

# Health and Wellbeing Are Blessings from God

**Daren Hendrickson, on behalf of the LLC Home and Family Committee**

Contained in the topic of Health and Wellbeing we find physical health, mental health and spiritual health. We can consider the health and wellbeing of an individual, but also of the family unit. What keeps a family unit healthy?

There can be differing opinions and ideas on how to preserve health and promote wellbeing. In the past year there has been a trend toward uncompromising opinions on these. This can try peace and freedom among believers. In many of these practical matters, we can abstain from a view that alienates others. Rather, we want to support, share thoughts where needed and above all ease the trials of others where we are able.

Matters of health can cause anxiety and worry. Much is beyond our control. When we trust God and accept that He is in control, we gain perspective. The prophet Isaiah records the following words, “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:9). We do not know why illness might beset one person and not another, but God does know.

The Home and Family Committee’s intention with these articles is to discuss health and wellbeing from the perspective of believers, finding comfort in God’s Holy Spirit, though our phases of life and our experiences vary. Everyone seeks contentment with our place in life, doing what we can to prevent illness, make healthcare decisions, facing trials and being aware of others’ needs.

All of us can look toward that place, our eternal home in heaven, where we no longer worry about illness and suffering.

## Can Stress or Anxiety Be Treated?

**Amber Huhta**

As I opened my email, I saw the request:

“Would you be willing to write an article for the *Voice of Zion*? The subject is wellbeing.” I wondered how they knew what I had just been through this past year or how my life has been in general. I believe God guides them when they asked for writers, and now I sit here feeling inadequate yet hopeful that God will bless my words.

Stress has been in the forefront of my life for many, many years. It has been present for as long as I can remember. A few years ago, one of my coping mechanisms for stress was to try to control every bit

of my life that I possibly could – even the parts that I now know I could not control, like my friends' feelings.

As the responsibility of adulthood weighed upon me life began to get hard. I was constantly worrying about what other people thought. Surely if I could do everything in my power to please people, I would be happy – right? If I ran myself ragged, I would feel calm and accomplished at the end of the day. If I kept saying yes to people's requests, I would find peace. These are not healthy thoughts, actions or feelings, and they had begun to consume me.

This past year I realized that I no longer knew how to cope with the anxious feelings that were increasingly part of my daily life. God had guided me through many different friendships to see that asking for professional help was the next step. This isn't something that works for everyone and is not a cure-all answer but was one that I thought might help me.

Speaking with a therapist has greatly reduced my stress levels and I have been learning healthy ways to deal with stressful situations. These are a few: I create a list of three to five things that I want to get done each day and stick to the list. I give myself grace if I do not complete everything on that list and try again the next day. When I find myself worrying about what other people think, I gently tell myself I have absolutely no control over that. I also use an app called Calm that guides me through daily meditation. These are not habits that I follow as consistently as I would like – but isn't that life? We try our hardest and give ourselves grace when the road gets bumpy. Even in this, our heavenly Father knows His own and will never leave us, not even the weakest one.

## Caring for Children's Wellbeing

**Suzanne Pitkanen**

As a teacher in a 3rd grade class, I find enjoyment and challenge in caring for each child's social and emotional wellbeing. My education and teaching experience have been in both special education and elementary education, and I have been able to teach students with a wide range of backgrounds. I have often reflected on the fact that each child is unique and is created by God. This has been a great comfort and reminder to me throughout the joys and challenges of teaching.

It has been an important reminder for me that each child is God's creation no matter what their background or family life is. My personality is not necessarily full of patience, but I have been able to learn strategies and tools to help me work with children in a variety of situations. As a teacher, it is very beneficial for me to build a personal connection with each child. My goal is to learn things about each child that might be their personal interests, their strengths, or something about their family. When a child feels that somebody knows something personal about them and cares about them, they feel like

they belong. This builds a connection and trust between adults and children and helps when behavior is unexpected or challenging.

A child blurts out, lashes out, yells, stomps away, shuts down. What is our first response as adults? I know what mine is. My first reaction is to show the child who is the boss. I am annoyed and prone to yelling. But, there are ways to train our adult brains to calm down and think: “What is the child communicating?” Children’s outbursts – both positive and negative – are a form of communication. It’s not always easy to be patient with unexpected loud or physical responses or refusal to comply. What can we, as adults, do to help these children feel calm and able to participate?

