

Living the Dream: Do You Want To Be Well?

John 5:1-18

May 9, 2010

Hoyt Byrum

Today is Mothers Day and on behalf of all of us who have been profoundly influenced by our mothers, we say "Thank You!!!" for all you have done to build life into us and set us on a journey toward health and prosperity. As we all know, behind every successful man is a surprised mother-in-law.

It is appropriate that we begin a four-week sermon series on wellness on Mothers Day. And even more appropriate is the topic we want to begin with on this special day: emotional wellness. I am going to begin this series, and this sermon in particular, by quickly sharing with you some foundational thoughts that you may or may not agree with but these thoughts are born out of forty years of being in the "people business" and many observations of people and their families. They are also born out of my own experience with this issue of trying to live a life of wellness. Let me first jump in with these assumptions and then over the next three weeks share some very practical ways of arriving at emotional, physical, spiritual and relational wellness.

Let me begin with the assumption that "living the dream" is not synonymous with living "the American dream." The "American Dream" is a fallacious belief that if I have money, status, power, and a "trophy wife" I will be happy. Because people who have achieved this dream through business success, or sports fame, or Hollywood have still ended up addicted to drugs, multiple marriages, and some jumping off bridges to end it all, I don't need to tell you any more that "the American Dream" is an empty dream. The dream life I am talking about is the one of achieving emotional, physical, spiritual and relational wellness regardless of the outward trappings associated with "the dream life."

Another assumption I am offering is that true wellness is achievable and in my opinion it is best experienced when addressed in the following order:

1. emotional wellness
2. physical wellness
3. spiritual wellness
4. relational wellness.

Why would I put emotional wellness as the first issue to address? It is because the effect we have on others is directly related to how we treat them and how we treat them is directly related to our emotional wellness. I love the poem that speaks about the effect we have on children and what we teach them is the result of the emotional climate we create for them. You have probably heard or read the poem before, but let me share it with you now knowing that some of you have not been exposed to its wisdom.

If we want our children to become people who:

Learn to condemn others

Learn to fight with others

Learn to approach life with great apprehension

Learn to live life as if they were a victim, always feeling sorry for themselves

Learn to be shy and withdrawn

Learn to envy everyone else for who they are and what they have

Learn to feel guilty

Then all we have to do is:

Create an environment that is critical – they will learn to condemn

Create an environment that is hostile – and they will learn to fight
Create an environment that is fearful – and they will learn to be apprehensive
Create an environment of pity – and they will learn to feel sorry for themselves
Create an environment of ridicule – and they will learn to be shy
Create an environment of shame – and they will learn to feel guilty

If on the other hand, we want our children to become people who:

Live with confidence
Learn to be patient with others
Live a life of appreciation
Live with the ability to love others
Live life liking themselves
Live with the ability to achieve significant goals
Live a life of generosity
Live truthful lives
Live lives concerned about justice
Live life respecting others
Live life with deep friendships

Then all we have to do is:

Create an environment of encouragement – and they will learn confidence
Create an environment of tolerance – and they will learn to be patient with others
Create an environment of praise – and they will learn to be appreciative
Create an environment of unconditional acceptance – and they will learn to love
Create an environment of approval – and they will grow up liking themselves
Create an environment of recognition – and they will learn how to achieve goals
Create an environment of sharing – and they will learn the joy of being generous
Create an environment of honesty – and they will learn truthfulness
Create an environment of kindness and consideration – and they will learn respect
Create an environment of safety and security – and they will learn to have faith

The primary reason for me to desire your emotional wellness is because it is a primary way we demonstrate to the world that having Jesus Christ in our lives makes a difference. To be honest, the non-believing world out there isn't all that impressed that you are in church at this moment. They are reading the morning paper, drinking coffee, or on their boat, or the golf course having fun and they aren't that desirous of your church involvement. They also aren't impressed that you give significant amounts of money to kingdom work – they are not drawn to Jesus Christ knowing that it may cost them some money if they get serious.

What does impress the non-believing world is to see believers go through the struggles of life with emotional wellness. When we get the news that our job is being eliminated – that the doctor has said, "Yes, there is cancer." – when our teenager is in an auto accident and is in the intensive care unit. How we go through such struggles matters. The world is watching. And I believe that we can go through these difficult issues with an emotional wellness that comes from choosing to believe that God is with us, that He will see us through, and that no matter what happens, we are going to be ok. That is a powerful witness to the presence of God in our lives and does impact those who have yet to put their faith in Jesus Christ.

This morning and the next three weeks we will address the following issues, in order, as the way we achieve wellness:

1. emotional wellness is achieved through transformed thinking

2. physical wellness is achieved through relying on a team of people to help me
3. spiritual wellness is achieved through a true grasping of the Gospel
4. relational wellness is primarily the result of two people who have personal wellness

Now, as we turn to the issue of emotional wellness: the result of transformed thinking; let me say at the outset the following. I believe that:

1. it is possible to be emotionally well regardless of your circumstances
2. emotionally well people experience painful emotions but for the right reasons
 - a. we ought to feel pain when we lose someone
 - b. we ought to be angry when we see someone abusing another person
 - c. we ought to be discouraged when we lose a job
3. emotionally healthy people have
 - a. the strength to face adversity
 - b. the energy to devote to physical, spiritual and relational health
 - c. the capacity to focus on others and give themselves away
4. emotionally un-healthy people
 - a. are tossed to-and-fro by circumstances
 - b. soothe their emotions in unhealthy ways (eating, drinking, gambling, etc.)
 - c. drain others around them of energy and vitality
 - d. seek out others like themselves because “misery loves company”

Now, having said all of this with very little explanation, let me turn the direction of this message to the primary issue at hand, which is contained in Romans 12:2, which says: *do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...*

Most people try to achieve emotional wellness by avoiding those things in life that cause us pain. But the real key to emotional wellness is not by avoiding life’s difficulties, for that is impossible, but rather choosing to think about those difficulties in healthy ways. This is what I want to address in the second sermon in this series next week. But let me conclude with the words of Victor Frankl. Victor was a citizen of the concentration camps and he suffered immensely during that time. He speaks about those in the camp who rose above the pain and the suffering and the deprivation and remained healthy emotionally even to the point of maintaining their concern for others more than themselves. He says:

We who lived in the concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread, sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: The last of his freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way. *Man’s Search for Meaning*

Amen.

(This sermon was shortened significantly due to the Mothers’ Day program the children of Trinity performed – the additional content will be included in next week’s sermon).