



PREPARING FOR YOUR RETREAT

Put Your Whole Self In

Children's songs are some of my favorite music. There is a simplicity and silliness to many children's songs that makes them infectious; familiar children's songs jump easily into our heads. Just reading the words, "If you're happy and you know it," probably has you singing in your head right now.

The children's song "The Hokey Pokey" has always been my favorite. I play the guitar and love to sing for both children and elders. Both groups seem to love to sing and get up and move whenever they hear the song. Of course you don't just sing "The Hokey Pokey," you *do* the Hokey Pokey. This combination of singing and moving is probably why this song is so memorable.

"The Hokey Pokey" begins by inviting you to "put your right hand in," and then to take it out, put it back in, and shake it all about. After that you do the Hokey Pokey and you turn yourself about. The song progresses from there by inviting you to put your left hand in, then your right and left legs, then your head, and the favorite verse for children—your "back-side"!

"The Hokey Pokey" builds toward the last verse when you are asked to "put your whole self in." I share all of this with you because much like the Hokey Pokey, this retreat is an invitation to put your whole self in. You will reflect upon your wellness with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind. Eight areas of your life and wellness will be examined, one in each chapter: Spirituality, Rest and Play, Vocational Wellness, Organization, Care for the Body, Stress Resiliency, Relationships, and Handling Your Emotions. When you have concluded this retreat you will have reflected upon all aspects of your health and wellness and in your own way you will have done the Hokey Pokey—you will have put your whole self in.

Have you seen the bumper sticker that reads, “What If the Hokey Pokey Is What It’s All About?” I am pretty sure that the Hokey Pokey is *not* what it’s all about, but when it comes to caring for your health and wellness, I am very sure that putting your whole self in *is*. My hope is that this book will be a place to help you determine the best course of action for treating any discomforts you may be experiencing and to become inspired to turn your life, your relationships, your work, and your health and wellness around.

Looking For Your Balance

One fall Saturday when our son was three I was painting the front porch of our old house with his help. At one point I was standing on a short step ladder and while leaning over to paint the soffit of the porch, I lost my balance and fell into the bushes five feet below. I wasn’t hurt, but it shook me up for a few moments and I lay dazed in the bushes. Our son was quite alarmed and ran down to ask me what happened. After catching my breath I explained to him that I was fine and that I had simply lost my balance. A few minutes later, after returning to my painting, I noticed our son crawling around on his hands and knees looking under the bushes by the porch. When I asked him what he was doing, he innocently replied, “Daddy, I’m looking for your balance.” Laughing to myself, I realized what he thought I meant by losing my balance: it only made sense that he would try to find it for me. If I had told him I had lost my screwdriver, he would have no doubt looked for that as well. So why would he not look for my balance? I bet we all wish it were that simple—that whenever we lose our balance in life someone else, even a three year old, could find it and give it back to us.

Unfortunately others cannot find our balance for us. However, the good news is that whenever we discover that we have lost our balance, we can take steps to regain it. Perhaps you are reading this book because you are looking for a way to restore balance and wellness to your life. Perhaps you are looking to restore balance and wellness to a significant relationship in your life, to your financial life, or to your work life. Perhaps you are struggling with a health issue or experiencing an unhealthy amount of stress in your life. If you are experiencing any or all of these challenges to maintaining balance and wellness, do not feel embarrassed or critical of yourself; instead, understand that you are part of the human race and it is a part of being an imperfect human being. You are not alone. The fact that you are reading this book probably means you want to do something proactive for yourself, and you are trying to find your balance. I am hoping that reading and working the process in this book will be a great step in that direction.

Your Faith *Can* Make You Well

There are many outstanding wellness programs today, but few of them invite people to explore the vital connection between their spirituality and their current state of wellness. Up until very recently, most wellness programs focused primarily on the physical dimension of wellness. There is now, however, a renewed interest in not only addressing spirituality as it relates to one's wellness, but to looking at other dimensions of wellness, too. This approach to wellness, known as "whole-person wellness," is what this book is based upon. In this book we address what it means to be well with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind. These four categories of wellness comprise the four points of the Living Compass approach to health and wellness.

In the Bible there is a story about health and wellness that appears in the fifth chapter of the Gospel of John. In this story we learn of a man sitting by a pool in Jerusalem and hoping to be healed as he encounters Jesus. The story says that there were many blind, lame, and paralyzed people there seeking healing. The gospel tells us that the man we come to know in the story has been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus approaches this desperate man, he asks him a fascinating question: "Do you want to be made well?"

