about how life can be more fulfilling and rewarding when we focus on this moment. Talk about how Christian faith can help us deal with guilt, anxiety, and those things that we cannot change. Mention the power of forgiveness (the topic for next week). Be glad and appreciate people or events the way they are. Ask the group what it means to be mindful, or if anyone has tried yoga or other methods of emptying the mind and concentrating on the moment.

Have you tried to meditate or pray and found that your mind is wandering? You are thinking about other things—what happened yesterday, where you are going tomorrow, what your kids are doing right now.... Try this activity to help put your mind into the present, without thinking about what was or what should be. Clean your mind. Have everyone close their eyes.

Say to yourself: “I wonder what my next thought is going to be.” Then become very alert and wait for the next thought. Be like a cat watching a
mouse hole. What thought is going to come out of the mouse hole? Try it now.

Well?

Did you have to wait for quite a long time before a thought came in?

Exactly. As long as you are in a state of intense presence, you are free of thought. You are still, yet highly alert. The instant your conscious attention sinks below a certain level, thought rushes in. The mental noise returns; the stillness is lost. You are back in time.

To stay present in everyday life, it helps to be deeply rooted within yourself; otherwise, the mind, which has incredible momentum, will drag you along like a wild river.

Read Aloud:

TASTE THE SOUP
by Priscilla Normandy Greenwood

When we were babies no one had to teach us how to live in the moment. There were toes to discover and sunbeams to play with. Only the present moment existed.

Then we grew up and many of us forgot how to stay fully present. We started remembering the past and rehearsing the future. Then if we were lucky, someone or something reminded us that life can only be lived in the here and now.

For some of us, it was something we read in a book or heard in a workshop or a church. For me, the “aha” moment happened while I was having lunch with my good friend, Walt Busby.

It was the seventies and I was Director of the Blood Supply at the new blood bank which I had helped organize in Gainesville, Florida. It was having growing pains and I was complaining to Walter about the boss, the stress, and being on call for emergencies. Then I launched into what was happening with my new boyfriend, my mother, my children.

We had both ordered cucumber soup, a first for me, and I barely noticed that Walter wasn’t eating his. I was too busy going on and on about me, me, me. I was devouring the soup and talking non-stop between gulps.

I started to share my upcoming vacation plans when Walter gently interrupted me to say:

“I get so lonely when I take you to lunch.”
I was stunned.

What do you mean, “I said, I’m right here.”

“No, you’re not. You’re at the blood bank. You’re with your boyfriend, your mother, and your kids. You’re on your vacation. You’re everywhere but here with me sharing this moment.”

I felt like crying for some reason. I didn’t know why. I told Walter I didn’t know what that meant, “to be in the moment.”

I was always remembering and reporting things that happened already or wondering about, rehearsing and planning for the future. Nothing much seems to happen in the moment. I will never forget his answer that changed my life.

“How’s your soup?”

“My soup?”

Why was he asking me about my soup in the middle of our conversation?

I thought for a second, and then answered truthfully, “I don’t know.”

“Taste it,” he said.

I did and almost gagged. It tasted awful!

“Yuk, that’s the worst-tasting soup I’ve ever had. I can’t eat that.”

“I know,” he smiled. “It’s terrible. That’s way I didn’t eat mine. I watched you mindlessly eating a bowl of soup while you were so busy being somewhere else. I couldn’t believe you actually liked the soup. You weren’t paying any attention to it. That’s what being here now is about.”

Taste the soup.

Group Discussion

“Unease, anxiety, tension, stress, worry – all forms of fear – are caused by too much future, and not enough presence (in the present). Guilt, regret, resentment, grievances, sadness, bitterness, and all forms of non-forgiveness are caused by too much past, and not enough presence” (Tolle, 1999, p. 50).
• Give examples of those things that keep us from focusing on the present.
• How does our confidence in God affect how he has proved to be reliable and consistent in or lives and throughout history?
• The only time Jesus talks about the future is when he says “don’t worry about it” and the only time he uses past language is when he says “forget it”, the past is forgiven. How can you use His words to guide your life?
• How is assurance built on faith?
• How do we use forgiveness to allow us to live in the present?
• Have you ever truly experienced the “present”?

Optional Raisin Activity
Increasing mindfulness of eating may benefit those who are trying to make changes in their eating habits. Here is how to increase your awareness of the moment as you eat.

