

SUMMARY ESSAY

WHAT IS WELLBEING?

An Introduction to Wellbeing for GES140 Students

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If I could name this class anything, I would name it Foundations for Soul Wellbeing.

Your soul is the essence of who you are. In Genesis 2:7 we see God breathing nephesh into humanity and it is this nephesh (or soul) that makes humans different than all other living creatures. Since soul is the essence of who you are, it seems prudent to intentionally care for it. This course will take you on a journey of learning what has shaped your soul and what you can do to care for your soul's wellbeing.

Which brings us back to that word - wellbeing. What exactly is wellbeing? Social scientists and psychologists alike would describe wellbeing using these characteristics: happiness, vitality, calmness, optimism, involvement, self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-worth, competence, development, purpose, significance, congruence, and connection. To be honest, though, these characteristics don't fully encompass the kind of wellbeing our souls were designed to experience. To catch a glimpse of that kind of wellbeing, we need to go back to the garden, when humanity was first created.

IN THE BEGINNING... THERE WAS WELLBEING. AND IT WAS GOOD.

In the beginning, ... once creation was complete, everything existed as God intended. All of the parts fit together in a state of spiritual, psychological and relational harmony. Adam and Eve were the prototypes of all that human beings were meant to be. Made in God's image, they were whole, unified beings who functioned as well-balanced, integrated systems. They were relational beings who fully enjoyed harmonious relationships with God and with each other. Reflecting God's character, they enjoyed the highest level of shalom, or wellbeing. In almost two-thirds of its 250 appearances in Scripture, the term shalom refers to a state of fulfillment that results from God's presence and covenantal relationship. Its root meaning includes the concepts of completeness, wholeness and harmony or ... wellbeing. (Craig Ellison. From Stress to Wellbeing, p. 6)

So in the beginning, God created and everything existed in a state of shalom. Humans experienced wholeness and thriving both inside their own bodies, minds and spirits and also in the midst of their relationships with one another and God. Everything was as it should be. And it was good.

THEN THERE WAS A TURNING, AWAY FROM GOD - AWAY FROM SHALOM. AND HUMANITY'S WELLBEING WAS ALTERED.

SUMMARY ESSAY CONTINUED

When humanity chose to turn away from God and follow their own desires, shalom was broken. Their souls experienced something they never had before - separation from God. It is safe to say, Adam and Eve no longer experienced unceasing wellbeing. However, this bleak outcome was not the end of the story between God and people.

As you read through the scriptures, you'll see that ever since the fall, God has been on a mission to redeem, restore and renew this world. Part of this restoration process is restoring and renewing people. The human soul was meant for much more than the depleted state it often functions in today. The human soul was designed to be whole and thriving and bearing the image of God in the world. It's important to see that God has not only been working to restore individuals but also been working to restore 'a people' - a people who are his representatives in this world. This 'people' is invited to live well with God and with one another. This 'people' is invited to join God in the redemption, restoration and renewal of this world. In the Bible, we read the stories of this 'people' - the Israelites, the Jews, the followers of Jesus, the apostles and the first century church - and how God invited them to help with this restoration and renewal of the world.

Just as in the past, you are invited into God's kingdom work of redeeming, restoring and renewing this world. One way you can participate in this is by investing in the renewal of your own soul.

SOUL RENEWAL LEADS TO SOUL WELLBEING

When a soul is whole and thriving, it shows up in life differently. It is able to love and forgive, care and be generous, extend mercy and grace. When a soul is well, it is able to be outward focused instead of inward focused. When a soul is well, it is able to work for a common good. When a soul is experiencing wellbeing, it has reserve and resources to pour into those who need help around them.

Understandably so, most souls are fairly inward focused. Some are exhausted, depleted, and discouraged. Some are craving distraction and entertainment. Some are anxious and fearful and stressed. Some have no idea why they exist. These experiences and others can keep a soul focused on their own life situation. The thought of joining God in the redemption, restoration and renewal of this world may be the furthest thing from their mind.

This is when a new line of thinking needs to be introduced.

