

Living the Dream: Do You Want To Be Well?
Physical Wellness: The Result of Team Building

John 5:1-18
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Good morning. Welcome to the second sermon in a four-part sermon series focusing on living the dream life, a life of emotional, physical, spiritual and relational wellness. By way of review, let me briefly summarize last weeks key points.

1. "Living the Dream is not about "the American Dream"
Money
Status
Appearances

2. "Living the Dream is about wellness

Wellness involves the following and in this order

1. Emotional Wellness – the result of transformed thinking
2. Physical Wellness – the result of team building
3. Spiritual Wellness – the result of grasping the Gospel
4. Relational Wellness – the result of personal wellness

Emotionally healthy people have:

1. the strength to face adversity
2. the energy to devote to physical, spiritual and relational health
3. the capacity to focus on others and give themselves away
4. an effective witness to the world that adversity does not affect us like those without Christ

There are four aspects of an emotion, called the ABCD of an Emotion

- A. the Activating Event
- B. our Belief System regarding the Activating Event
- C. the Consequential Feelings that "arrive on the scene"
- D. Decisive Behaviors – our reaction to the Activating Event

With this foundation having been laid last week, let's return to the ABCD's of an emotion and give some illustrations before we move on to looking at how we need to build a team of people into our lives who will assist us with our physical wellness.

Have you ever been at a Disney theme park around 10:00 PM and it is closing and seen the following?

Parent A says to his four year old son, "Son, it is time to head to the car and go home."

Activating Event: the four-year old son does the following: He sits down, starts crying, and says, "NO"

Consequential Feelings: Parent A gets angry and mad

Decisive Behaviors: Parent A jerks the child up by the arm, spansks him three times, and says, "Don't you say 'No' to me!" and drags the child to the gate.

Why does parent A feel this way and react this way? It is due to the way this parent is interpreting the situation – what is in his Belief System, which is:

Belief System: Little Johnnie is a bad boy. I don't deserve this. I spent a lot of money on you. You should be grateful. You need to learn a lesson.

Let's look at scenario number two: Parent B

Parent B has the exact Activating Event with his four-year old son when he says, "Son, it is time to head to the car and go home." How does Parent B feel and behave with the identical set of circumstances?

Activating Event: the four-year old sits down, starts crying and says, "NO"

Consequential Feelings: Empathy for his son, concern about his "condition"

Decisive Behavior: Parent B picks the child up, comforts him, pats him on the head until he falls asleep and then takes him to the car.

Why is the response of Parent B different from Parent A? Because Parent B has a different Belief System, which is:

Belief System: Johnnie is not a bad boy, he is a tired boy. We stayed too late. I should have left when I saw this coming. It isn't his fault as much as it is mine.

The point of this illustration is that how we feel and how we ultimately behave is not the result of the things that happen in our lives (Activating Events) but rather, what we choose to believe (Belief System) about the things that happen in our lives that makes the difference. We do not control the Activating Events most of the time, but we can control our Belief System about those events and that makes all the difference in the world on our emotional wellness (Consequential Feelings) and our ultimate way we behave (Decisive Behaviors).

Let's look at a Biblical example, the story of the Prodigal Son. Let's look at this story from the vantage point of the father in the story (represents God) and the older son (represents the Pharisees).

The Father's Perspective:	Activating Event: the younger son returns home
	Consequential Feelings: elation, joy
	Decisive Behaviors: hugs his son, puts a robe on him, throws him a party

Why? Because he believed the following:

Belief System: my prayers have been answered; my son was dead and is now alive; my family is restored; God is good.

The Older Son's Perspective:	Activating Event: the younger son returns home
	Consequential Feelings: anger, jealousy, hurt, bitterness
	Decisive Behaviors: refuses to go into the party, argues with his father

Why? Because he believed the following:

Belief System: It is not fair, this younger son has made my life harder, he doesn't deserve a party, I do.

Let me share some shining examples of people who have faced very difficult circumstances (Activating Events) and because of their choice to believe certain ways have maintained incredible emotional wellness and have behaved in remarkable ways.

Some of you know the name Tony Snow. Tony was President George Bush's press secretary. Tony was diagnosed with terminal cancer (Activating Event). Regarding his circumstance, Tony shared the following thoughts (Belief System) about this circumstance.

Tony Snow's Testimony

Blessings arrive in unexpected packages—in my case, cancer.

Those of us with potentially fatal diseases—and there are millions in America today—find ourselves in the odd position of coping with our mortality while trying to fathom God's will. Although it would be the height of presumption to declare with confidence *What It All Means*, Scripture provides powerful hints and consolations.

The first is that we shouldn't spend too much time trying to answer the why questions: *Why me? Why must people suffer? Why can't someone else get sick?* We can't answer such things, and the questions themselves often are designed more to express our anguish than to solicit an answer.

