



Reality Check

... take hold of the life that really is life. | Timothy 6:19b

Breath by Breath

Living the Good Life —Wellness in Body, Mind, and Soul

 **Goal:** To guide youth in understanding wellness, to see life as a gift from God, and to learn how practicing physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health is a faithful response to God's gift of life.

 **Scripture Focus: Psalm 139**
“Body and soul, I am marvelously made!”
(the Message)

 **Theme song**
“Teresa’s Prayer,” *Hymnal Supplement* #1133 (First line title is “Christ be in my mind.”)

Schedule

Friday

Gathering and get acquainted activity
Meal
Session I: “Breathing Life into My Body”
Worship/devotions

Saturday

Worship/devotions
Breakfast
Session II: “Breathing Life into My Spirit”
Games or free time
Lunch
Dismissal with blessing
(optional, for 18-hour event)

Saturday Afternoon

Get acquainted activity
(if a second session)
Games
Service project or field trip
Evening meal
Session III: “Breathing Life into My Mind”
Late-night activities

Sunday

Breakfast
Session IV: “Breathe in, Breathe out—
A Balanced Rhythm”
Worship and call to action

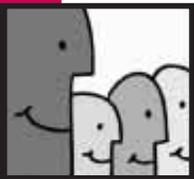


A resource series
for youth “lock-ins” or
retreats, designed to
help church leaders form and
educate young stewards.

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Notes for Leaders:

What is “real life” for a follower of Jesus? Does it match messages of what’s “real” in the culture around us? How do young people live out their faith? These materials are based on the understanding that the moment we say yes to Jesus, we become stewards of all of life. The outlines provide opportunities for fun, fellowship, and faith reflections—three important needs in the lives of youth of any age. Developed by young adults and leaders from various fields of expertise, this resource provides you with schedule options and a variety of activity choices. The outline can be divided into two short events of 18 hours each, or combined into a weekend event—from Friday evening through Sunday worship. Additional topics are available from the Church of the Brethren at 800-323-8039.



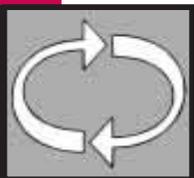
Get Acquainted Activities

The Choice Is Yours. Designate the four corners and the center of the room as “gathering spots.” Ask participants to go to the spot of their choice as you read the options below. When the youth are in their spots, ask them to choose a partner and talk for one minute each about why they made that choice.

- You arrive home hungry. Your snack choice usually is: (1st corner) chips; (2nd corner) fruit or veggies; (3rd corner) candy; (4th corner) soda pop; or (center) water.
- If you had to give up one of your senses, it would be: sight; smell; touch; hearing; or (center) taste.
- When you feel unhealthy, you: take two aspirin and go to bed; quietly watch TV; eat comfort food; think about what might be bothering your spirit or emotions; or ignore the feeling.
- The most likely reason for you to feel well is because: You have good health; you have a loving family; you have faithful and caring friends; you exercise regularly; or you have adequate spending money.
- When your spirit is low, you: eat; go shopping; call a friend; engage in a favorite activity; or sleep it off.

It’s a Ball! In advance, get one or more light-colored beach or rubber ball(s) (up to 10 participants per ball) and use a permanent marker to write a different phrase on each panel of the ball, such as “I like ____”; “I am ____”; “If I were able, I would ____”; “I want ____”; “I deserve ____.” Youth stand in a circle and bounce the ball across the center. The one catching the ball answers the question under his or her thumb. Play until all have had one turn. Or, pre-printed balls are sold at: www.freespirit.com/catalog/item_detail.cfm?ITEM_ID=557.

The Well Body.¹ In advance, trace an outline of a body on butcher paper. Discuss how “wellness” involves the whole person. Cut the body into parts: legs, arms, head, chest, and abdomen. Divide the students into groups, giving each a part. Ask them to brainstorm wellness behaviors and lifestyle habits that are important for keeping that particular body part healthy and write those ideas on the body part, being creative and taking into account ALL the areas of wellness (see “Well, well, well” below). Gather the whole group together and tape the body parts back together as the youth share their ideas. Post this body for use in other activities or in worship.