Read this trajectory of thought slowly:

The world is not as it was designed to be.
God is in the process of redeeming, restoring and renewing it.
God invites people to join in the process of change.
Many souls can't join this process because they are not personally well.
These souls are inwardly focused on their own needs, wants, issues, anxieties and desires.
It is challenging for these souls to look outward to what God is doing and participate with God.
However,
If the inward focused soul would participate in a renewal process with God,
life could be different.

WHEN A SOUL IS WHOLE AND THRIVING, IT SHOWS UP IN LIFE DIFFERENTLY.

IT IS ABLE TO LOVE AND FORGIVE, CARE AND BE GENEROUS, EXTEND MERCY AND GRACE.

WHEN A SOUL IS WELL, IT IS ABLE TO BE OUTWARD FOCUSED INSTEAD OF INWARD FOCUSED.

WHEN A SOUL IS WELL, IT IS ABLE TO WORK FOR A COMMON GOOD.

SUMMARY ESSAY CONTINUED

Unfortunately, soul renewal feels exponentially difficult for many. It feels like there is a huge undertow dragging people away from a renewed state of being. The reason is, **there is a current pulling people away** from this transformative work. Think about it. It would be much better for the 'powers and principalities' who oppose God if human souls would stay inwardly focused. When the human soul stays focused on itself, it does not look outward. It does not invest its energy in loving God, loving others and joining God in this beautiful redemption, restoration and renewal process.

Therefore,
one of the most God honoring activities humans could do is participate with God in the renewal of their soul's wellbeing.

Remember, when a soul is well - when it is whole and thriving - it shows up in life differently. It is able to love and forgive, care and be generous, extend mercy and grace. When a soul is well, it is able to be outward focused instead of inward focused. When a soul is well, it is able to work for a common good. When a soul is experiencing wellbeing, it has reserve and resources to pour into God's mission of redeeming, restoring and renewing this world.

The challenging thing is this:

The renewal of a soul's wellbeing depends on much more than prayer. The renewal of a soul requires cooperating with God's good design in multiple areas of life. This class will show you how you can participate.

WELLBEING IS POSSIBLE.
WELLBEING REQUIRES AWARENESS.
AND ... SOUL WELLBEING IS PARTLY UP TO YOU & YOUR AGENCY.

We only have one semester together to explore your soul's wellbeing and the many things that have influenced it. Thus, we will narrow our focus to six aspects of life that significantly have influenced your soul and its Intrapersonal Wellbeing.

First, your wellbeing is impacted by the **SPIRITUAL** dimension of who you are. You are more than a body, you are soul with a spirit. To define this using a Christian lens, your spirit refers to the part of you that can interconnect with God; the part of you that communicates with God; the part that senses the Holy Spirit; the part that desires to be like Jesus. Your image of God, church experiences, faith traditions, understanding of the Bible, and so on have shaped your spirit to be what it is today.

In this class, you will be introduced to several different ways you can invest in and cultivate your spirit's connection with God. You can choose to engage your Sacred Pathways. You can choose to practice Spiritual Disciplines like Solitude, Silence, Service, Study, Prayer, Fasting, Worship, Celebration and so on. You can choose to establish Rhythms with God that purposefully bring you back to engagement with God daily, weekly, monthly and annually. Your choices regarding your spirit will greatly impact your soul's wellbeing.

INTRAPERSONAL WELLBEING:

AN INDIVIDUAL'S
QUALITY OF LIFE
IDEALLY CHARACTERIZED
BY WHOLENESS AND
THRIVING WITHIN THE
SPIRITUAL, COGNITIVE,
EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL,
RELATIONAL AND
MEANING ASPECTS OF
LIFE.

SUMMARY ESSAY CONTINUED

Second, your soul's wellbeing is impacted by the **COGNITIVE** dimension of who you are. Your 'mind' has a cognitive side and an emotional side to it. In class, the cognitive portion of your mind will refer to your thoughts. You will explore some biological, psychological and environmental factors that have shaped the way you think.

