

An Evangelical Christian Wellness Model

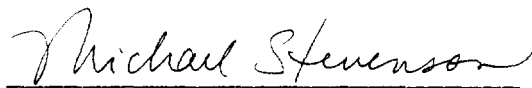
An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael Stevenson". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

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Wellness is becoming a way of life for many people. Ball State University has committed to educating students about wellness through their Institute For Wellness on campus. Several residence halls provide free health screenings, exercise programs and equipment, nutritional guides, and educational programs for the duration of each school year. Wellness at Ball State is defined as six dimensions: Physical, Social, Intellectual, Occupational, Emotional, and Spiritual. The physical dimension involves positive health habits and body fitness. Socially, we must get along with others, build trusting family and friendship ties, and exhibit a sense of community. The intellectual part demands an ongoing acquisition of knowledge. "The abilities to laugh, to enjoy life, to adjust to change, to cope with stress, and to maintain intimate relationships are examples of the emotional dimension of wellness (Robins, Powers & Burgess, 1991)." The spiritual dimension doesn't necessarily call for identifying a creator, a god, or a theology, merely an attempt to find personal meaning and purpose in life through reflections on experience.

It is encouraging to see Ball State include spirituality as a dimension of wellness. Spirituality differs from the other dimensions, in that, public schools cannot endorse any specific boundaries to place around or measure it. The fine line between church and state causes some to object to any university sponsored program that encourages students to examine their spirituality. Collins, Hurst, and Jacobson

(1987) state "the apparent delicacy of this topic offers no excuse for lack of attention....Similarly, it seems ironic that institutions ignore spirituality although they are immersed in the human condition that deals daily with spiritual issues (p. 275)." Therefore, we need to discuss what boundaries have been established by our judicial system in its interpretation of our Constitution.

In a joint effort, 14 educational and religious organizations published a questions and answer bulletin dealing specifically with the liberty public schools have while pursuing religion or spirituality. "The school may strive for student awareness of religions, but should not press for student acceptance of any one religion...the school may expose students to a diversity of religious views, but may not impose any particular views...the school may inform the student about various beliefs but should not seek to conform him or her to any particular belief (Coalition of Religious and Educational Organizations, 1988,p. 81)." Essentially, this means that a university may create an open forum for every religious viewpoint to be expressed. The Equal Access Act of 1984, later upheld by the Supreme Court, gives the right of public schools to provide such a forum (Haynes & Thomas,1991).

Ball State University is taking a constitutional approach to spirituality. The desire is to provide no path or journey as a standard, according to Dr. David C. Gobble, Associate Director of the Institute For Wellness at Ball

State, in a recent interview (1991). Dr. Gobble presents a host of avenues in his classes, expecting students to choose a path they find attractive, and some students possibly becoming offended due to the broad range of viewpoints that are discussed. The underlying goal is to motivate students to take personal responsibility for discovering, beginning, or continuing on some path of spirituality. Current efforts are being made to establish a referral system, whereby, a diversity of campus religious leaders, faculty, and professional counselors will serve as mentors for students wanting to explore spirituality more deeply. The university provides the resources and the students choose which ones to utilize.

This thesis is an evangelical Christian perspective of wellness. Since spirituality for Christians encompasses every dimension of living, a Christian wellness model will be much different than the current Ball State wellness model. The following model is meant to be one more resource within the open forum established by Ball State for students to evaluate and possibly use for their own lives. Further, because Christianity seems to be the predominant religion on campus, a large number of students may benefit from a model that more closely resembles their present lifestyles.

An Evangelical Christian Wellness Model

This wellness model is based on a set of relationships that form a pyramid shaped structure. The foundation of the

model is a relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. The second level of the pyramid is a relationship with ourselves. This is not meant to put the self ahead of others or to put personal goals ahead of serving others. It entails accepting personal worth found when God forgives us of our sins and gives us eternal life. Finally, the pinnacle of our model is a relationship with others. This a very important area to develop because God commands us to serve others, even when we don't always want to. We are to love unconditionally, just as He does. The principles set forth in God's inspired word, the Bible, provide the basis for the model. Growth in each dimension depends entirely on our total dependence on God and His will for our lives.