This question seems rather silly at first. Of course a person who has been ill for thirty-eight years wants to be well, right? And yet, if we pause to consider this question we will discover that when it comes to wellness, it is *the* question. We all know people who seem to choose to stay stuck in their "dis-ease." They seem to be blind, lame, or paralyzed about their ability to make a choice to be well. We, of course, are sometimes those people ourselves. Any of us can be blind, lame, or paralyzed regarding our own well-being or the well-being of a significant relationship without even realizing it. We can be blind to the steps we could take to be made well. Like the man that Jesus encountered by the healing pool in Jerusalem, sometimes we need someone outside of ourselves to help us recognize both our present condition and what we can do to change it. Sometimes that someone is another person and sometimes it's the work of the Spirit, and of course, sometimes it's one and the same. The connection between the Spirit and wellness is evident in many of the stories that describe Jesus offering healing to someone. The stories almost always end with Jesus saying to the person, "Your faith has made you well."

It is reported that Mark Twain, when asked if he believed in infant baptism, said, "Believe in it? Heck, I've seen it!" That is funny but is also exactly my response when I am asked if I believe there is connection between faith and wellness: "Believe it? Heck, I've seen it!" It is because I have witnessed the connection between faith and the healing, recovery, and well-being of countless peoples' lives that I continuously emphasize the

importance of grounding one's wellness in one's faith. The fruits of wellness truly grow from nurturing the seeds of the Spirit's movement in one's life.

It is worth noting here that the power of faith in a person's life can work two ways. I have been speaking of the tremendous positive influence a faith or spiritual life can have on a person's health and wellness. The fact is the power of a person's faith system or spiritual understandings can also have a tremendous negative influence on a person's health and wellness. In my thirty plus years as a psychotherapist, I have listened to hundreds of individuals describe how they were suffering from having been raised in what I call a toxic faith environment. A toxic faith environment is characterized by a shame-based or fear-based approach to spirituality. The approach of toxic faith is to shame and/or scare people into believing and behaving a certain way. Not only does this not work in the long term, but it creates residual shame, anxiety, and inadequacy in a person. In this case, I would say that rather than their faith making them well, their faith has actually helped to make them sick.

You Have Already Been Made Whole

Our wholeness is a gift that we have already been given by God. We already are whole. But sometimes we can get a bit off balance and may not be experiencing this God-given gift, and therefore are feeling unwell. I use the words "wholeness" and "wellness" in slightly different ways. Wholeness has to do with our being, the very essence of who we are. Wellness has to do with how we are choosing or not choosing to manifest that wholeness at any given time. Wellness is the sum total of our choices. Wholeness is the sum total of God's choice to create and love us. We have already been given the gift of wholeness.

The retreat you are about to embark on is meant to help you discover a deeper sense of wholeness and to create wellness choices that more fully manifest that wholeness in your life. It is also meant to help you identify places where healing is needed in your life. Healing begins the moment we begin to recognize the gift of wholeness, the gift of love that has already been freely given to us. And the more we recognize that gift, the more likely we are to manifest it in our own wellness.

It is my hope and prayer that this retreat will help you to recognize and receive the gift of wholeness that you have already been given and in the process help you to share that gift more freely with others.

Your Living Compass

We all have places that are sacred to us, places where we reconnect to our sense of what is most important in life. These sacred places are where we

experience that which is holy, that which is life-giving. Sacred places help us access a different place within ourselves.

Quetico Provincial Park in western Ontario is one of the sacred places in my life. Quetico is a 1.2 million acre remote wilderness area that borders the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in northern Minnesota, and like the Boundary Waters it can only be accessed by canoe. A permit is required to enter the park, which limits the number of people in the park at any one time. It is common to go several days without seeing another soul. I have spent many days and nights in this park and have always drunk the water right out of the lake. No filtering, boiling, or treatment of the water is required. If you relish solitude in nature, the experience there is as pure as the water.

There is one essential skill for a successful canoe journey through any remote wilderness and that is the skill of navigation. One must be proficient in using a compass and reading a map. There are more than six hundred lakes in Quetico and, depending on how long one's journey, a visit may include ten to fifteen of those lakes in a week. The portage trails are remote and are never marked so they can only be found by using a compass and a good map. No one would ever think of entering a remote wilderness area without a good compass and a good map.

