



**“Here To Eternity” is a programme about managing our wellness as we get older.**

### **How the Programme came about**

For my 68<sup>th</sup> birthday I was given a voucher for a Christian bookstore. I wanted to get something about retirement and I bought a book by Dr John Dunlop entitled **“Wellness for the Glory of God”**. This book was the inspiration for this programme. It describes six wellnesses we need:

- Physical wellness;
- Mental wellness,
- Social wellness;
- Financial wellness;
- Spiritual wellness; and
- Emotional wellness.

Dr Dunlop is a Christian doctor of many years and describes himself as a geriatrician with a practice that has catered for the needs of the “previously young”. His observation is that his Christian patients seem to handle getting old better in general than others. He has observed how different patients address different aspects of their lives in dealing with and enjoying their twilight years. He states that the difference between ninety-five year olds on the golf course and those in the nursing home is the choices they made in their sixties. His inspired concepts and ideas are supported by biblical reference so that the foundations are built in wisdom that goes beyond the knowledge of this world.

My observation from studying his book is that we don’t need to wait till we retire to make those choices: thirty-five year olds don’t need to wait for the heart attack before looking at their health habits, or to decide about funding for their retirement. But I guess it is only as we start to focus on “life after work” that we take stock of our lives and this book, dividing our wellness into six categories, is a great way to help us with our own introspection about our lives. I wish I had looked seriously at these aspects of my life at an earlier stage so that those aspects that fall into these various areas could have been more clearly structured and less haphazard as my life unfolded.

The starting point of the programme is a question that we all need to consider, whether Christian or otherwise: **“What is my purpose in life?”** As we weave our path through the maze of careers, sports, hobbies and families we are constantly seeking to define for ourselves what our purpose is. As we look at the end, or potential end of our “working lives” we start to realise that life has lot more to offer than our importance in our jobs and that there are many other aspects to our lives that matter more than the prestige, self-image, feelings of importance that generally go with the thing that drives most of our lives: work.

The dramatic disruption to our lives that the **Covid-19 pandemic** has brought about has served to make these considerations all the more important. For some of us our working life may have ended prematurely or have been significantly changed. We have spent much time in isolation causing us to reflect on the social aspects of family and friends and we have all been emotionally affected by these events and the measures put in place to deal with them.

It is important for us to remember that the Lord has given us talents and that we must first recognise what they are and secondly determine how to use them effectively for His kingdom. What I have come to realise that the skills I have acquired in a lifetime of work are those very gifts from the Lord and that my work life has been a source of honing those skills for things yet to come. I am constantly reminded in a song composed by Bryan Adams / Allee Willis performed by Brandon Heath entitled "**He's Not Finished With Me Yet.**" No matter how much we feel that our usefulness is spent in our endeavours, these words ring true.

Psalm 92vv13-14 says:

*Those that be planted in the house of the LORD Shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing*

Proverbs 16v31 says:

*Grey hair is a crown of glory*

So we must realise that everything we have done in the world is for a purpose in the life to come. We should focus on our wellbeing to prepare ourselves for the life that follows our time on this Earth. It is true to say: the sooner the better; but for most of us we are and have been so busy on getting through today that we seldom focus on tomorrow. In our later years, when the buzz of activity tends to slow down, it gives us the opportunity to reflect and focus on eternal life. What I have gleaned from Dr Dunlop's book is a recipe for that purpose in a way that will keep people focused and active until we are called home.

There is great value to be had in our older years. They are an important part of our lives. We need to spend those years in a meaningful and enriching way; helping us to deal with the inevitable shortcomings we will encounter with advancing years and use the faculties we have and the experiences and relationships we have encountered for the benefit of others as well as ourselves. We are made in God's image and redeemed by Christ. Life is not about our accomplishments. Our longevity is part of God's design and we need to find the purpose He has for us in our old age and pursue that with vigour.

## **Format of the Programme**

Having had the privilege to facilitate Alpha programmes, I understand the value of engagement in studying topics with others. The input of people who have trodden a different path to ours helps to give us new perspectives about the world.

Sharing life's experiences with others is a great way to understand how events and happenings can be interpreted in different ways and opens our minds to see our life experiences from diverse perspectives. If "**travel broadens the mind**" then sharing life's experiences through the eyes, interpretations and feelings of others, certainly **broadens our understanding**.

Reading the book has made me reflect on my own life and helped me to consider each aspect of wellness and what I can do to retain that wellness for as long as I can to enable me to fulfil what God has planned for me. Part of that is the construction of this programme so that I can share these things and help others to approach getting older with **purpose, passion and confidence**.

So the programme will start with an introduction to the topic of wellness (an introductory session followed by one session for each of the wellnesses identified in Dr Dunlop's book) followed by a small group discussion that will be prompted by some of the thoughts and ideas expressed in the book. These small groups will consist of online communication groups or may consist of socially-distanced contact sessions. After the discussion we will spend a little time looking at our own personal situation in order to develop strategies for ourselves and actions to help us put those strategies into action.

To facilitate this process in the first session I will share with you an approach I have developed to help businesses identify strategy and turn that into action. This will help you realise your goals using a structured methodology. Through the group interaction, based on the expectation that there will be people in the group with common interests, location and motivation, I also hope that the groups will assist the members with solutions that may satisfy mutual needs in a constructive and engaging manner.

