

SUMMARY ESSAY

WHAT IS WELLBEING?

An Introduction to Wellbeing for GES140 Students

by Dr. Christine Osgood, LMFT, D.Min.

Associate Professor of Wellbeing, Program Director for GES140 Introduction to Wellbeing

Well-being is becoming a popular word these days. Society is recognizing that the steady drum of busyness, occupational stress, violence, racism, political turmoil and so on is producing a generation steeped in anxiety, isolation, loneliness, and chronic stress. People recognize that their wellbeing is negatively impacted by these things but are perplexed as to what they can do to enhance their quality of life and experience of wellbeing.

The dictionary defines wellbeing as "the state of being comfortable, happy, healthy or prosperous" Social scientists would describe wellbeing using these characteristics: vitality, calmness, optimism, involvement, self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-worth, competence, purpose, significance, congruence, and connection. These are useful characteristics and indicators of wellbeing. However, when one explores wellbeing through a Christian worldview, a whole new perspective of wellbeing emerges.

During this course, you'll be encouraged to explore **wellbeing as "a state of wholeness and thriving within and between people that echoes the Hebrew concept of shalom."** This introductory essay will explain why and how one could envision and move toward that kind of wellbeing.

To catch a glimpse of this shalom-like 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 [experience] 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, 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 to have human souls 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 can 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.

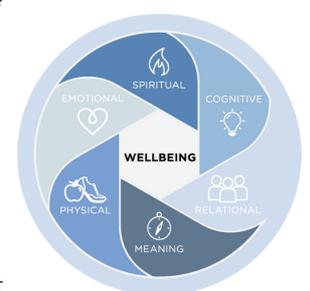
WELLBEING IS POSSIBLE. WELLBEING REQUIRES AWARENESS AND WELLBEING REQUIRES AGENCY.

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 influence your soul and its Intrapersonal Wellbeing.

First, your wellbeing is impacted by the **SPIRITUAL** aspect of your life. 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 the transcendent God; the part that senses the Holy Spirit; the part that desires to be like Jesus. Your image of God, church experiences, understanding of the Bible, spiritual practices and rhythms with God 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 use your agency and develop certain habits which will shape your spirit. You can choose to engage your Sacred Pathways. You can choose to practice Spiritual Disciplines. You can choose to establish Rhythms with God that purposefully bring you back to engagement with God daily, weekly, monthly and annually. Your choices and habits regarding your spirit greatly impact your soul's wellbeing.

**THERE ARE SIX
FOUNDATIONAL
ASPECTS
OF LIFE THAT
AFFECT YOUR
INTRAPERSONAL
WELLBEING.**



SUMMARY ESSAY CONTINUED

Second, your soul's wellbeing is impacted by the **COGNITIVE** aspect of your life.

Your 'mind' has a cognitive side and an emotional side to it. In this 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.

Additionally, you will be introduced to different ways you can invest in and cultivate your thinking so that it promotes your intrapersonal wellbeing. You can re-shape 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** aspect of your life.

Your body profoundly influences your sense of wellbeing. Most people don't realize how their small daily choices are actually harming their physiology and thus impairing their wellbeing. Additionally, some people have to navigate crippling illnesses or debilitating injuries. Does this mean that their soul will never be well since their bodies are struggling so profoundly? Not at all! 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 influence.

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

Fourth, your intrapersonal wellbeing is influenced the **RELATIONAL** aspect of your life.

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 invest in your relational wellbeing, you have a better chance of experiencing Interpersonal Wellbeing.

(Note: The difference between intrapersonal and interpersonal wellbeing will be explained on the next pages.)

Fifth, your intrapersonal wellbeing is influenced by the **EMOTIONAL** aspect of your life.

Your emotions are the other side of the 'mind' coin. Your thoughts and your feelings comprise your 'mind' and dramatically influence how you 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 unit, 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 from are: Recognizing Interoception and Concepts, Emotional Granularity, "Knowing your Dope(amine)", Reframing, Curiosity, Empathy, Managing your Flood and Managing Conflict. Ideally, these skills will become habits in your life that will affect your wellbeing for good.

Finally, your intrapersonal 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 sense of wellbeing. If you don't know why you are here on earth, your soul will suffer.