A Relationship With God

Wellness begins with a relationship with God. We were created in His image to serve and worship Him. His presence in our lives brings completeness and fulfillment. God is the glue that holds our lives together. When we exclude God, we build our life on a foundation of sand (Mt 7:26)*.

This present life and all that is in our world is temporal. We cannot rely on personal health, relationships, material wealth, or any other thing around us, for they will fail us someday. Only God and His power is eternal. A commitment to follow God and grow spiritually in His will is the only hope to be found in our world today.

Salvation

First, we must realize that we have sinned or rebelled against God and cannot approach Him because of our unrighteousness (Ro 3:10,23). We need not commit heinous crimes to be unrighteous. Sinning against God can be as simple as telling a white lie. It doesn't matter, any sin will separate us from the glory of God. I John 1:8 says "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."

Second, the Bible tells us that, as a sinner, we deserve death (Ro 6:23) or eternal separation from God. John 3:18 further elaborates that "Whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." We all deserve death and cannot do anything to save ourselves (Eph 2:9).

Yet, God loved us so much that He sent His Son Jesus to die in our place so that through Him we can be forgiven (Jn 3:16). Jesus said "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (Jn 14:6)." Jesus is God and became man (Jn 1:1,14), died in our place on the cross (I Pe 3:18), and came back to life, demonstrating His power to overcome the penalty of sin for us (Ro 4:25).

Finally, we must receive Him into our lives. John 1:12 says "Yet, to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become the children of God." We must "Repent then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the

Lord (Ac 3:19)." Repentance is not just feeling sorry for our sins (Ac 26:20), but, is turning away from our sins and turning toward God through Jesus Christ. We must place our faith in Jesus. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith (Eph 2:8)." Faith is not just believing facts about Jesus (Jas 2:19), it is trusting in Jesus. We must allow Jesus to be Lord of our lives (Ro 10:9,10).

Surrendering to Jesus as Lord is not just saying we give our lives to Jesus (Mt 7:21), it is giving Jesus full control of our lives. We give Him the steering wheel of our lives and go where He takes us.

God promises that "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Ro 10:13)." We can be sure that God will give us everlasting (Jn 11:25,26) and full (Jn 10:10) lives. The following is a sample prayer of commitment to Jesus: Dear Lord Jesus, I believe You are the Son of God and died to forgive me of my sins...I know I have sinned and ask you to forgive me...I turn from my sins and ask you to take control of my life...Thank You for saving me...Amen. "I tell you, Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation (II Co 6:2b)." Now is the time to begin a life of true wellness. A wellness model can only stand on the solid foundation of a relationship with God.

Growth

God is a personal friend to every Christian. He wants His children to talk to Him in prayer and read what He has written in His word, the Bible. Christian maturity is

essential for a progressive walk of wellness. A commitment to Christ is only the beginning of God's plans, the starting line of our race toward the goal laid before us (Heb 12:1,2).

Prayer is simply talking to God (Jn 15:7). Scripture teaches us to "Pray continually (I Th 5:17)." Praying can be broken into four parts, represented by the acronym ACTS. We begin by Adoring God with words of praise. We Confess our sins to Him and ask for His help to overcome present temptations. Thank God for all He has given to or done for us. Finally, we come to God with Supplications or prayers of need for others and ourselves.

Jesus said "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (Jn 8:31)." Studying scripture helps us recognize sin (Ps 119:11) and be "a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth (II Ti 2:15b)." The Bible is not just a collection of helpful hints for a worthwhile life; it is God's personal living word (Heb 4:12, I Pe 1:23) to everyone who will read it and believe on it. Wellness living for today is taught in the Bible, as we will continue to discover. God's word is still relevant today and always will be in our temporal world (Mt 24:35).