I don't know why I have cancer, and I don't much care. It is what it is—a plain and indisputable fact. Yet even while staring into a mirror darkly, great and stunning truths begin to take shape. Our maladies define a central feature of our existence: We are fallen. We are imperfect. Our bodies give out.

But despite this—because of it—God offers the possibility of salvation and grace. We don't know how the narrative of our lives will end, but we get to choose how to use the interval between now and the moment we meet our Creator face-to-face.

Second, we need to get past the anxiety. The mere thought of dying can send adrenaline flooding through your system. A dizzy, unfocused panic seizes you. Your heart thumps; your head swims. You think of nothingness and swoon. You fear partings; you worry about the impact on family and friends. You fidget and get nowhere.

To regain footing, remember that we were born not into death, but into life—and that the journey continues after we have finished our days on this earth. We accept this on faith, but that faith is nourished by a conviction that stirs even within many non-believing hearts—an intuition that the gift of life, once given, cannot be taken away. Those who have been stricken enjoy the special privilege of being able to fight with their might, main, and faith to live—fully, richly, exuberantly—no matter how their days may be numbered.

Third, we can open our eyes and hearts. God relishes surprise. We want lives of simple, predictable ease—smooth, even trails as far as the eye can see—but God likes to go off-road. He provokes us with twists and turns. He places us in predicaments that seem to defy our endurance and comprehension—and yet don't. By his love and grace, we persevere. The challenges that make our hearts leap and stomachs churn invariably strengthen our faith and grant measures of wisdom and joy we would not experience otherwise.

'You Have Been Called'

Picture yourself in a hospital bed. The fog of anesthesia has begun to wear away. A doctor stands at your feet; a loved one holds your hand at the side. "It's cancer," the healer announces.

The natural reaction is to turn to God and ask him to serve as a cosmic Santa. "Dear God, make it all go away. Make everything simpler." But another voice whispers: "You have been called." Your quandary has drawn you closer to God, closer to those you love, closer to the issues that matter—and has dragged into insignificance the banal concerns that occupy our "normal time."

There's another kind of response, although usually short-lived—an inexplicable shudder of excitement, as if a clarifying moment of calamity has swept away everything trivial and tiny, and placed before us the challenge of important questions.

The moment you enter the Valley of the Shadow of Death, things change. You discover that Christianity is not something doughy, passive, pious, and soft. Faith may be the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. But it also draws you into a world shorn of fearful caution. The life of belief teems with thrills, boldness, danger, shocks, reversals, triumphs, and epiphanies. Think of Paul, traipsing through the known world and contemplating trips to what must have seemed the antipodes (Spain), shaking the dust from his sandals, worrying not about the morrow, but only about the moment.

There's nothing wilder than a life of humble virtue—for it is through selflessness and service that God wrings from our bodies and spirits the most we ever could give, the most we ever could offer, and the most we ever could do.

Finally, we can let love change everything. When Jesus was faced with the prospect of crucifixion, he grieved not for himself, but for us. He cried for Jerusalem before entering the holy city. From the Cross, he took on the cumulative burden of human sin and weakness, and begged for forgiveness on our behalf.

We get repeated chances to learn that life is not about us—that we acquire purpose and satisfaction by sharing in God's love for others. Sickness gets us partway there. It reminds us of our limitations and dependence. But it also gives us a chance to serve the healthy. A minister friend of mine observes that people suffering grave afflictions often acquire the faith of two people, while loved ones accept the burden of two people's worries and fears.

Learning How to Live

Most of us have watched friends as they drifted toward God's arms not with resignation, but with peace and hope. In so doing, they have taught us not how to die, but how to live. They have emulated Christ by transmitting the power and authority of love.

I sat by my best friend's bedside a few years ago as a wasting cancer took him away. He kept at his table a worn Bible and a 1928 edition of the Book of Common Prayer. A shattering grief disabled his family, many of his old friends, and at least one priest. Here was a humble and very good guy, someone who apologized when he winced with pain because he thought it made his guest uncomfortable. He retained his equanimity and good humor literally until his last conscious moment. "I'm going to try to beat [this cancer]," he told me several months before he died. "But if I don't, I'll see you on the other side."

His gift was to remind everyone around him that even though God doesn't promise us tomorrow, he does promise us eternity—filled with life and love we cannot comprehend—and that one can in the throes of sickness point the rest of us toward timeless truths that will help us weather future storms.

Through such trials, God bids us to choose: Do we believe, or do we not? Will we be bold enough to love, daring enough to serve, humble enough to submit, and strong enough to acknowledge our limitations? Can we surrender our concern in things that don't matter so that we might devote our remaining days to things that do?

When our faith flags, he throws reminders in our way. Think of the prayer warriors in our midst. They change things, and those of us who have been on the receiving end of their petitions and intercessions know it.

