

Today we ask: what does it mean to be well?

Many people use the phrase “be well” in causal language without giving it much thought. When saying it to others they may mean that they wish the person to have a nice day. They may mean that they wish the person to be happy. Still others may mean that they wish the person to be healthy. But does anyone ever wish for people to be whole?

Often times in America we tend to compartmentalize our lives and segregate aspects of ourselves across many spectrums. This means that people wear many masks in life without ever truly finding out who they are and how they can become a whole person.

Sure, some wear the mask of a mother, or a husband, or a coworker, and even a Christian. But it is the whole self that defines a person, not just a segment. So when we think about what makes us well, we need to be thinking of what makes us truly happy, what makes us truly healthy, and what will makes us have a great day everyday for the rest of our lives.

This morning we were able to focus on our physical well-being. And now I want us to focus on our spiritual well-being. And just like our physical well-being, our spiritual well-being needs constant exercise. It needs shaped, and harnessed so we feel healthy and happy. Otherwise we will become sluggish in our walk with God. We will have excess baggage not around our mid-section but rather on our conscious.

So in order to work up to a great relationship with God, we must work out for him. He needs to be our coach. He needs to give us direction of what to do and how to do it. And like a good coach, he will tell us when we are doing something wrong, he will lift us up when we stumble, and he will encourage us to strive for our very best. And a good coach always provides a training example. And in the case of our spiritual fitness, that example comes from Christ.

God is our coach; Christ is our spiritual fitness example.

In the passage that was just read, this exercise metaphor that I have been speaking about has been clarified for us.

Hebrews 12:1 ¶ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,

Indeed, we read that the author is envisioning a stadium atmosphere when he says we are “surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.” So know that whenever you talk to God, whenever you worship him, you are not alone. You have fans out there—they are your fellow Christians.

So now you are in the stadium about to run your race. Your fellow Christian fans are all around you, cheering you on.

The author continues

let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,

But you cannot run a race with a mind that is bogged down by burdens. You must focus. You must put all your strength and power, all your heart and mind into the race. Because if you don't, you will surely fail. With such great odds stacked

against you, what can you do for inner peace and calmness before you run and while you run?

You must look to Jesus:

² looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ ¶ Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

You must endure. The race is long. The race is difficult. If you succeed you can rejoice. If you fail, you will be humiliated. Those against you will despise you, think you weak, and not worthy to have run the race. And what will be your excuse? Did you not train hard enough? Or did you simply not have what it takes to win? Winning the race is a struggle, it will not come easy.

⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

So the author is telling us we must be willing to sacrifice everything to win.

Everything is at stake in this race. So if you have to struggle through pain to win, then that is what you must do. The consequences of giving up and giving in to defeat will have lasting effects. But don't worry, coach God is there and your training example Jesus will allow you to keep focus through what you have to endure.

⁵ And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children--
"My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; ⁶ for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts."

God as our coach knows how hard it is to endure the trials in life that shape us and make us who we are. Those trials can be great sacrifices every so often or little scarifies each and every day. Either way, they are not easy and they can create an unhealthy self. The sacrifices can wear us down and make us weak. They can cause harm to ourselves and others. So it may seem odd that sometimes our coach has to punish us to prepare us for what lies ahead and fix what has happened to us in the past. It certainly did not seem fair at the time, but when we cross the finish line we will know that all our hard work was worth it.

What spiritual sacrifices have you made that has caused you harm in the past? Are you every worried that those sacrifices may catch up to you someday?

Similarly, have you ever felt that God has punished you for something and you did not understand why? Maybe this metaphor can help!

⁷ Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? ⁸ If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children. ⁹ Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. ¹² ¶ Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. ¹⁴ Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

And what race is this that you have been training for? What race is this that it really does matter if you win or fail?

This race, the one that the author of Hebrews envisions, is the race of life.

Paul adds in

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 ²⁴ ¶ Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. ²⁵ Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. ²⁶ So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; ²⁷ but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

We have to work really hard at our spiritual well-being in order to win the race of life. And while training we must remember not to make enemies. Real Christians don't taunt others, they don't provoke others, they don't gloat after victory, and they help train others for their own individual life race.

Imagine a sports world that thrives not on beating everyone else in the game, but by beating the game itself while playing the game for the love of the game itself. The sports world has not become about how well you can master the skills you need to be good at the game, it has become more about beating other people. But some are good examples of self-competition and self-mastery. They see whatever sport or exercise that they do as an example of improving themselves. This is the mindset that Christians need to have.

It's not about telling your neighbor that, "I've won and am going to heaven and you've lost you're going to hell." Being a Christian is about training for the race of life together. So let us all together make ourselves better and more prepared for the race of life.

In fact, we learn this from 2 Timothy.

2 Timothy 4:1-8 **2 Timothy 4:1** ¶ In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: ² proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke,

and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. ⁵ As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully. ⁶ ¶ As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

You see, being a Christian is a team sport. We all need each other in order to win. But some on your team will become weak and may even betray you for selfish pleasures. **Don't give in to them. Give in to God.**

So some may be asking: "what do we win if we run the race of life according to God's training plan?" The answer: nothing less than an eternity basking in victory.

So when we think about being well, remember these metaphors. **Remember that if you are going to take the time to be a good mother, a good husband, and a good coworker, you had better take the time to be a good Christian.**

Otherwise you won't be running in the race, you will be spinning on your little hamster wheel, never getting anywhere, never being completely fulfilled, never being completely whole.

Yet, **with each other's help we can all win the race God asks us to run.** It may be long and hard, but he has equipped us with the tools we need to succeed. **He has given us our example in Jesus and through him we will find eternal life as our prize.**

So be well congregation, be whole, and good luck to you this week while running your race of life.