A Relationship With Self

The relationship with self comes before the relationship with others due to the importance of laying a foundation of

Godly living upon which all our decisions are made. This is not to imply that we put ourselves ahead of others. Jesus, our example, put all others ahead of Himself (Php 2:6-8). However, let us examine Jesus' second commandment in Mark to "Love your neighbor as yourself (Mk 12:31)." Said differently, you have to love yourself before you can love your neighbor. This is not a selfish love, rather, it is the acceptance of God's grace, which He freely gives, and the realization that we are worthwhile in God's eyes no matter what. We must also be disciplined about our Christian walk, always looking for the direction God wants us to take.

Acceptance of Grace

The most significant part of having a relationship with God is the act of grace or unmerited favor He shows toward us. At the point of salvation, we helplessly ask Jesus to forgive us of all sin and unrighteousness. "Forgiveness relieves guilt, hopelessness and despair (Nichols, 1991)." It is pointless to continue to rely on ourselves to earn salvation. Acceptance of grace means we accept a clean slate, a new start in life. "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God (I Pe 3:18)." The Apostle Paul wrote confidently to the Roman Christians "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Ro

8:38,39)." Wellness involves trusting in this assurance and remembering that our wrongdoings are forgiven and forgotten. The weight of guilt is gone; the punishment of death has been taken care of by Jesus; we are free from debt in God's eyes.

Self Worth

As mentioned earlier, loving others involves loving ourselves. We must realize that God loves us so much that He sent His Son to die in order for us to enjoy abundant God-led lives. Romans 5:7-8 tells us that "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrated His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." The key is not to search for self esteem. We deserve nothing more than eternal separation from God. Yet, God must think we are worthwhile if He went to so much trouble to bring us to Him. "We don't need self esteem because we are created by God, God esteemed (Nichols, 1991)." Our esteem is based on the worth God sees in us. Wellness involves a healthy self concept, and what better way to see ourselves than the way our Creator sees us.

If we are not loving ourselves, then we are implying that God is wrong for loving us. We need to accept the confidence God has in our ability to live through Him. He asks us to take the responsibility of spreading His word and witnessing for Him (Mt 28:19,20), further proof that we need to have God esteem.

Christian Lifestyle

Once we have accepted grace and self worth, the task is to make life choices consistent with God's plan for our lives. As mentioned earlier, prayer and Bible study are important keys to Christian maturity. "Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does (Jas 1:22-25)." True wellness involves studying the Bible to determine how to be more Christlike. Fulfillment can only come when our hearts are constantly seeking God's will, not our own. God's word not only deals with spiritual well being, but, physical well being also. Striving to live for God is not easy and will require sacrifice, yet, we can be confident in the victory Christ has already demonstrated over sin. We can claim that victory right now to overcome temptation.

We must realize that "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it (I Co 10:13)." The previous verse

warns us to be careful not to rely on our own ability to stand. Hebrews 4:15-16 explains that Jesus our Savior was tempted in every way, just like we are, and can sympathize with our struggles. Furthermore, we can "approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Heb 4:16)." It is God's strength which helps us overcome temptation.

Another comfort that Christians have is that God is going to help us for the rest of our lives on this earth, even until the end of the world (Php 1:3-6). God is not going to abandon us. We may stop following Him totally in our daily lives, yet, His promise will always hold true.

One might conclude from this that Christians have the freedom to sin since they are eternally forgiven. "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer (Ro 6:1,2)?" I Peter 2:16 calls for us to "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God." To seek after the sinful old nature conflicts with the new nature which we receive through Jesus Christ. We cannot serve two masters. Our priorities must be clear and distinct, or wellness will deteriorate. James 1:6-8 warns us not to doubt the promises of God or we will be double-minded, unstable in everything we do. If we claim to be Christians, then we had better truly follow Christ. We must "walk the talk," and be a living witness of what God has done for us. Jesus said "If you love me, you will obey what I command

(Jn 14:15)." Lip service to God will not please Him, nor will it challenge us to mature. Just as babies mature physically, we can not remain as spiritual babies. God has great plans for our lives; we must be willing to boldly follow them.