Similarly, you will be introduced to several different ways you can invest in and cultivate your thinking so that it promotes your soul's wellbeing. You can cultivate your thinking by understanding Neuroplasticity, allowing Cognitive Dissonance, choosing a Growth Mindset, developing Intellectual Competence, engaging Metacognition and practicing Dialectical Thinking.

Third, your intrapersonal wellbeing is impacted by the **PHYSICAL** dimension of who you are. Your body profoundly influences your sense of wellbeing. If your body is functioning well, you have a much better chance of experiencing wellbeing. Many people have to navigate crippling illnesses or debilitating injuries. Does this mean that their soul will never experience wellbeing since their bodies are struggling so profoundly? No, this does not mean that they will never experience soul wellbeing. The good news is: other aspects of life also influence wellbeing and those other aspects may become more influential in order to accommodate for physical illness beyond a person's control.

In this class, you'll be introduced to choices you can make which cooperate with God's good design for our bodies. The choices of Reducing Bad Stress, Sleeping, Eating Mindfully, Moving or playing, and enjoying Nature can be done by almost anyone at almost anytime.

Fourth, your soul's wellbeing is influenced the **RELATIONAL** dimension of who you are. You are a social being. You have been shaped by the social context or social reality you grew up in. The way you relate with others is influenced by many things including your culture, your personality, your sexuality, and the way you engage conflict (to name just a few topics).

If you want to cultivate the relational or social portion of your soul, you'll recognize your Personality, Sexuality, Cultural Identity and Intelligence and Conflict Styles are places of agency for you. Meaning, you can choose to relate differently with people based on your awareness of yourself and these topics. As you cultivate your personal, internal relational wellbeing, you have a better chance of experiencing Interpersonal Wellbeing.

INTERPERSONAL WELLBEING:

THE QUALITY OF LIFE EXPERIENCED BETWEEN TWO PEOPLE IDEALLY CHARACTERIZED BY WHOLENESS AND THRIVING

Fifth, your wellbeing is influenced by the **EMOTIONAL** dimension of who you are. Your emotions are the other side of the 'mind' coin. Your thoughts and your feelings comprise your 'mind' and dramatically influence how you will behave and interact in the world. Your emotions are a mix of cognitive appraisals and physiological experiences. Each person needs to become savvy at reading the emotions they are experiencing. That way, you can manage your emotions instead of having your emotions manage you.

In this class, you will learn the four main components of Emotional Intelligence (EQ/EI) and then learn two skills to cultivate each component of EQ. The skills you will learn and can choose are: Interoception and Concepts, Emotional Granularity, "Knowing your Dope(amine)", Reframing, Curiosity, Empathy, Managing your Flood and Managing Conflict.

Finally, your soul's wellbeing is dramatically influenced by your sense of **MEANING** and purpose. Your answer to 'why do I exist?' either propels you into a meaning-filled life or derails you and your wellbeing. If you don't know why you are here on earth, your soul will suffer.

In this class, you will explore a Christ-follower's Calling, your personal Strengths, your Career possibilities, your Values and your Intentional Decisions that align with your values. As you choose to invest in your calling, strengths, career, values and intentional decisions, you will find your sense of meaning and purpose beginning to thrive.

**WELLBEING REQUIRES AWARENESS & AGENCY
THIS CLASS WILL HELP YOU BECOME AWARE
THIS CLASS WILL HELP YOU SEE PLACES OF AGENCY**

SUMMARY ESSAY CONTINUED

To review thus far:

1. At the time of creation, wellbeing (or shalom) was experienced by humans in the garden. See Genesis 1-3.
2. Wellbeing was altered when humanity turned away from God.
3. God desires to redeem, restore and renew all of creation. God invites humanity into this renewal process.
4. A soul's wellbeing can be renewed which will require investment, effort and a connection with God.
5. An individual's intrapersonal wellbeing is affected by at least six aspects of life: the spiritual, cognitive, physical, relational, emotional and meaning dimensions of life.
6. Each person can make choices to cultivate each of these aspects of life. When they do, they are investing in the renewal of their soul's wellbeing.
7. This class will teach you choices for each dimension so that you can work with God in the renewal of your wellbeing.
8. These choices will create positive ripple effects into multiple dimensions of wellbeing.