It is hard to describe, but there are times when suddenly the hairs on the back of your neck stand up, and you feel a surge of the Spirit. Somehow you just know: Others have chosen, when talking to the Author of all creation, to lift us up—to speak of us!

This is love of a very special order. But so is the ability to sit back and appreciate the wonder of every created thing. The mere thought of death somehow makes every blessing vivid, every happiness more luminous and intense. We may not know how our contest with sickness will end, but we have felt the ineluctable touch of God.

What is man that Thou art mindful of him? We don't know much, but we know this: No matter where we are, no matter what we do, no matter how bleak or frightening our prospects, each and every one of us, each and every day, lies in the same safe and impregnable place—in the hollow of God's hand."

Tony Snow remained remarkably healthy emotionally throughout his ordeal, not because his circumstances were ideal but his belief system was. He chose to view this struggle through the Belief System of faith and that made all the difference.

Another gentleman that I hold in high regard for the way he has maintained his emotional health while experiencing incredibly difficult circumstances is Jim Hollis, a member of this church. Jim has been in a federal prison for a number of years now for a crime he did not commit. Had he gone to trial he would have been set free but he chose to plead guilty to a crime he knew he did not commit because the risk of being found guilty, and therefore having his wife Linda also go to prison, was too much for him. If anyone had a reason to be bitter (Consequential Feelings) about the circumstances (Activating Events) he is experiencing it would be Jim. But he isn't bitter. Here is what Jim wrote me recently: "God has really been busy blessing my little family over the last year. The King of the Universe has taken charge, but hey, He was in full control throughout!"

Jim holds to the belief that God is in control and that is helping him remain emotionally healthy and behaving responsibly when most others would have stayed ill emotionally, physically, spiritually and probably relationally. Beliefs are powerful and they are choices we make.

Why is emotional health so important? Partly because there is growing evidence that our physical health is effected profoundly by our emotional health. In a book written by Don Colbert, M.D. he says the following:

"Let me share a dynamic fact that can totally transform your life and health. How do you feel in our heart can show up in your body, for your heart and body are more powerfully connected than you have ever realized. It's true. Your emotional health is often mirrored in your physical health. Perhaps

you've asked your doctor to treat your pain when you would have been better off dealing with the root problem – your deadly emotions.

Deadly emotions wreak havoc on our physical bodies. I would consider bitterness, resentment and unforgiveness to be three of the most deadly emotions a person can have. These emotions actually may prevent the body from releasing toxic material, especially from the liver and the gallbladder. This buildup of toxins in the system can eventually lead to disease. The excessive stress caused by negative emotions is quite dangerous because it increases our cortisol levels, which then suppresses the immune system. When the immune system is suppressed, cancerous cells can begin to form and grow. Hatred and jealousy are devastating emotions.”

I love the Proverb that says: “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person’s strength. Proverbs 17:22. So how do we maintain physical wellness beyond focusing on being emotionally well? Let me suggest a wonderful book that has just been published in May called More Health, Less Care by Peter J. Weiss, M.D.

Time does not permit me to share all the wonderful ideas that Peter Weiss presents in this wonderful book, but let me give you just a glimpse. See if some of these ideas challenge your current belief system and if some do, then pause a while and reflect on the benefit of believing this way about your ability to be physically well.

Change requires an open mind and an action attitude.

You need to be the lead doctor for your health and medical treatment team.

You need to build into your life a “health team” who will assist you:

- Spouse and family members

- Friends who can join you on the health journey

- Professionals who can bring expertise to your “pain”

 - Doctors

 - Medications

 - Personal Fitness Trainers

 - Counselors

 - Life Coaches

 - Support Groups

Your lack of wellness may be the result of being “normal” in this culture

- American Culture – over weight – the “normal American diet”

- Asian Culture – controlled weight – the “normal Asian diet”

Thus, being well in our culture will require “swimming upstream.”

Many “diseases” are defined as a “medical problem” but they may actually be a “lifestyle problem” – such as diabetes. Willpower is not the answer. Forget willpower! Change the situation. (This is not contradictory to the basic idea that changing our beliefs is the key. Alcoholics Anonymous meetings are not held in a local bar for a reason.) Shoulds and oughts are not good motivators for change. Desire to be well and a willingness to act (with cheerleaders in our corner) changes behavior. God desires you to be well - He’s in your corner. John 10:10

I strongly recommend that you read Dr. Weiss’s book and let his wisdom guide your Belief System as it relates to your physical well being.

Let me return to the question that under girds this sermon series: Do you want to be well?" This week, take some time and ask yourself if there is some aspect of your life that you know is not well and try to sort out what is keeping you from being well. What is there in your belief system that has you stuck? Change it, and you can change your life. "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you might prove what is the perfect will of God." Romans 12:2. God's perfect will for you is that you be well regardless of the difficult circumstances you might find yourself. Believe it – it's true. Amen.