Session I: “Breathing Life into My Body”

Introductory Remarks: 1 Cor. 3:16 says, “...You yourselves are God’s temple and...God’s Spirit lives in you.” What does the word “wellness” really mean? Some people think of it as the absence of sickness; others believe a person can be “well” even when very sick. Think of a time when you weren’t sick at all, but you felt sad or upset. Wellness is when we are healthy in body, feelings, thoughts, and spirit. We all have days when we aren’t in balance. Working at well-being means we try to make the best choices most the time, so we can be healthy and happy most of the time.

ACTIVITY OPTIONS:

“Well, well, well.” This activity gives an overview of the qualities of a well person. In advance, make a poster listing the areas of wellness below. You will also need old magazines, scissors, glue or tape, and a large blank poster board for each group of four-to-five students.

PHYSICAL: exercise, eating, physical care, heredity

EMOTIONAL: anger, humor, love, expressing feelings

SOCIAL: friends and family, groups, getting along, seeing value in people

MENTAL: self-esteem, knowing you are one-of-a-kind, insight

INTELLECTUAL: using your mind, studying and growing, curiosity, memory

SPIRITUAL: values, worship life, awareness of God’s presence, beliefs

ENVIRONMENTAL: part of a global community, care of creation.

Using the poster, briefly talk about the scope of “wellness.” Ask: *What does wellness mean to you? Is it more than just not being sick?* Divide into groups of four or five people. Distribute materials. Direct groups to draw a line down the middle of their posters. On one side of the line, the group should design a collage that shows wellness, and on the other half of the poster put examples of “un-well” persons, activities, or words. Gather to discuss what the pictures represent.

What Do I Have Going for Me? Ask each youth to write down his or her individual strengths on sticky notes, referring to the poster of wellness areas from “Well, well, well,” above. Using the body poster from the get acquainted activity, have participants place as many sticky notes as they choose on the related body part. Next, in groups of three-to-four people,

ask each person to take two minutes to talk about his or her top strength, one area where he or she feels “not-so-well,” and how to improve in that area. Encourage honest sharing in each small group, and call “time” so that everyone has a chance to share. Some discussion options are: What determines if you have a healthy body? Who determines if you have a healthy body? Is wellness a list of dos and don’ts? Thinking about your unique limitations, what are the choices you can make each day to live the best life you can?

Get Movin’! Physical activity is vital for all aspects of wellness! Choose one of the following activities:

- *Teen Yoga DVD**
- Invite a local yoga or tai chi instructor to lead a session for the youth, being sure that they incorporate easy movements so that all are able to participate.
- Design an indoor “marathon” with a variety of options, but with instructions to complete a minimum number of them. Examples: stair climbing, jumping rope, hoola-hoop, chair sits (up and down repetitions), arm or thumb wrestling, basketball bouncing, stretch band stretches, wheelchair races.

Food Choices Challenge. Obesity in teenagers is on the rise in the United States, with many young teens on prescriptions for heart disease. This activity is a fun and informational way to draw participants’ attention to healthy eating options. Work in advance with your kitchen crew to create a table of snack options. Assign each option a score—low points for wise choices and high points for not-so-wise. Healthy choices can be: fruit, vegetables, yogurt, 100-calorie snack-packs, popcorn, juice, water. Not-so-wise choices include: soda pop, chips, candy, cookies. Provide portion comparisons if possible. Divide youth into equal-sized teams. At each snack break, each person makes his or her own choices, but they must add up a score for the entire team. A wall chart showing team progress may help encourage players. At the end of the event, tally the scores and allow time for discussion. The team with the lowest score wins.