TO BE CLEAR, WHAT ARE THE DEFINITIONS OF INTRAPERSONAL, INTERPERSONAL & SYSTEMS WELLBEING

To be really clear, when you hear the phrase **Intrapersonal** Wellbeing - that is referring to the micro level of wholeness, thriving or soul wellbeing that you personally are experiencing within yourself.

When you hear the phrase **Interpersonal** Wellbeing - that is referring to the mid level of wellbeing that exists between people in the midst of their relationships when their relationships are whole and thriving.

On occasion, you may also hear the phrase **Systems** Wellbeing - this refers to an entire system experiencing wholeness and thriving. Think of a family or a residence hall or even the U.S. - each of these are systems. When a family is whole and thriving that family is experiencing 'systems wellbeing.' It is important to recognize that entire systems could 'be well' and those systems can influence the intrapersonal and interpersonal wellbeing of those people living within them. This is why your intrapersonal wellbeing may suffer a bit when our nation is struggling with large scale issues or why you may experience a significant sense of intrapersonal wellbeing when war between our nation and another comes to an end. Macro level or systems level wellbeing influences the wellbeing of the people living within the system.

This class will primarily focus on the micro level of intrapersonal wellbeing. Additionally, you will begin to see that your intrapersonal wellbeing affects those around you AND their intrapersonal wellbeing affects you. As you come to this awareness, you will begin to identify ways you can invest in and cultivate the Interpersonal Wellbeing between you and others. **Think about the connection between your intrapersonal wellbeing and your ability to have interpersonal wellbeing.** When has your interior been a bit depleted and edgy? How did you treat others when you were exhausted physically, mentally or spiritually? Most likely, your intrapersonal wellbeing (or lack thereof) impacted others around you.

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SO, WHAT IS WELLBEING?

It is intrapersonal, interpersonal and systemic wholeness and thriving which is influenced (at minimum) by the spiritual, cognitive, physical, relational, emotional and meaning aspects of life.

This is the kind of wellbeing that was experienced in the garden. In the beginning, humans were whole and thriving as they were interconnected with God and one another. They walked and talked with God. They had meaningful work to complete. Their bodies were nourished and functioned in ways that allowed for life to continue. There was peace and justice in the land which allowed them to live free from anxiety, fear or violence. The system of the garden helped their wellbeing flourish. It is this vision of wellbeing that I hope will captivate your imagination. It is this vision of wellbeing found in shalom that we were designed to experience. It is this vision of wellbeing that I hope our Bethel community will move toward.

Please remember, we're not aiming for this kind of wellbeing found in shalom simply for our individual benefit. As we aim for this, we are saying: "I recognize I am part of something much larger than myself. I am part of God's people. And God has given us sacred work to do. Together we are to invest in loving God, loving others and participating in the renewal of all things. I can participate in this much more effectively, intentionally, fully if my soul is well."

HOW WILL THIS CLASS HELP YOU MOVE TOWARD INTRAPERSONAL AND INTERPERSONAL WELLBEING?

Almost every day you come to class, you'll explore another topic that somehow relates to your Intrapersonal Wellbeing. As you explore the topic, you'll be able to reflect on how your soul - the essence of who you are - has been influenced by the topic of the day. As you do this, you'll be increasing your AWARENESS about yourself and your wellbeing.

Additionally, almost every day you'll explore a way you can invest in your wellbeing. You will be given many practical tips and tools for investing in each dimension of the wellbeing wheel. The hope is that you will use your AGENCY and choose to use these tips or tools.

Look at the wellbeing wheel. You'll notice that there are two rings - the inner dimensions form and ring and they are encased in an outer ring. As you invest in cultivating the essence of who you are, that essence will spill over into your relationships and interactions with others. What is inside you will affect how you interact. What is inside you will affect others. This semester, you are invited to explore what is inside you and discover practical tools to cultivate your soul's wellbeing. The hope is that what spills out from each of us would be helpful for everyone's wellbeing.

Perhaps then, together we can turn our attention outward and love God, love others and join God in the renewal of all things.