In school, we work on mindfulness activities such as deep breathing and simple exercises to calm our bodies and minds during the school day. These activities are for everyone – we all can benefit from calming exercises! Some children need a quiet space where they can take a break for a few minutes to calm down. Other children benefit from keeping their hands busy with small fidgets or manipulatives, so that their brains can focus. Quiet and calming music can also be very soothing.

One of my students’ favorite exercises is finger-breathing. You can try it too! Hold up one hand and trace each finger with the other hand. As each finger is traced in an upward motion – breathe in, and with each downward motion – breathe out. Searching online for mindfulness activities will provide a plethora of other useful ideas!

We teach mindfulness activities at school and give space for them during the school day. We also work with children to use these strategies when they feel upset, stressed, anxious or need to move. I have also learned to use these calming strategies myself when working with children who have physical or emotional outbursts. Sometimes the response that children need from adults is opposite to how we might naturally respond. In fact, in my experiences with troubled students, I have learned to ask them if they need a hug. It is sometimes surprising to realize that a child is looking for love and care when their lashing out or non-compliant behavior can make us feel frustrated or annoyed. Children from all kinds of backgrounds – from believing and unbelieving homes – can be affected by many things in their lives. Sometimes neglect or traumatic experiences of all kinds can cause emotional or physical responses that appear as unexpected or challenging behavior.

Children may also experience learning differences, disabilities or disorders that affect their learning, responses, and social interactions. Some common examples are autism spectrum disorders, Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and anxiety. We cannot always see these disabilities or know what type of experiences a child may have had. We might, however, notice a child’s behavior or response at school, in social situations, at church events, Sunday school or camp activities.

Can these strategies be used at home or during church activities? We all do some of these when we ask children to fold their hands and pray together with us. Still, if a child needs more time and attention in the area of finding calmness, mindfulness activities are quite simple and can be used in most situations.

It is important that these activities are discussed and learned in a calm situation so that they can be better utilized in a situation when behavior may become challenging.

If you are a Sunday school, Day Circle, Bible class teacher or working at camp, it would be good to build connections with and between the children in your class or group. In addition, it's pretty quick and easy to fit in some deep breaths at the beginning or middle of a lesson. In our homes, we may have discovered that each of the children and adults in our home have different personalities and unique responses to different situations. It is important for children to feel like someone knows something special about them and that they are an important part of the family. We also know that children may have outbursts or unpleasant responses in different situations. Perhaps they are anxious, need quiet time, or need some physical exercise. Sometimes a quick break with some breathing exercises can help diffuse frustration or anger. Sometimes kids need a hug or maybe their conscience is weighed down by sin and they need to hear the gospel of the forgiveness of sins preached to them.

Each of us is unique. We have family and life experiences that are unique. As believers, we can feel like we have many things in common, and yet, we also have our own singular personalities, families, and experiences. Adults' responses to challenging situations may be filled with fatigue and impatience; however, we can learn strategies and ways to keep calm and help a child's wellbeing. And as believers, we also have a treasure. We can ask for and preach the gospel to cleanse the conscience and put sin away. We can be refreshed and try again.

## Contentment, a Gift from God

**Sarah Sorvala**

Contentment is personal, a response to our given situation. No other person or thing can make someone feel content.

In my life, I have had times of dark, heavy discontentment and also beautiful blessings of contentment. If you, dear reader, look back over your life, you likely recall moments of happiness as well as darker moments. I have felt that God allows struggles as well as great joy and happiness so that we can see His guiding hand in our lives.

Each person finds contentment in a personal way. For me, when I begin to look into another person's life, it can make me feel unworthy. I start to feel like a horrible mother, wife and homemaker. The devil is so cunning, whispering lies into my ear.

God has given His children the gospel, a powerful comfort and reassurance. During my times of heavy doubt and discontentment, I prayed that God would give me strength to ask for my discontentment to be forgiven in Jesus' name and precious blood. This prayer was answered.