Session II: “Breathing Life into My Spirit”

Introductory Remarks: Read Ezekiel 37:1-10 aloud, focusing on verse 6b, “*I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.*” Explain that deep, “from-the-gut” breathing helps us focus our attention on what we do. Our spirits can feel weary, yet God breathes life into us and we will feel restored. Then, slowly lead this brief meditation, pausing after each body-part to allow participants to focus: *Settle your minds and bodies into a space of calm relaxation. Think about relaxing each part of your body. Start with your toes, then move up to your ankles, your knees, hips, torso, shoulders, arms, fingers, neck, head. Focus your thoughts on your breath. (Pause.) Put both hands over your belly button. Take three deep breaths that make your hands move up and down.*

ACTIVITY OPTIONS

Walking the Path. In advance, locate a labyrinth and plan a time (1 to 1 1/2 hours) to teach youth about this age-old prayer and centering practice. Then have them participate in this calming, and balancing activity. Share some “wellness mantras” they may use as they walk, such as, “To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul” (Psalm 25:1), or “Body and soul, I am wonderfully made” (Psalm 139), or “My life is a gift from and to God.”

Brittle Spirits. Use uncooked pasta to symbolize the dry bones in the valley of the Ezekiel scripture. Point out how inflexible and rigid uncooked pasta is—much like we are when our spirits are dry and hardened. Boil the pasta in water. (Consider cooking enough for a healthy group meal.) Discuss what it takes to “soften” the spirit—to loosen up so that we can serve God wholly. To illustrate for the body, ask youth to try the yoga “tree” position without any stretching or warm-up. (Instructions are at www.yogajournal.com/poses/496.) What happens? Next, have participants center themselves with deep breathing and stretching and try the position again. Discuss what happened the second time. When our bodies and spirits are balanced and flexible, we have a deeper sense of wellness and God’s presence in our lives.

Laughing—the Best Medicine. Many laughing clubs have popped up, particularly in India. Participants say stress relief and better health are benefits. Here are some laughter options:

- **View videos:** <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0283448/> (28 minute film available from Spiritual Cinema Circle) or John Cleese at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXEfjVnYkqM>.
- **The “Ha” game**— You need five people or more: Players sit on the floor in a circle. Person 1 starts by looking into the eyes of the person to the left and saying “Ha.” Person 2 says “Ha, ha” to the person to his or her left, and play continues, adding a “ha” with each new person. The object is to maintain eye contact and NOT laugh or smile. Anyone laughing or looking away is eliminated. Continue until only one person remains.

Reader’s Theater: As a group, produce the drama, “Miss Fitt’s Spiritually Fit course.” Print the script at <http://christianskitscripts.com/spirfit.htm>. The CD* adds drama, humor and credibility to the production.

* Available on loan from the Church of the Brethren, 800-323-8039, ext 208. A complete list of stewardship materials for loan is on-line at www.brethren.org/site/DocServer/StewardshipLoanerBibliography.pdf?docID=2762.

Session III: “Breathing Life into My Mind”

Introductory Remarks: The writer of 1 Peter 1:13 says, “Therefore, prepare your minds for action, be self-controlled.” What does this mean? How does your mind (your thinking, your emotions, your affections toward others) influence your total wellness? In this session we will focus on the wellness of our minds. Studies show that we are more creative and remember more when we are in a state of “mindfulness.” When we pay attention, our brain waves slow down and actually capture everything we are doing. This results in better performance on tests, better health, and more positive, energetic feelings.