• Look at the food you are about to eat. Study it. Look at the color and the shape. Focus on what it consists of. Ask yourself, “Do I want to take this food into my body?”
• Pay close attention to every bite. Chew it slowly. Food eaten mindfully will be easier to digest and you will be less likely to overeat. Appreciate its texture, its smell, its taste.
• Just after eating, notice how the food you ate affects your digestive system. Does it agree with you?
• Appreciate that raisin’s goodness.
• Notice how you feel when eating a low fat meal versus a high fat meal...or a candy bar snack versus a raw vegetable snack.

PART TWO: Bible Study

“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”
Philippians 3: 13b-14

God exists in the present moment

As you read the following selected scriptures, be sure to put emphasis on the present tense that is used in all scriptures. For instance, in Psalm 46:10 it says: Be still and know that I am God. Tolle says in his book The Power of Now (1999) that there is no past or future in Christ (p. 86). And what is God’s self-definition in the Bible? Did God say “I have always been, and I always will be?” Of course not. That would have given reality to past and future. God said: “I am that I am” (Exodus 3:14). No time here, just presence.
Psalm 46:10  Be still and know that I am God

Other Selected Scripture
Matthew 12:50  Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother. (Be closer to God who is love.)
Exodus 3:14  I am who I am
Jeremiah: 29:11  I know the plans I have for you
Philippians 4:8  ...think about such things...
Isaiah 43:19  See, I am doing a new thing
Mathew 18:20  Where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them

Closing Prayer
To realize the value of ONE MONTH, ask a mother who gave birth to a premature baby;
To realize the value of ONE WEEK, ask the editor of a weekly newspaper;
To realize the value of ONE HOUR, ask the lovers who are waiting to meet;
To realize the value of ONE MINUTE, ask the person who missed the train;
To realize the value of ONE SECOND, ask the person who just avoided an accident;
To realize the value of ONE MILISECOND, ask the person who won a silver medal in the Olympics.

Yesterday is history, tomorrow is mystery, today, is a gift – that’s why it’s called the present.
SESSION 7:

FORGIVE AND BE FORGIVEN

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly beloved, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievance you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

Colossians 3: 12-13

PART ONE: Sharing/Educational Component

Opening Prayer

Introduction
What does forgiveness have to do with our good health? Many have said that it would take a lifetime to forgive someone who has hurt them. Yet Jesus says to “love your neighbor as yourself”. So who is our neighbor? Our neighbors reach all spectrums of society. We are called to reach out to those to whom we find it hard to relate...the stranger, the homeless, the criminal, even those closest to us. God teaches that we can’t limit who our neighbor is; our neighbor transcends all ethnicity, race, class, and borders. Just as Jesus died for our sins, we need to understand that we will be released, only if we can forgive and “let go” of the pain, bitterness and sin in our own hearts as well as other emotions that hold us hostage. It even means forgiving ourselves. The essential message is: forgive as the Lord forgave you. God accepts those who come to him, as well as those who haven’t yet discovered him. Perhaps it is up to us to be able to forgive, knowing that this is what God would do for us.

Educational Component
Give a personal example of forgiveness in your own life. How does the ability to forgive lighten your heart and keep us ultimately healthier?

In forgiving we sometimes feel vulnerable because it means trusting the other by risking being wronged again. To ask for forgiveness means there must be the willingness to affirm your repentance as genuine and to choose to “let go”.

Forgiveness means different things to different people. But, what is the cost of not forgiving? What is the effect of your not forgiving on the other person? Following are some thoughts about what forgiveness is and what it isn’t:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT FORGIVENESS IS:</th>
<th>WHAT FORGIVENESS IS NOT:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging what happened and your feelings</td>
<td>It is not forgetting what happened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letting go of your anger and bitterness</td>
<td>It is not attempting to undo what happened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusing to allow the person who hurt you to have power over you</td>
<td>It is not denying your feelings about what happened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something you do for yourself</td>
<td>It is not condoning or excusing what the other person did</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A choice</td>
<td>It is not the same as letting the other person get away with it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A necessary step in the process of healing</td>
<td>It does not necessarily mean you need to continue to have a relationship with the person you are forgiving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freeing yourself from the past</td>
<td>It does not mean your hurt over what happened will automatically go away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting that the past cannot be changed</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Being unwilling to wish harm on the other person</td>
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Forgiveness is a process and may not happen overnight. It means “letting go...” it doesn’t mean that we stop caring. It doesn’t mean cutting yourself off; it just means you understand that you can’t control another person. It is allowing for natural consequences, or you might say allowing God to take care of the situation. Allow the outcome to be in His hands. Forgiving is a way of “caring about” not caring for. It means not trying to judge but to allow another to be a human being. It allows others to affect their own destinies. It provides for the ability to accept and to search your own shortcomings and correct them. It allows you to take each day as it comes and cherish yourself in it. It means not regretting the past but growing and living for the future. Forgiveness is to fear less and love more.