Christ-filled Choices

A well relationship with self means that every decision we make reflects God's will for us. According to Minirth, Meier, Meier and Hawkins (1988), we must ask ourselves five questions:

"1. What does the Bible tell me to do?" Any decision must not violate the established truth found in God's word.

Rather, our choices stem from what the Bible teaches about Christian living.

"2. What can God show me as I pray?" During a daily quiet time with God, decisions should be reviewed. All remaining options need to be searched out for their consequences.

Jesus promises that "If you remain in Me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you (Jn 15:7)." God will answer every prayer. He will lead us to the proper choices.

"3. What can knowledgeable counselors or advisors tell me." Proverbs 15:22 says that "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed." Seeking Godly people for advice won't give us the answers, but, will provide fresh insight into our decisions, or will boost our confidence in choices we might already lean towards.

"4. What do these circumstances tell me about God's purposes and timing?" Determine which options continue to be available and which ones are disappearing. Make a note of future expectations and learn from what is happening right now.

"5. Is my heart filled with peace about my decision?" This is very subjective and must be dealt with carefully. Be confident in the words of Jesus when He said "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid (Jn 14:27)." Colossians 3:15a further states "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." Our choices, made within the will of God, should not produce conflicting inner thoughts. Pray that God will grant a peace once a choice is made. If peace doesn't come, God might be telling us to choose again.

Healthy Living

The relationship with self also includes a commitment to stay physically healthy. We are called to serve nothing except God. Food cannot become our god; we must practice self control. As Christians, God dwells within our bodies. How we treat our bodies is a reflection on how we treat His creation. Proper exercise and daily precautions will prolong our ability to physically serve God. Wearing a safety belt in a car and driving safely is showing respect for life. Refraining from mind altering substances, which cause us to be less alert and render us less capable to serve God, will

demonstrate our priority to always be sensitive to God's leadership, as well as reducing the possibility of physically harming ourselves. Sexual abstinence until marriage is the only guarantee of no exposure to STDs. Our list could continue to include every aspect of health. The point is, we must be faithful to God in every area of our lives. It is for His glory and honor that we do these things. If we love God, we will do what He says.

Once we are striving to follow God's will in our lives, we will be able to effectively serve Him. The final part of our wellness model is essentially the method in which we physically serve God, by serving others. Giving our lives to other people is the most important part of our wellness. We will only receive as much as we are willing to give.

Relationship With Others

When asked what the most important commandment was, Jesus gave His audience two commandments. "The most important one, answered Jesus, is this: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these (Mk 12:29-31)." By combining them, Jesus equates the love for others with the love for God. Relationships are a key part of our lives and as Christians, we have several Biblical

guidelines to help maintain relationship wellness. These include how to love and forgive, issues concerning the fellowship of believers, and advice for marriages and families.

Agape Love

Jesus used the word agape to describe the type of love we are to have for God and others. Agape love is unconditional love, acted out by choice. "It means taking the initiative to meet real needs in another's life, hoping that the individual will be a better person and have a richer life because of our love (Minirth et al, 1988)." I Corinthians 13 is entirely devoted to describing actions exhibited when agape love is expressed. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails (I Co 13:4-8a)." Finally, chapter 13 concludes with "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love (vs 13)."

Agape love means to turn the other cheek when someone hits us (Mt 5:39), love and pray for our enemies (Mt 5:44), and serve others continuously. In fact, when we serve others, we are actually serving God. (Mt 25:40). When we love as Jesus loves us, sacrifices are required, but blessings of wellness are acquired. We know that we will

receive blessings because service to God (via service to others) promotes spiritual growth, a vital part of wellness.