ACTIVITY OPTIONS:

A Raisin by Any Other Name. You will need one large raisin for each person. Share the following with the group: *Often we sit through a class or church without really tuning in. Even when friends talk to us, we sometimes think about something else! We also often gobble down a meal while watching TV, driving, or standing at the kitchen counter. Do we really know what we are doing with that time? Do we pay enough attention to what we do? How many of you can tell me what you had for lunch two days ago?* (Allow time for responses.) *Let’s experience what it really means to be “mindful” of what we are doing.*

Give the following instructions, stressing that each person waits until everyone has a raisin, and that they go slowly. Allow plenty of time between each action. Say: *“Select one raisin and hold it in your left hand. Examine its texture and shape. Notice how it feels. Smell it. Think about how and where that piece of fruit grew. Who cared for it? What process did it go through to become what it is? How did it get to you? Now, put the raisin in your mouth and let it rest on your tongue without chewing it. Notice any changes in your mouth. Bite into it once so that you have two pieces. What muscles did you use to bite down? Now, eat the whole raisin as slowly as you can, with the thought that it could be the only food you will eat all day.”*

Discussion: What images came to your mind as you ate? What sensations did you feel before biting into the food? How would it feel to eat an entire meal in this state of mindfulness? Name other situations where paying attention would be better for your body, mind, or spirit.

As You Breathe.² This exercise helps develop self-esteem and positive energy, and can be used in worship. Share that our mental and emotional states can affect the way we breathe. Ask youth to think about how they feel and breathe when scared, tense, or upset. Usually our breathing becomes rapid and shallow when we have those feelings. Conscious, slow, deep breathing brings more oxygen to our lungs and brains, which gives us a sense of calm and gives us more energy. Breathing is one of our automatic physical functions, but it is also under our conscious control. Have youth sit comfortably with their feet on the floor and eyes closed. Instruct them to inhale when the words “breathe in and” are said and to exhale when the next phrase is read. Read slowly.

Inhale	Exhale
Breathe in and	Release any tension
Breathe in and	Acknowledge your strengths
Breathe in and	Expand your vision
Breathe in and	Trust in God
Breathe in and	Enjoy your creativity

Encourage participants to think of other energizing, affirming words that have special meaning for them and to use them as they do this exercise on their own. Brainstorm situations when this exercise might be helpful (e.g. before a test or public performance, when frightened or anxious).

Kitchen Band. This activity is fun and is a good jumping-off point to talk about community, relationships, equality, and using “what you’ve been dealt” for positive results. Before your event or together as a group, collect (or make) “found sounds” as substitutes for traditional percussion instruments. (Examples are: A large garbage can, water cooler jugs, buckets, fast-food pickle barrels, and cardboard for drum sounds of differing pitches. Assorted bottles full of rice, beans, or gravel for shakers. Tin cans as guiros. Keys for a chime. Pan lids struck with a mallet for a cymbal. Drinking glasses “tuned” with water. Blow across cardboard tubes.) Start with a youth leader setting a rhythm, then add sound layers gradually, improvising as you go. Try echo patterns or add a simple rhythm of words. (Scripture would work!) Give the group plenty of time to develop the sound, instructing the leader to slow down the rhythm and conclude at a cue from a designated adult leader after about 10 minutes. If time permits, allow several youth to be the initial leader.

Discussion. How did it feel to join in, or be “at one” with a group? How did your mind and body become part of this experience? How did you respond physically and emotionally to knowing there was no “right” or “wrong” way to participate? In what ways did you sense respect for each voice?



Finding Your Own Mind. Use a continuum as a non-threatening way to encourage youth get moving, thinking, and expressing opinions for themselves. Indicate an imaginary line down the middle of the room. One end represents “agree,” the other “disagree,” with every gradation of opinion in between. Start with the easy first statement (below) and ask the participants to place themselves anywhere along the line to indicate how they feel about the statement. Ask some to share why they placed themselves where they did. Add other statements if you wish.

- Once you have your diploma there’s no real reason to read another book.
- It’s OK to remain quiet if someone offends or makes fun of one of my friends.
- I feel great talking to kids at school about my church youth group.
- There’s nothing wrong with hanging out with people who use drugs as long as you don’t use drugs yourself.
- I base my ideas about success on people whom I admire in the pop culture, like _____ (give examples pertinent to your group).
- Before I make a final decision on an issue, I talk it over with my parents or an adult mentor.