**Group Discussion**

- Read or hand out the article “Amish Forgiveness at Nickel Mines”, by Donald B. Kraybill (see below).
- Talk about how communion calls us to make amends with our brothers and sisters before taking the bread and cup. How can this change our lives, relationships, and spiritual health?
- What if someone does not accept our forgiveness; what if we are not ready to accept an apology?
- Give an example of how we have felt relief as a result of forgiveness.
Optional (*but powerful*)
Show #10 video (10 minutes) “Lump”, by Rob Bell from the Nooma Series and lead into discussion. (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan)

**Amish Forgiveness at Nickel Mines**
*by Donald B. Kraybill*

The blood was barely dry on the floor of the West Nickel Mines School when Amish parents sent words of forgiveness to the family of the one who had slain their children. Forgiveness? Forgiveness so quickly for such a heinous crime? Of the hundreds of media queries I received in the aftermath of the Amish shooting, the forgiveness question quickly rose to the top. Forgiveness eclipsed the story of slaughter at the Amish school; it trumped the violence and became the redeeming narrative that captured the world’s attention. Within a week of the quintuplet murders, Amish forgiveness was a central theme in more then 2400 news stories around the world. The *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Newsweek*, *NBC Nightly News*, *CBS Morning News*, *Larry King Live*, *Fox News*, and dozens of other media heralded the forgiving Amish. From the *Christian Science Monitor* to the Christian Broadcasting Network, from the *Khaleej Times* (United Arab Emirates) to Australian Television, international media were opining on Amish forgiveness.

How could the Amish forgive such a thing so quickly? Was it a genuine gesture or just an Amish gimmick? It was more than words. Fresh from the funerals where they buried their own children, grieving Amish families attended the burial of the 32 year old killer, Charles Carl Roberts IV on Saturday, October 7. Of the 75 in attendance at least half were Amish. The Amish families greeted Mrs. Roberts and her three children. She was deeply moved by their presence, according to eyewitness accounts. Plans were set to continue the conversation between the families of killer and killed. But it was more than words and graveside presence; the Amish also supported a fund for charitable gifts for the assassin’s family.

But why forgiveness? Perhaps forgiveness spiraled into the media spotlight because we were so hungry, so hopeful that something good, something redemptive would rise from this horrific story. Or perhaps in a terror-filled world we were desperate for a word that somewhere on this planet there were still some people who could forgive. Regardless of the seedbed that welcomed this gentle rain from Amish country, it did offer a lesson of love and hope amid the horror of the schoolhouse.

Anger - at least some grudges - are surely justified in the face of such slaughter. A frequent phrase in Amish life is "forgive and forget." Like others they will never forget, but it’s their mantra, their way of “letting go” and “moving on.” It’s the recipe for responding to Amish members who transgress church rules if they confess their failures. The Amish don’t argue
with God. They have an enormous capacity to absorb adversity - a willingness to yield to divine providence in the face of hostility. Such religious resolve enables them to move on without the endless paralysis of analysis – letting the analysis rest in the hands of God. Make no mistake: many tears were shed in Amish homes and barns. Death sears the hearts of Amish parents as any others.

As Anabaptists, the Amish take the life and teachings of Jesus seriously. Without formal creeds, their simple (but not simplistic) faith accents living in the way of Jesus rather than parsing the complexities of religious doctrine. Their model is the suffering Jesus who carried his cross without complaint. And who, hanging on the cross, extended forgiveness to his tormentors: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Beyond his example, the Amish try to practice Jesus' admonitions to turn the other cheek, to love enemies, to forgive 70 times seven times, and to leave vengeance to the Lord. They try to practice the forgiveness clause in the Lord’s prayer. Retaliation and revenge are taboo....left in the hands of God.