In this unit, you will explore God's Calling for your life, your Values, Priorities and Intentional Decision Making so that you can live a meaning-filled life. As you choose to invest in your calling, career, values and intentional decisions, you will find your sense of meaning and purpose beginning to thrive.

**THE WELLBEING
WHEEL HELPS YOU
REMEMBER THE SIX
ASPECTS OF LIFE THAT
GREATLY INFLUENCE
YOUR WELLBEING.**

**WELLBEING REQUIRES AWARENESS & AGENCY.
AS YOU REPEATEDLY USE YOUR AGENCY TO MAKE CHOICES
YOU WILL FORM HABITS THAT CAN HELP RENEW YOUR SOUL**

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. This 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 areas of life. When they do, they are using their agency to invest in the renewal of their intrapersonal wellbeing.
7. These choices can not all be made at one time. Rather, over your adult life, you will want to wisely and strategically determine when to use your agency and implement what you have learned.

SO...WHAT IS WELLBEING? AND ARE THERE DIFFERENT KINDS?

To re-iterate, the course definition of general wellbeing is:

"a state of wholeness and thriving within and between people that echoes the Hebrew concept of shalom."

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.

Now, you're not aiming for this kind of wellbeing found in shalom simply for your own benefit. If you aim for this kind of wellbeing, you 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, and fully if my soul is well."

Throughout this essay, various kinds of wellbeing have been referenced.

Wellbeing can be experienced on an Intrapersonal level, an Interpersonal level and a Systems level.

Intrapersonal wellbeing

refers to the wellbeing one can experience within themselves. The course definition is "an individual's quality of life characterized by wholeness and thriving which has been influenced by the spiritual, cognitive, emotional, physical, relational and meaning aspects of life." This is the micro level of wellbeing.

Interpersonal wellbeing

refers to the wellbeing between people. The course definition is "the quality of life and relationship between people characterized by justice-infused peace, mutual respect, connection and thriving." Interpersonal wellbeing is influenced by the Intrapersonal wellbeing each individual in the relationship is experiencing. This is the mid level of wellbeing.

SUMMARY ESSAY CONTINUED

Systems wellbeing

refers to an entire system experiencing wholeness and thriving. The course definition is: "the quality of life experienced by a system characterized by wholeness and thriving for the entire system which impacts the intrapersonal and interpersonal wellbeing of those functioning within the system."

Think of a family or a residence hall or even the U.S. as systems. When a family is whole and thriving that family is experiencing 'systems wellbeing.' This is why your intrapersonal wellbeing may suffer 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 and mid levels of wellbeing since those are what you have the most agency to influence while in college.

HOW WILL THIS CLASS HELP YOU CULTIVATE INTRA AND INTER PERSONAL 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 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 repeatedly choose to use these tips or tools. Your repeated choices will become habits.

One last thing. Look at the wellbeing wheel. This wheel was designed to help you remember the foundational aspects of life that influence your wellbeing. You'll notice that there are two rings - the inner dimensions form a ring and they are encased by an outer ring. These rings depict this truth: **What is inside you 'spills out' and influences how you interact with 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 'flows out' from you would be beneficial for everyone's wellbeing.

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

INTRAPERSONAL WELLBEING:

AN INDIVIDUAL'S QUALITY OF LIFE CHARACTERIZED BY WHOLENESS AND THRIVING WHICH HAS BEEN INFLUENCED BY THE SPIRITUAL, COGNITIVE, EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL, RELATIONAL AND MEANING ASPECTS OF LIFE

INTERPERSONAL WELLBEING:

THE QUALITY OF LIFE AND RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEOPLE CHARACTERIZED BY JUSTICE-INFUSED PEACE, MUTUAL RESPECT, CONNECTION AND THRIVING

SYSTEMS WELLBEING:

THE QUALITY OF LIFE EXPERIENCED BY A SYSTEM CHARACTERIZED BY WHOLENESS AND THRIVING FOR THE ENTIRE SYSTEM WHICH IMPACTS THE INTRAPERSONAL & INTERPERSONAL WELLBEING OF THOSE WITHIN THE SYSTEM