Session IV: “Breathe in, Breathe out—A Balanced Rhythm”

Introductory Remarks: In Genesis 2:7 we are told that God formed a human being from the dust of the ground and breathed life into his nostrils. God also breathed the fullness of life into each of us. We can inhale the good things of life, and release our energy and breath into the world to complete a healthy cycle of spirit-led breathing. Or we can choose differently. What we breathe in affects what we breathe out. In this session, we will consider how “intake” and “output” affects individual wellness and the wellness of the world around us.

ACTIVITY OPTIONS:

Our Bodies—Our Stuff. Ask the group how they think they are affected by the people they spend time with, the music they listen to, the movies they see. Discuss the similarities between and impact of the following areas of living: (a) what we put into our bodies, (b) what we fill our minds with, (c) the purchases we make, and (d) what we feed our spirits with. Watch the 20-minute video, *Story of Stuff*, online at www.storyofstuff.com.

Discussion questions. How does the video relate to complete wellness—both of an individual and of the world? How does the video fit into your understanding of what it means to be Brethren?

Grab Bag Skits. This activity reinforces the idea of finding balance in life, illustrating that many areas need our attention and care. Each of us is more than *just* a student, *just* a choir member, *JUST* a football player. The better we “feed” each area of living, the stronger and happier we will be. In advance, fill grocery bags with four or five items that represent the areas of wellness (mental, physical, spiritual, emotional, social, environmental). Divide youth into small groups and give each a bag, instructing them to create a three-minute skit that shows the importance of being a balanced person or making healthy choices. Items to include may be: mirror, light bulb, keys, book, prescription bottle, photo of a family, soda bottle, cigarettes, running shoe, DVD, seatbelt, cell phone, bandage, fruit, chips. Be creative and have fun!

Call to Action. As a group, brainstorm some specific actions to take to form habits that promote well-being. Include physical, mental, and spiritual options and list them on newsprint. Encourage big and little, realistic and reachable goals, but do not discourage challenges. Discuss the list after it is created. You may wish to reach consensus on one or more actions to take together—or you may encourage individuals to make a personal commitment. Write the plan(s) out carefully to offer during the closing worship of this event as a response to God’s gift of life. Sing “Spirit of Life,” #1129 in *Hymnal Supplement*. Some ideas are:

- Each person chooses one healthy food change to make in his or her life. Create a goal and commitment form to keep records and practice this wellness habit for 30 days. Report to the group.
- The group plans a “wellness challenge” for taking better care of their bodies through diet and exercise. Carefully articulate plans, with specific goals stated for the group. Set beginning and ending dates. (Participants should check with their doctors before a weight-loss challenge.)
- Discuss how one person’s health can affect those around him or her. As a group, plan ways to be instrumental in improving the stewardship of health in the congregation. What can be done alone and what would take a group effort? And for how long?

Dismissal and Blessing Options

Altar of Thanksgiving (closure for 18-hour event, after Session II). In advance, make a PVC pipe frame with netting over it, secured with safety pins (see photo). Get a party-sized helium tank for filling balloons, permanent markers in various colors, and latex balloons (biodegradable) of different sizes and colors. Lead this experience with the following words: *As we focus on God’s ability to breathe life into our body and mind and spirit, you are invited to help build an altar of prayer and thanksgiving. Select a*

balloon, fill it with helium from the tank, and tie a knot to seal it. Then gently write a prayer, a word of hope, or something for which you are thankful on the balloon. Place the balloon under the netting of this altar. When all participants have completed a balloon, gather around the altar and sing "Spirit Wind" (#1075 in the Hymnal Supplement). Release the balloons by opening the netting. Closing prayer: *Let the Spirit carry our prayers upward, joining them in praise and hope as they are offered from our spirits to God.*



Anointing (closure for second event, or end of a 36-hour event after Session IV). In advance, purchase one small mirror for each participant. Paint or stencil, "I am well—a whole child of God." on the back. Plan an anointing that focuses on wellness. You will need several prepared leaders and anointing oil. Ask youth to consider these questions for their response in the service: *For what "wellness" do you wish to be anointed? Is there anything in your body, mind, or spirit that will keep you from receiving the full blessing of God through this anointing?* In a closing circle, pass around a hand mirror. As each person holds it and looks into the mirror, the rest of the group says, "(Name), you are made in the image of God. Breathe in life and be well!" As the group departs, give each person a mirror as a reminder of this event.