As pragmatic as they are about other things, the Amish do not ask if forgiveness works; they simply seek to practice it as the Jesus way of responding to adversaries, even enemies. These folks do not live in the lobby of heaven. Rest assured, grudges are not always easily tossed aside in Amish life. Sometimes forgiveness is harder to dispense to fellow church members, who they know too well, than to unknown strangers. But despite their share of family and churchly feuds their anger rarely flares into violence.

But how can these forgiving folks be so unforgiving of their own members who stray, excommunicating and shunning them? The Amish answer, is that those who break their baptismal vows are always welcome back and will be fully forgiven if they confess their errors. But until they confess, the shunning (based on biblical teaching) is a dose of tough love to remind them of their transgression.

The Amish willingness to forgive is exemplary, but it raises many thorny questions. It may be easy for a separatist group that eschews holding public office to forgive, but how does it work for those Christians who are helping to govern in the larger society? And how does forgiveness relate to justice? In their two kingdom view, when dealing with outsiders, the Amish can readily forgive and pass off justice to the police. If everyone forgave so quickly would it truly transform human relations, or lead to civil anarchy? Moreover, it may be easy to forgive a dead killer; but what about those who are not berserk, who intentionally murder or threaten to do so for political ends or personal retaliation? But those questions about Christian citizenship and responsibility in the broader society do not perplex the Amish like many of the rest of us.
Martyr voices of their Anabaptist ancestors still ring loudly in Amish ears with the message of forgiveness for those who tortured them and torched their bodies at the stake. Forgiveness is woven into the fabric of Amish faith. And that is why forgiving words arrived at the killer's home before the blood had dried on the schoolhouse walls. It was just the natural thing to do, the Amish way of doing things. Such courage to forgive jolted the watching world as much as the killing itself. Indeed the transforming power of forgiveness may be the one redeeming thing that trickled from the massacre at Nickel Mines.

Donald B. Kraybill is distinguished professor at the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown College. He has written numerous books on Amish life including The Riddle of Amish Culture (Johns Hopkins).

**PART TWO: Bible Study**

**Selected Scripture**
There are many stories in the Bible about those seeking forgiveness and the anguish of not feeling worthy of the forgiveness.

- **Matthew 18: 21-22**  
  Peter asks Jesus about the limits to forgiveness.  
  Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

- **Matthew 6:12**  
  For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

- **Matthew 26:28**  
  This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

**Closing prayer**
Allow time for participants to think about something or someone that needs forgiveness. After some silent reflection, ask God to lift that burden from them. End with the “Lord’s Prayer”
SESSION 8:
SMILE AND HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOR

“A cheerful heart is good medicine but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.”
Proverbs 17:22

Preparation for this week – Video clip from Ted & Lee if available. (Ted Swartz and Lee Eshleman at www.tedandlee.com

PART ONE: Sharing/Educational Component

Opening Prayer

Introduction
If available, show a clip from a Ted & Lee video clip. (We showed Armadillo Shorts, Volume #1, Discovering God in a Dr. Seuss Book, but there are many to choose from.)

Humor and laughter can be effective self-care tools to cope with stress, pain, and depression. They can improve the function of the body, the mind, and the spirit. An ability to laugh at our situation or problem (and even ourselves) gives us a feeling of superiority and power. Humor and laughter can foster a positive and hopeful attitude. We are less likely to become depressed and feel helplessness if we are able to laugh at what is troubling us. Humor gives us a different sense of perspective on our problems. Laughter provides an opportunity for the release of uncomfortable emotions which, if held inside, may create biochemical changes that are harmful to the body.

Educational Component
Give an example of how laughter and having a light heart has made a difference in your life. Talk about how life can be more fulfilling and rewarding when we are able to laugh.

Although it is sometimes hard to see the humor in our day-to-day life until much later, you’ve probably noticed that you feel much better after a good belly laugh. If you manage to bring a sense of humor to daily conflicts on your job, in your relationship with your family, or to your health or financial situations, you’ll go a long way toward improving the quality of your life. Try boosting your spirits by “lightening up”, not taking things so seriously, and smiling! Your sense of humor not only enriches life, it also promotes physical, mental and spiritual health.
Laughter helps to strengthen your cardiac muscles. The next time you’re having a good belly laugh, put your hand over your heart when you stop laughing and you will notice that your heart is racing. Even after 15-20 seconds of laughter your heart rate will remain elevated for 35 minutes. It is almost as effective as jogging and has been described as a form of “internal jogging”. Give your heart a good workout several times a day, using the effective self-care tool of laughter. A good belly laugh will relax those muscles.