Forgiveness

Part of the example prayer Jesus gave us says "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors (Mt 6:12)." He expands this view of forgiveness by presenting a parable of a servant who owed his master an amount of money (Mt 18:22-34). The servant begged forgiveness and his master granted it. Later, the servant met another man who owed him money, but unlike the master, he had the man arrested until the debt was paid. When the master heard about this, he called the servant back, bewildered that the servant had not acted in the same manner he had been treated. The servant was then arrested and forced to pay the debt. In other words, because God freely forgives us of all debt or sin, then we ought to, in the same manner, forgive others their debt or wrongdoings toward us.

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (Eph 4:31,32)." This verse deals with forgiving and forgetting like God does. Forgetting is difficult, yet, it is the most crucial element of forgiveness. If we continue to hold a grudge or harbor bitterness, it will bring us trouble (Heb 12:15). Augsbuger (1981) states:

"In forgiving, I finish my demands on past

predicaments, problems, failures and say good-by to them with finality. I cancel my predictions, suspicions, premonitions of future failure and welcome the next moment with openness to discover what will be. I make a new transaction of affirming integrity between us now" (p. 52).

Wellness requires that we unconditionally love by forgiving others. We tear ourselves down spiritually and emotionally when we don't. If God can forgive us, then surely we can forgive those who wrong us.

Fellowship With Believers

Jesus says "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them (Mt 18:19,20)." The power of unified prayer is enormous. As believer, we depend on each other. We identify our allegiance to Christ when we love other Christians (Jn 13:35). Building Christian relationships is essential to our wellness. Hebrews 10:24-25 states "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Fellowship is meant to rejuvenate us, to give us support during times of need, to allow us to provide support when called upon.

Proverbs 13:20 advises that "He who walks with the wise

grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm." This does not mean to break ties with nonChristians for even Christ shared His life with many unbelievers. Our support group of friends, however, must be Christians, who share the same convictions and serve the same Master. Wellness is found in adherence to God's will and nonChristians won't be able to discern for the Christian how to pursue wellness effectively.

Fellowship with believers provides acceptance, support and sound advice. God works through people to serve people. The best example of this ought to be where Christ is most present, in the lives of those in the fellowship at the local church. Together, Christians can rejoice in the hope that is found in Jesus Christ.

Marriage and Family

The essential ingredient for a well marriage is personal commitment to Christ by both husband and wife (II Co 6:14). The relationship between a husband and wife is defined in Ephesians 5:22-33. Wives are to submit to their husbands or yield their own rights. Husbands are to love the wife as much as Christ loves the church or so much that their rights are superseded by the rights and needs of their wives. Husbands have 51% of the stock within a marriage, and must always act in the best interest of their wives (Minirth et al, 1988). This is not a power issue, nor should it ever be within marriages. The ultimate goal is to create a marriage in which Christ can shine through most gloriously, as well as

provide for a functional unit to work within. Wellness will abound when husbands and wives learn to submit mutually.

