

Church discovers benefits of holistic wellness; sees lives changed through emphasis on health_90604

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By John Hall

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SAN ANTONIO-At first glance, The Springs Baptist Church may seem a little like an exercise infomercial.

The pastor lost 50 pounds. A member lost 30 pounds. A 65-year-old woman and her husband have started a workout regimen. And each loves it.

A deeper look reveals not a collection of over-achieving health fanatics, but a group of people looking to live out their faith more fully.

The congregation stresses that each aspect of humanity is linked to other characteristics, and Christians are called to love God with their hearts,

souls, minds and bodies, said Pastor Brad Russell.

That emphasis translates into church-sponsored wellness and recovery classes in addition to Bible studies.

The classes attempt to deal with emotional, substance and physical issues that plague people in a way that points them to God, Russell said.

The push goes beyond the classroom. The congregation discusses trying to have healthy food at the visitors' table and started a running group.

Members do not always run together, but they support each other and bond around their common interest.

The church is seeing lives changed. People are becoming healthier. They are rethinking their eating habits and exercising. Some are working through emotional issues in the classes.

“One of my concerns is that there are people who are strong in many ways, but not well,” said Russell, who will lead a seminar during a Health Ministries Conference Sept. 10-11 in San Antonio, sponsored by the Baptist General Convention of Texas Missions Equipping Center.

“To be the strongest person you can be, you need to take care of yourself, spiritually, physically and emotionally.”

Poor physical condition affects the way a person encounters God, Russell noted. An unfit individual is more likely to get depressed, and depression can lead a person to question God's goodness.

A person who is in good shape has the energy to do God's will, he continued. Ministry can call for long hours in crisis situations that drain the body. A person must be able to persevere when needed.

“If I neglect my body and don't take care of it, it's just as much a sin as if I

neglect reading the Scriptures and studying the Bible,” said Judy Sinter, age 65.

“It goes hand in hand,” Jennifer Minx echoed. “Again, it's intuitive. God uses our physical bodies to work through us, and if we take care of our bodies it follows that he can do more through us.

“God tells us that our bodies are temples, so we should treat them with the same respect that we treat physical sanctuaries as a way of worshiping him.”

Wellness has a universal appeal, Russell added. Talking about it opens conversations about spiritual issues.

Through those discussions, lives can eventually change, he maintained.

“It has an appeal for everyone,” he said. “Even the most unchurched person wants to be well.”

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