The body’s healing system responds favorably to positive attitudes, thoughts, moods, and emotions such as love, hope, optimism, caring, intimacy, joy, laughter, and humor. The body’s healing system responds negatively to negative attitudes such as hate, hopelessness, pessimism, indifference, anxiety, depression, and loneliness. Humor can stimulate the immune system, enhance perceptions, and renew spiritual energy, so it is important to maintain as positive a focus as possible.

“A CLOWN IS LIKE AN ASPIRIN, ONLY HE WORKS TWICE AS FAST”
(Groucho Marx)

The words of American poet, Ella Wheeler Wilcox:

*Laugh and the world laughs with you,*
*Weep, and you weep alone,*
*For the sad old earth must borrow its mirth,*
*But has trouble enough of its own.*
*(1883, public domain)*

“Laugh and the world laughs with you, snore and you sleep alone”
(Mrs. Patrick Campbell)

Humor is found in people all over the world and is a universal human trait. At a conference recently I heard that children laugh an average of three hundred or more times a day while adults laugh an average of five times a day. What a difference! Humor is in our genes; no one teaches us what is funny. Humor is necessary for success, happiness, and leadership. It is also a major ingredient of resilience.

**Group Discussion**

**Questions:**
- Can we laugh when we read the Bible?
- Share a time when you laughed in church or at a sermon.
- Does God have a sense of humor?
- How do you learn to access the lighter side of yourself in the world we live in?
- How do we define happiness?
• Do you know people that can find joy and laughter in the least likely places?
• When we realize we don’t have control in our lives, we feel stressed and vulnerable. How can God lighten our load?
• How does our perception of things make a difference? How does this affect the spirit, body, and mind?
• When is the last time you had a good belly laugh?

PART TWO: Bible Study

Selected Scripture

“A cheerful heart is good medicine but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.”
Proverbs 17:22

Additional Scriptures
Proverbs 15:13 “A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit.”
Proverbs 16:20 “Whoever trusts in the Lord, happy is he”
Psalm 146:5 “Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God (happiness comes to those who find their help and hope in God).”
1 Philippians
Joy in the Lord and in our circumstances
Chapter 1 – Joy in the Lord
Chapter 2 – Joy in Serving
Chapter 3 – Joy in Believing
Chapter 4 – Joy in Giving

Paul used the word “joy” 16 times in his writings (Philippians). Paul could be called the “rejoicing apostle”. Read the whole letter at one sitting and underline his words “joy,” “rejoice,” be glad”. It hardly seems possible that Paul was writing from prison with chains holding him. He had a light heart and it was evident that his soul was free! There was no atmosphere of depression and disillusionment in his confinement, but only a reflection of the joy of the Lord.

Philippians 2:14 Do all things without murmuring and disputing.
Matthew 5:16 If we are going to “glow” for God, we can’t be grouchy and grumpy!
John 16:22-24 No one will take away your joy! My Father will give you whatever you ask for. As in the name of Jesus Christ and you will receive and your joy will be complete.
Ecclesiastics 3:4 A time to weep, a time to laugh, a time to be born...
John 16:33 I told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.
Psalms 90:14  Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

Genesis 17:15-17  Abraham fell on his face with laughter

Genesis 21:6-7  (The birth of Isaac.) Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me…” (Did you know the name Isaac means ‘laughter’?)

Luke 6:21b  Blessed are those who weep now for you will laugh. (Jesus on the sermon on the plains).

Proverbs 15:13  Laughter – A “merry heart makes a cheerful countenance”

Proverbs 15:17  The Little Things --- “Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted calf with hatred”. Maintaining loving relationships and enjoys the basic things of life are more important that wealth and success.

Ten Rules for Happier Living:

1. Give something away.
2. Do a kindness
3. Give thanks always
4. Work with vim and vigor
5. Visit the elderly and learn from their experience
6. Look intently into the face of a baby and marvel
7. Laugh often – its life’s lubricant
8. Pray to know God’s way
9. Plan as though we will live forever – you will
10. Live as though today is your last day on earth

Follow these rules, and your happiness will be complete. “Praise the Lord, O my soul! While I live I will praise the Lord” (Ps. 146.1-2)

Closing Prayer
SESSION 9:

DO SOMETHING FOR SOMEONE ELSE

“Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again.”
Ecclesiastes 11:1

PART ONE: Sharing/Educational Component

Opening Prayer

Introduction

“I never take care of crowds, only of one person.
If I stop to look at the crowds, I would never begin.”
- Mother Theresa

Jesus calls us to think outside of the “box”, that is, ourselves. We eat, usually with others present. Sharing food is a way to refuel our own energy and our resources. While broken bread and a cup shared around a table evokes the relationship between people, God, and the earth, it seems that vending machines are symbols of the opposite: eating as refueling. If we have fallen into a vending machine lifestyle, rushing everywhere, eating on the go, perhaps we need to focus on sharing food and fellowship with others, by sitting around the table with others.