God gives gifts to every person and we don't always see our own gifts. We can pray that God would give us the gift of contentment for this moment, each day. The songwriter expresses this beautifully: "Contentment I ask you to grant for today, the work that You gave me, make precious, I pray" (SHZ 411:3).

We lived in a very small, cozy home in Michigan for thirteen years. God richly blessed our life even though we didn't have much space. Living there, we made many believing friendships. We were very happy to a roof over our heads. Nevertheless, I was sometimes discontent. During winter months, I felt as though the walls were closing in. The kids' winter clothes cluttered the entrance floor. Boots and soggy mittens lined along the furnace vents. These dark cloudy days spoiled my spirits.

During those times, I would take myself away from the clutter, daily chores and overwhelming thoughts. I sat on the chair with a pile of books and read to my children. They were happy and content sitting in my lap or next to me, which in turn helped assuage my thoughts of discontentment.

When we moved to Arizona, we were able to move into a bigger home. I can today look back and feel thankfulness that God preserved us in faith and blessed us with a home with more space.

God richly blesses us in His time. He has given you and me what we need in our life right now. If only we could always be thankful for what we have and don't have!

We are all in different stations of life. Wherever we are, contentment is a gift from God. May God give us strength and contentment in our daily duties as we journey to our heavenly goal. Once in heaven, we will have full contentment: "From all lips is joy resounding, time with sorrow is no more, as the tree of life is yielding full contentment evermore" (SHZ 589:5).

## Medical Care Is a Blessing

**Becky Randall**

In a parable, Jesus told about a wounded man, on the verge of death, who was helped by a passerby, a Samaritan. The Samaritan treated the wounds with oil and wine and then brought the wounded one to an inn for further care. The parable speaks of wounds in the person's body and their treatment but also contains a picture of spiritual care for the wounds of sin. God's children have two types of inns where they can receive care. The kingdom of God is an inn that provides the spiritual care that we need through the oil of the Spirit and the wine of the gospel. We also have those inns to which we can turn when we have wounds or difficult health matters that need care.

Many times in my life, I have felt grateful for medical care. I watched our grandson, a premature newborn, grow into a healthy toddler after spending about 125 days of his life in the NICU, shedding wires and tubes along the way. Then, over the course of years as a parent, we received advice and

reassurance from our pediatrician during well visits as our children grew. In addition, I made countless trips to our pediatrician with typical childhood illnesses and to the emergency room to have broken bones set and sutures placed. I've spent nights in the hospital for surgical intervention of a ruptured appendix, help with breathing during RSV, or for IV fluids when Rotavirus still plagued children in the early spring.

When traveling in a developing country, I was struck by the difference in availability of medical care. Here in industrialized nations, we have not had to wonder what to do if we have sudden onset of chest pain. When an ambulance rolls in the hospital doors, a patient is quickly taken to the cath lab to have stents placed, if the need is indicated. Someone injured in a car accident is treated with expertise based on standards of care established by the medical community. Protocols are developed based on study outcomes and they strive for improved treatments. While the treatments are imperfect and are provided by faulty human beings, the systematic evaluation and development of treatment protocols have had positive outcomes overall.

### **Healthcare Is as Old as Humanity**

Luke is described in the Bible as “the beloved physician.” Jesus referred to physicians and medicine and used sickness as a metaphor for sin. When the Pharisees criticized Jesus for eating with the publicans He said, “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick” (Matt. 9:12). Before and since those New Testament days, science and medicine are always evolving, driven by changes in society. Interventions have changed based on research that carefully follows the scientific method. Technology has also changed because of scientific advancements.

Consider that MRI scanners were rare when I first started working in a hospital. Now, if I suspect that one of my patients has a brain mass, I request an MRI and have the results within hours. Even antibiotics are new in the scope of time. Penicillin didn't exist for my grandparents as it wasn't in use until the 1940s. Today, we have vastly expanded medications at our disposal that can treat more virulent microorganisms in targeted ways. As a result, people die less often from infections today than they did in the past.