As we go through the programme, each participant will build up a set of personal goals with specific actions to put in place to realise those goals in a meaningful way. In the book Dr Dunlop suggests certain broad strategies for each of the wellnesses and encourages his readers to develop their own action plans to realise those strategies. From my experience in facilitating organisations to develop strategies and actions to realise those strategies I have developed a technique to help translate goals and objectives into strategic actions. I will share this technique with you so that each participant can develop their own set of actions to help make the most of their wellnesses as they tread their path to that glorious time when we are called home. The technique is called the **SELF analysis**. My experience in the facilitation of corporate strategies indicates that people do not naturally have the ability to turn a goal or strategic objective into action steps to realise them.

I also recognise that the type of strategies envisaged by Dr Dunlop are not necessarily easy to put into action by individuals working in isolation. The vision I received was to develop strategies for individuals in a collective environment where the needs of the people in attendance and those of the community they belong to can be the basis of synergy in developing collective actions to enable individual goals to materialise.

Some examples I envisage might be:

- A person who attends gym loses the ability to drive: someone else who can drive offers to take them to the gym;

- A person who is no longer able to tend to their garden may be supported by someone who lives in an apartment or a home and who loves gardening, but has no garden of their own;
- A person who wants to use their skills to contribute to their community is included in a craft making group who share their abilities to make things and deliver to local homes for the disadvantaged. An example is a handbag ministry, where second hand handbags are collected, filled with personal hygiene items and delivered to a home for abused and abandoned women.
- Retiring business people wishing to give back may become involved in entrepreneurial training such as the Paradigm Shift programme or offer mentorship to developing managers.

## **Outcome of the Programme**

The programme will help us to reflect on our own wellness and realise the challenges we are likely to face as we get older. Knowing what lies ahead and knowing that there are things we can do to manage those events is comforting and will give us confidence to look forward to making the most of the rest of our life on Earth.

At the end of the programme we will have not only understood these things but will have a personal action plan to help us achieve our personal goals in each area of our wellness. I hope that the process will not be confined to self introspection only but will have enabled us collectively to look at how we can take this journey together, encouraging each other and building community as we bring glory to God on our adventure.

The goals we will have identified and the actions to support their achievement will help us to look after our physical health and develop our mind, to focus on others, to manage our finances and to press on towards the ultimate goal and to feel well about ourselves

## **Overview of Wellness**

Being “well” is not about physical wellbeing, but about managing all areas of your wellness and being in a place where you can be fulfilling God’s purpose for you.

People in old age experience a deterioration of faculties and frequently a dependence on others. In today’s lifestyle we are expected to be independent financially, in health, socially, mentally, emotionally and our spiritual welfare is supposed to be self-contained. The structure of family life has changed drastically over my life with families often living apart to pursue careers, with grandparents often being props for babysitting to give exhausted and over-occupied parents a break from their children, rather than being a source of richness to the upbringing of children.

The wellness inabilities or inadequacies we experience as we move on from the world of work are often a source of shame for us. We are expected to always be the figureheads of our families, but as our children grow and the intricacies of today’s world become more difficult to keep track of or grasp for those of us born in a less technology-driven generation, there is a tendency for us to feel less and less relevant to our families.

In a world where children can extract mountains of information in seconds, reference to grandparents' worldly wisdom has become irrelevant. That is because the current generation believe all knowledge is accessible from the internet. The world seems no longer to put value on the things we experienced in our lifetime, like discernment, alternative views, conversation, the written word or letter-writing. Tolerance for others, least of all those who cannot cope so well or who are not "instant" in doing things, seems to be diminishing and attitudes and the media point to the irrelevance of older people. I suppose the seeds of these thoughts may have been planted in my own childhood with the words of the Who's "**My Generation**" saying "I hope I die before I get old".

So let us reflect on what is wellness. The first response is usually to think of wellness as physical wellness. We see wellness as a degree of our physical health. We need to consider the spectrum of wellnesses that goes beyond the physical to encompass mental, social, financial, spiritual and emotional wellness. These aspects are independent but also are interrelated.

Struggles in any one area usually detract from the wellness in other areas. From a holistic point of view we need to look at the spectrum of wellness, take steps to address each area, within our means, and to focus on what we are doing well at in order to support the things we could improve upon.

One of the most startling observations in Dr Dunlop's book is that of the six wellnesses, **five will diminish** as we get older!

Being healthy but lonely is not as good as being less well but having a good circle of friends and family. We have to recognise that age will diminish our physical and mental wellness. The longer we live the greater the strain will be on our financial wellness. Furthermore the longer we live, the more people we will lose from our lives and that will impact on our emotional wellness. As we face the inevitability of diminishing health, wealth and friendships, we need to build strategies to build new friendships within our means, to find value in our lives by sharing our talents and experiences, or giving our time to help others. All these things give purpose to our existence and that purpose may help us prolong the wellness we have and will help us to prepare for what will follow in the next life. The one area of wellness we can expect to grow is that of our spiritual wellness. The restrictions in our lives caused by diminishing wellness in other areas gives us more time to focus on the Word, in prayer and the contributions to the lives of others (even those we do not necessarily know).

**John Povey**