We are called to share our time, ourselves, and our resources with others. To eat well is to consider not only your own body’s needs, but also the needs of others. As Christians we need to “count well the cost” if we do not reach out to others.

Educational Component
Talk about how we are called, as Christians, to love our neighbors as ourselves. Talk about how life can be more fulfilling and rewarding when we are able to share our abundance with others. There are many empty lives that will look to you to see what a Christian community is supposed to look like. Is it a warm and inviting example?

Many people who are feeling “down” find that by helping out another person in need they feel better themselves after understanding that they are not the only ones in dire straights. They realize that that they can bring joy to another and that it only takes a small effort to share their abundance, their gifts, and resources. When we do so we realize how much we have to be grateful for and how much we have to offer.
If you have not listened to the song “God Bless to Us Our Bread” this would be a good time to do so. (IONA resource used in Chapter 2).

**Group Discussion**

- In what ways have we shared our time, resources, food, wealth, and hospitality?
- In what ways have we *neglected* to share our time, resources, food, and hospitality with others?
- Read and discuss your feelings as you heard “I was Hungry Today” by David Radcliff.
- Distinguish need vs. greed.
- How is sharing time, food, and resources with others healthy? How is this considered nourishment?
**HANDOUT A**

I WAS HUNGRY TODAY

(A Reading About Hunger Awareness for Two Readers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I was hungry today.</th>
<th>I was hungry today.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All I had for lunch was two pizza slices, a bag of chips and a soda.</td>
<td>All I had for lunch were three tortillas and a small handful of rice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then after school I had practice and the coach really ran us hard.</td>
<td>Then I continued to work in the corn field all afternoon alongside my father and little brother. It was hot, and the work was hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After practice I had to go straight to the library to do research for a project. The assignment is due tomorrow, and if I didn’t get it finished, I’d be in big trouble!</td>
<td>After working in the field, I had to go to the stream to get water. I carried it to our house—a 45 minute walk up a steep mountain trail. Otherwise, we wouldn’t have water tomorrow, and that would’ve been trouble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After slaving over the computer for an hour and a half, I jumped in the car and finally made it home. Of course, everybody had already eaten supper by then.</td>
<td>I got home just as night fell. My legs were tired and my neck was sore from carrying the large container of water on my head.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luckily, there was still some lasagna left—I just hate having to rummage through the refrigerator for leftovers after a day like today.</td>
<td>My parents had eaten and were already preparing for bed. My mother always leaves me a few tortillas—and the beans tasted good, even though I have them every night.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finally, food! I was so hungry. I really porked out.</td>
<td>I ate it all; I was still hungry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I topped it off with a big bowl of ice cream.</td>
<td>I’m almost always still hungry when I go to bed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’d have to watch my weight if I weren’t so active.</td>
<td>I heard the health worker tell my mother I’m not growing quite like I should.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And hey, by eating a lot I’m sure to get a balanced diet!</td>
<td>One of my friends is losing her sight because the foods she ate didn’t give her a certain vitamin when she was a child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oops, I almost forgot the prayer for the meal.</td>
<td>I must say a prayer for the food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rub-a-dub thanks for the grub!</td>
<td>Almighty Lord, give us this day our daily bread.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yea God!</td>
<td>In Jesus’ name, Amen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THINGS YOU OR YOUR GROUP CAN DO FOR SOMEONE ELSE

☐ Volunteer a week at your local camp with your favorite age group.

☐ Volunteer at a soup kitchen or with a disaster relief project.

☐ Organize a community Crop Walk (1-888-CWS-CROP 888-297-2767) or check out www.churchworldservice.org.

☐ Visit the elderly/shut-ins and sing old favorite hymns. Start a new ministry; take a meal to the sick or homebound.

☐ Plan a vacation Bible school or other group activity for children. Center the program on hunger, using the many hunger education resources put out by our denomination. Or, request Build a Better World: Activities for Children from Church World Service.