### **God Guides in Illness and Healing**

Through rigorous study and God's blessing these practices and treatments have come to pass and can continue. It is good to thank our heavenly Father for providing opportunity and ability for people to study medicine and for providing resources for medical interventions and disease prevention.

There are times when we are faced with illness or health decisions that are frightening. Trusting in God and His blessing comforts and can help ground our decisions when we feel our life is out of control. We can turn to medical providers with questions and weigh their recommendations through the Holy

Spirit. We can seek specialists when they are recommended. These might include psychiatry or therapy for mental health conditions or nephrologists, cardiologists, or other specialists for medical conditions. Visiting about a difficult treatment decision with another believer in the light of God's Word can be helpful. No individual has perfect understanding. Yet, when we approach our health decisions humbly and pray for guidance, God will help.

### **Thankful for God's Gifts**

In all these questions we can see God's blessings and trust in Him. Even as I write this, intense research continues, and medical practices develop as a result. Recent events in our lives illustrate how recommendations change based on available data. Thankfully we don't have to understand the complexities of each new medical development. God provides the knowledge and means for research to take place. He knows our needs.

Even so, there can be conflicting opinions on health. This can lead to anxiety and fear in society and may even lead to a turning away from God. These controversies also affect believers and have the danger of rising to a point that they cloud living faith. May we nonetheless support each other, visiting with mutual respect and humility, encouraging each other to thank for those blessings God places before us, and putting sin and doubt away with the gospel. As instructed in Scripture, we can trust in the Lord with all our hearts and lean not on our own understanding (Prov. 3:4,5).

We cannot be thankful enough for the gift of health. Nor can we be thankful enough for the gift of medical care and science that God provides. Trusting in God and His blessings is comforting and relieves us of fear when we feel lack of control over illness that affects us. When our approach to science and medicine is with humility and prayer and our discussions around these topics are edifying, we can support and strengthen one another on the road to heaven.

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## **Mindfulness Can Help with Stress**

### **Joella Korpi**

I have recently graduated as a Family Nurse Practitioner. As part of my education, I did my doctoral project on the use of mindfulness meditation to decrease stress and anxiety. Our health and wellbeing are so important! Wellbeing can be defined as the state of being comfortable, happy, and healthy. Too

often in our rushed lives we do not set aside time for our personal wellbeing. As stress accumulates in our life it may take a toll on our health. So, what is mindfulness meditation and how can it help?

To be mindful is to pay attention in a certain way during the present moment, or more simply put “to be present in the moment.” Mindfulness is used to improve coping and emotional wellbeing. To practice mindfulness, relax your body, clear your mind, and make yourself aware of what is happening around you and inside of you. While doing this, focus on your breathing. Take deep breaths in through your nose and breathe out long and slowly through your mouth. Try to keep your mind clear, but if a thought or feeling comes up, just acknowledge what you are feeling and continue to relax and focus on your breathing. A fun way to do this is to be mindful of your five senses. Notice what you see, hear, smell, feel, and even taste. The real question is, how does one incorporate this activity into the hustle and bustle of daily life?

This practice can be done anywhere at any time, even without the deep breathing component. For example, it is easy to be mindful of your senses. Consider you are walking with your children to the park; take notice of what you see around you. Notice the wildflowers on the side of the road, hear the birds singing and the wind blowing through the trees, and feel the sun shining on your back. Enjoy the refreshing taste of water from your water bottle. Doing this will help you enjoy the moment rather than stress about what you need to do when you get home. Perhaps you are rocking the baby to sleep in the evening. Turn the diffuser on or burn a candle with a relaxing scent. Play some waterfall sounds or some peaceful music. As you are rocking the baby, you can focus on your breathing. While you take a deep breath in, sit more upright. As you breathe out, allow your body to relax. Be mindful of what is going on around you. Notice that comforting scent. Allow yourself to only focus on the smell or to only notice the waterfall sounds playing in the background for a moment. For those that work outside the home, keep yourself in the moment and avoid the auto-pilot drive to work. Notice the road signs, different cars, and scenery on your way. Focus on your breathing as you drive. This may reduce the racing thoughts and anxiety that tend to build up when you think of the task list that awaits you at work.