Additional Activity Ideas

Games. Many games stimulate mental acuity or connect the mind-body-spirit. Puzzle-solving allows us to develop key areas of the brain and trains us to think differently. For individuals, provide word games, word search, pattern finding, or Sudoku. For a group, try: Scrabble, Twister, Balderdash, Trivial Pursuit, Loaded Questions, Imagineiff, Pictionary, Guesstures, Cranium and Catch Phrase. Conclude by briefly discussing how each felt playing and why it is important to be able to find solutions and think "outside the box?"

Guest speakers. Invite a "wellness speaker" (a physical therapist, nutrition counselor, someone who has purposely lost a lot of weight, or a person who has experienced a disability) to talk with the group. Ask the speaker to share wellness concepts such as the importance of physical exercise for mental and physical health, how attitudes like determination or discipline help in adjusting to major changes in life, the value of maintaining balance, or the importance of adequate rest. Allow for a question and answer time.

Movies and Videos: *"Dying to Be Thin"* (60 min), NOVA films 2000. *"Supersize Me"* *

Websites:

- www.doxasoma.com** In Greek, *doxa* means "praise or honor" and *soma* means "body." "DoxaSoma" is a practice of breath and postures similar to yoga. A DVD is available on the website.
- www.brethren.org** Click on GROW, then on "Wellness" for a wide variety of resources. *The Wellness Study Guide* (PDF) accompanies a series of 11 workshops exploring the dimensions of wellness and how this holistic approach strengthens us to live more faithful, healthy, and happy lives.
- www.heyugly.org** Hey U.G.L.Y. (Unique Gifted Lovable You) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to building teenager's self-esteem. Laughter CDs are for sale.

Worship Ideas and Resources

Well-being in worship. Our minds and spirits affect our worship. Information on multiple intelligences and several worship styles to try is found at www.rethinkingyouth.blogspot.com. In the box listing "top links," click on "Creative Worship Ideas," titled "Multiple Intelligences Worship Styles," October 6, 2008.

The flame of life.³ Light a large candle in the center of the room and turn off the lights. Play quiet music instructing youth to watch the flame and reflect. Slowly read these instructions, pausing between them: *Think about your life and the fire within you. Name how you feel about yourself. Describe your sense of wellbeing. What is your purpose in life?* After ten minutes, ask youth to share their reflections. Ask: How can one little light can make a difference? What might the darkness represent (e.g. fear, anger, self-doubt)? In what ways can we choose to be a light? A closing option is to have one person carry the light and lead others into another room or activity—to show how one person can help others to reach a goal.

Music. "Breathe" by Michael W. Smith. "Take my life" by Ken Medema. "Fluye, Espiritu, Fluye" (<http://rockhay.tripod.com/worship/music/fluye.htm>). From *Hymnal: A Worship Book* and *Hymnal Supplement*: "Peace, be still, and know that I am God" (#1120), "Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary" (#1128), "As the deer" (1017), "Take, O take me as I am" (1084).

Whole body worship. Body prayer incorporates meaningful movement into prayer. Repeat this prayer several times, with appropriate breathing: *"Breathing in, I am aware of my heart. Breathing out, I am aware of my heart. I vow to eat, drink, and work in ways that preserve my health and well-being."* (Thich Nhat Hanh) In addition, the Church of the Brethren Health Promotion Sunday Materials, 2007 at www.brethren.org include a body prayer for worship.