☐ Invite someone new out to lunch.

☐ Find out where your church sends their money and ask, “How is our church connected to service in the community or the world?” What percentage of your own budget reaches people who are needy?

☐ Learn what it is like to eat and feed your family while living in poverty. See the innovative “poverty diet” program of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org. A free full curriculum including personal stories and statistics concerning hunger and poverty is available for download.

☐ Host a picnic at a park instead of a meal at your home. Invite a family you have never eaten with before.

☐ Who prepares the food at your house? Is the workload shared in a way that seems fair to everybody? Discuss these questions with your household and make adjustments that may enable you to offer hospitality more freely.

☐ Invite a minority group at your church to host a meal of foods native to their culture. What can you learn about their culture?

☐ Give a gift of food as an act of forgiveness or encouragement: a loaf of bread, a jar of nuts, something special you made.

☐ Other ideas:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
PART TWO: Bible Study

“Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again.”
Ecclesiastes 11:1

(In other words, be adventurous, like those who accept the risk’s and reap the benefits of sea borne trade. Do not always play it safe.)

LECTIO DIVINA
Matthew 25:34-37

Read the listed scripture and follow these steps. Be aware that this exercise could take up to at least 10 minutes. You may want to print out the scripture ahead of time so that each person has a copy. Have someone read the passage aloud. Have each participant to listen for a word or phrase that attracts. Each person quietly calls out the word or phrase. Then, ask the participants how the passage connects to one’s own life. Listen for what Christ is calling you to be or do.

Additional Scriptures
When we think of doing for others, we think of Jesus, the suffering servant that called us to follow him. This theme can be found throughout the Bible.

God sets the example of giving without fearing the risks of being involved with people who didn’t value a relationship.

Matthew 25: 31-46 ...Lord, when did we see you hungry...
Matthew 1:20 Do not be afraid, take Mary as your wife.
Matthew 5:14 You are the light of the world – a city on a hill cannot hide.
Matthew 5:43 Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.
Matthew 6:25 Do not worry about your life – what you will eat...

Closing Prayer
Compose a prayer thanking God for the resources and blessings you have been given. Ask for God’s guidance in using these gifts to help our neighbors, both near and far.
SESSION 10:

BE STILL EACH DAY AND PRAY

“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Matthew 6:6

PART ONE: Sharing/Educational Component

Opening Prayer

Introduction
Prayer...meditation... stillness... the time to contemplate...the time to listen... how hard can that be for the Christian? Think about those who have never been taught to pray or who only pray when in crisis and are crying for help. In developing our spiritual health and prayer life we need to quiet ourselves, go to a peaceful place and spend time in quiet.

The peace and inner strength that comes from spiritual wellness depends not only on what we believe and our good works, but our close walk with God. Spiritual time management means making room in your day for whatever helps in quieting your soul.

It means taking time to listen to God.

Educational Component
Talk about your experience with prayer, including noise and quiet in your life. How has this time alone with God made a difference in your life?

Experiencing our spiritual self and keeping still long enough to center ourselves has become harder and harder every day in the rushed life that we live. To fully experience this life of faith, hope, and love, we must be anchored to something other than the six o’clock news. Many different religious groups have sought an anchor – a focus, a center – to give them hope, strength and meaning in life. For the Christian, that center is Jesus Christ, His words, His life, His death, and the power of His person. Part of our spiritual wellness is believing and living His example so that His life becomes part of our own.

Spiritual practices such as meditation, fasting, prayer and study help us center our lives on Jesus Christ. Meditation is an inward discipline that helps us to detach from the confusion all around us in order to have a richer attachment to God and to others. Meditation is popular in the secular world but it has been a true Christian practice for centuries. Meditation has to do
with relaxation and stress management which are valid goals, but the Christian tradition points to far more spiritual benefits than these. The purpose of meditation is to calm the body and quiet the mind so as to listen to God. The still, small voice is rarely heard in the noise and confusion in modern living. The first step is to accept being quiet and “doing nothing” as a valuable activity.

Fasting, abstaining from food for spiritual purposes, must be centered on God to be fruitful. With this as the primary focus, fasting can help us understand the things in our lives that control us and can help improve our spiritual insights. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. It is asking for answers, help, and healing from God for ourselves and others. Study involves two types of material, both verbal (reading and listening) and nonverbal (careful observation of events and actions). The principal task is perception into the reality of a situation or encounter.