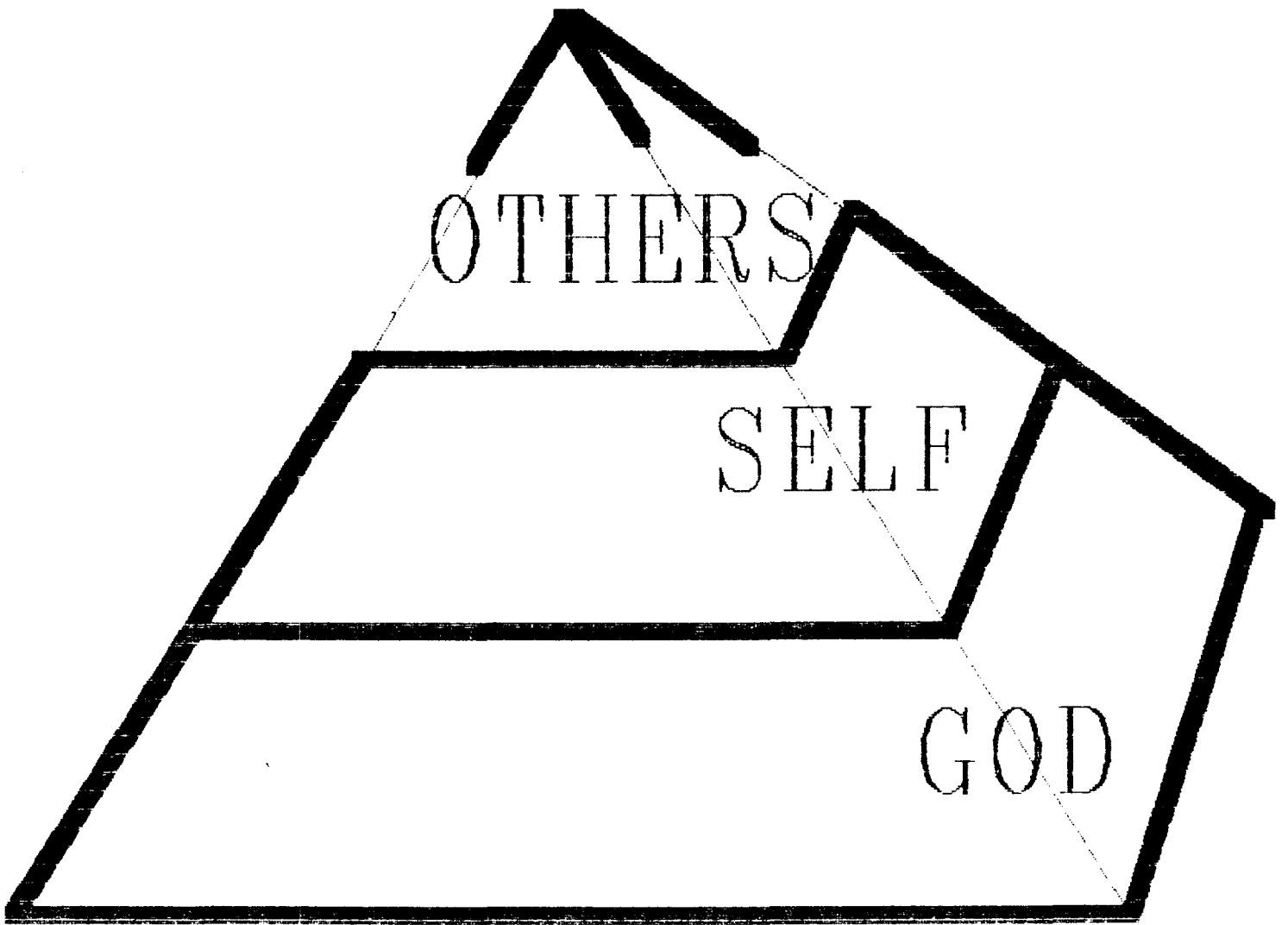
"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother—which is the first commandment with a promise—that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth (Eph 6:1-3)." Children need to understand God's desire for them to learn from their parents. "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4)." Parents need to pray for God's wisdom when guiding their children. Within this framework, God can begin to receive glory and honor. The strife of rebellion and/or child abuse is done away with. Parent/child relationships will be able to develop well. A well family is cohesive in Christ.

Final Remarks

A Christian Wellness Model is needed to supplement the current wellness model at Ball State University. For Christians, spirituality cannot be reduced to one component of wellness. Spirituality is the underlying foundation on which Christians base their whole lives. God is the beginning of wellness, not merely a single dimension. The proposed model in this thesis should be made available to students as an evangelical Christian option within a forum of many other options.

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WITH:



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*All scripture passages are taken from:

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