Mindfulness meditation is a useful practice for improving personal wellbeing. Our emotional and mental wellness are just as important as physical health. Activities such as mindfulness meditation may help to maintain balance in all areas of wellbeing and promote optimal health.

## Moderation for Health and Wellbeing

**Evan and Maria Loukusa**

What does healthy living in moderation mean? Perhaps it means eating nourishing foods and being moderately active. Maybe minding stress levels and avoiding substances play a role. For many,

moderation might include a relaxing visit with family and friends. Most health professionals agree that a great deal of illness in America would disappear if we would all live moderately by the above examples.

In recent times, making healthy choices can be overwhelming and stressful, considering the amount of information available. There are many different opinions, many of them from professionals, and there is much distrust. Certain topics are controversial, and even believers are susceptible to the polarization that can occur within the realm of health and wellness. The devil knows our human tendencies and will do anything to break the love between believers. However, we can pray for God's guidance. It is important to love and support our fellow travelers; we have the same goal of heaven. Beware of the danger of pursuing health too strongly and taking your gaze from the heavenly destination. This is moderation.

God has created us in His own image. In our DNA is written the ability to fight off infections, heal wounds and recover from illness. We continuously discover more about God's creation – recent evidence has shown that our behaviors can actually turn genes on and off, preventing or unmasking disease. It is respectful to care for our marvelous bodies by remembering the rule of all things in moderation. Paul writes to the Corinthians that the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, instructing them to avoid fornication and “glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Cor. 6:19).

Healthy living can also include specific preventive measures. Evidence shows that colon cancer screening prevents the suffering and early death associated with a cancer detected too late. But, at family gatherings, we avoid criticizing those who eschew colonoscopies and other preventative screenings – this too is moderation.

For those that are interested in moving their health in a positive direction, the following steps have benefitted us:

- Get more vegetables on your fork and move towards minimally processed foods.
- Appreciate the social health blessings that come with the close relationships within God's kingdom! Since moving to Michigan last year, Evan has enjoyed regular sauna visits with his father-in-law. We discuss daily events, life's challenges, and forgive each other's shortcomings. This ritual can be a wonderful way to care for family relationships. Both young and old benefit from social relationships with people of all ages and from many walks of life.
- Be active. As a mother of young children, Maria no longer takes physical and mental health for granted as she might have when she had only herself to care for. With young ones demanding our time and attention around the clock, it can be difficult for caregivers to prioritize their own health. However, many find energy and patience for children when they have time away. In her training, Maria learned the importance of starting small and keeping things simple. For example, when beginning an exercise program, it might help to start with daily walks rather than a gym membership.

- Be mindful of social media use. It is so easy to feel inadequate when comparing ourselves to the lives we see on social media. We may wonder, Why do I have so many bad days? Why don't I fit into my clothes? Why don't I have the energy to deal with my toddlers? Why don't I have a successful business going? when others seem to be doing it all and doing it well. We know that we are only seeing one side of reality when we scroll through these images, but these thoughts can still bother us at a subconscious level. God created us all exactly as He saw fit. We are all given different gifts, different passions, different bodies, and we are all made to be unique individuals. For our health, a break from social media often works best.
- Pay attention to what drives behaviors. In our hectic society, it is tempting to cut corners on a stressful day and, for example, choose food that is filling rather than nourishing. We cannot avoid stress, but we can use strategies to be less vulnerable to it: mindfulness, cognitive re-framing, and reducing stressful situations as much as possible can be helpful. If emotions drive behaviors, a counselor or coach may be a valuable resource.

“And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (Gen. 2:15). From man's first steps on this earth, we received instruction to care for God's creation work. Each day allows time to care for our bodies – a beautiful part of God's creation. We can do this trusting that our heavenly Father hears our prayers for health and healing.

### **Discussion Points**

1. How does discontentment impact our mental and physical wellbeing?
2. How can feelings of discontent trigger problem-solving?
3. What are ways that mindfulness can help us deal with anxiety?
4. How can comparing life situations foster either negative emotions or positive appreciation for one's own situation?
5. What can we do to help ourselves notice the small joys in life?
6. If lack of resources cause anxiety or discontent, how can others notice and share?