**Group Discussion**

- Play NOISE, by Nooma #5, in a series of 10 (only 2 minutes 34 seconds long). Go to [www.nooma.com](http://www.nooma.com) to see clips and get information about this vignette, or call (877)776-7755.
- Do you feel there is too much noise in your life? Is it hard to hear God speaking to you?
- Is noise comforting to you?
- Do you wish God’s voice would be louder in your life?
- When you have a problem or are troubled, who do you talk to? Do you spend the same amount of time listening to God?
- Do you sometimes avoid silence?
- What do you do to shut out the outside noise?
- Are you aware of the noise that gets in between you and God?

**Review of the Course**

List the 10 commandments of wellness. Which ones have been the easiest and/or which ones have been the most challenging to you? Has this been a physical demand or a spiritual demand on you?

How can you continue to support each other in coming closer to achieving your wellness goals?

**PART TWO: Bible Study**

“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Matthew 6:6
Additional Scriptures

Psalm 4:4  
Search your heart and be silent.

Psalm 46:10  
“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

Kings 19:11-12  
God was not in the wind nor earthquake nor fire, but in the whisper...

Deuteronomy 27:9  
Be silent O Israel...

Habakkuk 2:20  
Let all the earth be silent before him.

Mark 4:39-41  
He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, Quiet! Be still!”...

Matthew 11:38  
“Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest...:

Matthew 14:22  
Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.

Mark 1:35  
Very early in the morning while it was still dark, he got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Closing  
Ask each group member to pray for someone in the study group, either out loud or privately. Ask for stillness in their lives, faith to continue their quest for spiritual and physical well-being, and courage to share God’s love with others, sharing one with another.
REFERENCES


All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New International Version (NIV). All rights reserved.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

There are more materials on health, well-being, wholeness and the separate issues surrounding body, mind and spirit than one person could ever discover! Following are just a sample of some that appear to have value, and many are part of the lending library in the office of Wellness Ministry of the Church of the Brethren in Elgin, Illinois. You are welcome to borrow any of their materials for just the cost of postage.

The website of the Caring Ministries of the Church of the Brethren, www.brethren-caregivers.org, of which the Wellness Ministry is a part, contains many other resources as well, including the Health Promotion Sunday 2007 materials highlighting wellness within the congregational setting. For information on any of these resources contact mgarrison_abc@brethren.org

Books:


Children/Youth:


Congregations:


Magazines:
Body and Soul
Cooking Light
Spirituality and Health
Health
Eating Well – the Magazine of Food and Health

Websites:
www.eatwild.com
www.foodtimeline.org
www.billbright.com/howtofast
www.pcusa.org/hunger/food
**DVDs from Aquarius, available for loan:**

- Healing Power of Forgiveness (30 min)
- Creating Wellness; Taking time, Making Time (27 min)
- Holistic Aging – Uniting the Mind, Body & Spirit (30 min)
- The Power of Prayer – How it Can Influence Your Healing (28 min)
- Healing and Humor with Joyce Saltman (26 min) **on backorder**
- Overcoming Obesity – Keeping Kids Healthy (26 min)
- Ode to Joy – Why Your Attitude Matters (27 min)
Author Biography

Phyllis (Yvonne) Dodd lives in Farmington, Delaware with her husband Paul, Pastor of the Bethany Church of the Brethren. Together they have four children: Daniel, Samuel, Gabriel, and Rebecca.

Phyllis is a self-employed, bilingual, clinical social worker working primarily with Latino families in the area of domestic violence and childhood sexual abuse. She is a graduate of Juniata College and studied her junior year abroad in Barcelona, Spain through Brethren Colleges Abroad. Phyllis began her work in Ecuador as a Peace Corps volunteer and has continued to build her social work skills over the years.

Her work with the Church of the Brethren includes serving as Refugee Resettlement Coordinator for Mid-Atlantic District, Chairperson of the District Peace & Justice Committee, and as an active member of Brethren Peace Fellowship. Phyllis currently provides treatment for male offenders of Domestic Violence, Parenting Classes for parents of divorce and separation, and individual therapy for victims of abuse, mostly abused women and girls. In doing so she has helped individuals seek better approaches to taking care of themselves in holistic ways.

After seeking a curriculum to go along with the 10 Commandments of Wellness to teach at her church to no avail, she decided to take on the project herself....