The reality is that each of us already has a "living" compass. Each of us has a compass that is directing and guiding the day-to-day decisions we make in our lives, whether we know it or not. Our compass is a combination of our beliefs, thoughts, core values, self-identity, passions, and ideals and is always orienting our lives and our daily decisions.

There are many compasses that are competing to guide how we make decisions, including our family of origin, our gender, our race, our national culture, our important relationships, our self-identity, and our faith. These compasses all influence our daily decisions, often without us even knowing it.

This retreat invites you to reflect on the compass or compasses that are orienting you in eight areas of wellness. In each of these areas you will be invited to reflect on which compass is guiding the choices and decisions you make regarding this area of wellness. You will be invited to reflect on what thoughts, beliefs, ideals, passions, and ideals are influencing your decisions.

Throughout the retreat you will be invited to take your reflections a couple of steps further. After you reflect on thoughts, beliefs, passions, and ideals that are guiding your decisions, you will be asked to consider the impact on your well-being. Are you helped or hurt by those thoughts, beliefs, passions, and ideals? Finally, you will be invited to decide if you want to do or try something different based on your self-reflection. The following three questions provide a simple way to summarize this:

- ◆ What compass or compasses are guiding you in this area of wellness?
- ◆ If you keep heading in the direction you are pointed, will you end up where you want to be?
- ◆ Is there anything you would like to change or do differently based on your answers to the first two questions?

Faith Defined as Your Inner Compass

There are many different ways to define faith. For the purposes of this retreat, I am defining faith as the composite of one's thoughts, beliefs, passions, practices, habits, and ideals that serve as the inner compass that guides one's life. Every one of us has an inner, living compass—and probably more than one—that guides us, whether we are conscious of it or not. It is probably clear by now that I view spirituality as the area of wellness that influences and guides the remaining seven areas of wellness identified by the Living Compass. It is the foundation upon which we build our lives and make our decisions and is the most important part of who we are.

The idea of a compass works well as a metaphor for our faith. While it is common to talk about the needle of a compass pointing north, in fact, the needle is not really pointing, but is actually being pulled toward the north. The needle of a compass is activated and influenced by a force outside of itself. This force, known as magnetic north, is what causes the needle of a compass to point toward the north. Our faith works the same way. Our spiritual life is activated and influenced by a force outside of ourselves. Christians, of course, name this force as God/Jesus/Spirit, while other traditions give different names to that which is drawing us toward the true north of an abundant and meaningful life.

Change Your Compass, Change Your Life

There are a host of wellness programs available to us today. Wellness programs are popular in workplaces, schools, retirement communities, hospitals, and through many health insurance companies. All of these wellness programs have something important and helpful to offer. They all provide good information about disease prevention and positive changes with the potential to increase health and wellness. Behavior change is a primary focus of most wellness programs. The Living Compass approach to wellness is a little different from most of these wellness programs. The goal of our approach to wellness is to make our faith our living compass every day, in every way, in every aspect of our lives. Of course new behaviors and habits will follow from this transformation of consciousness, but if we

just focus on changing behaviors without changing consciousness, then our behavior changes will most likely be short lived.

Two Prayers to Guide Us as We Begin Our Retreat

As our final preparation for beginning our retreat, I invite you pray two ancient prayers. I invite you to pray them now and to return to them and pray them throughout your retreat. The first prayer is the prayer attributed to St. Francis.

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen. (BCP, 833)

This prayer is a beautiful summary of what it means to live a Christian life. If we think of being an instrument in musical terms, then it is essential that we tune our instruments on a regular basis. If we are out of tune, it's impossible to play beautiful music. This retreat is designed to help you tune the instrument of your heart, soul, strength, and mind so that you can truly be an instrument of God's healing love in the world.

The second prayer I would like to invite you to pray is the Collect for Purity.

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen. (BCP, 355)

A full reflection on this prayer will be offered later in this retreat. I include it here, too, because just as it is an ideal prayer to begin worship, it is an ideal prayer for beginning a retreat. This prayer, just as the retreat that follows, invites us to authenticity and full transparency in order that we may grow in our ability to love and magnify God's presence in our lives and in the world.

So let's begin. Let's open our hearts more fully to ourselves, to one another, and to God.