



Personal Health & Balanced Living

Choosing a Growth Theme

by MARIE WALL

Have you ever wondered about our purpose in life? I first asked myself this question as a teenager. I knew life had much to offer and I yearned to know more. I didn't know how or where to find the answer, yet deep inside I knew I wanted more out of life than just a job when I finished high school. So, how did I reach that deeper meaning of life? By taking steps to become happy and fulfilled.

When I started on my life's journey I was unaware that there were four paths that needed to be travelled to attain health and balanced living – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. Now when I look back I see how each of these paths have been present in my life and how they have led me to where I am today. Over the past 20 years I have travelled all four paths and the lessons I've learned along the way have helped me become the person I am today.

It may seem impossible to pay attention to each of these and still keep all the other aspects of daily living in check. I would suggest that attaining a healthy balance is a life-long process. At various stages in our lives it may be easier to deal with a specific area. For example, when we were young adults in university we focused on our mental growth. When an illness occurs, physical health becomes a priority. Likewise, when relationships challenge us, the emotional aspects of life are often in the forefront. Sometimes a crisis forces us to address something in our lives. We don't have to wait for a crisis to occur, however, before choosing a growth area to focus on to help us grow towards better health and balance.

It is a new year and a time when people are encouraged to make resolutions. I do not promote this as a way to make change in one's life because, as many of us have experienced, it does not often work. One person told me she never makes a resolution because it is a sure fire way for the plan to fail. Once the first slip occurs the goal often becomes unattainable. Another told me she has kept the one resolution she made: "to never make

another resolution". In my own life I choose an area to focus on. I call it my "New Year's theme", and I encourage you to consider choosing a personal theme to work with during the year. Choosing a theme will allow you to pay attention to a particular issue, to make a plan to address it, to begin working towards our goal and to assess how we are doing. In essence, it gives us time to succeed.

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Last year my theme was physical fitness. In a past article in *The Bulletin*, I shared my positive experience and invited you to consider your physical well being. Now that physical fitness has become integrated into my routine I have time to work on another area of my life. This year I have chosen to focus on my financial well-being. If I have as much success as I experienced last year, I will make great strides to becoming a healthier and happier person.

So how to choose a theme to work on? As I said earlier, there are four paths to health and balanced living, each with specific aspects that can be addressed. Fitness, finances, diet, organization, and work are all examples of concrete physical tasks we can address. The emotional aspects focus on relationships with ourselves and others, our spouses, children or co-workers. Choosing to evaluate our relationships provides an opportunity to renew and refresh our lives. Deciding to read more, take a course or do some professional development can meet the need to nurture our mental health. When we address a particular need we bring renewed energy into

our lives which I believe helps feed our spiritual health. By becoming more conscious of our lives and making steps to grow and live life to the fullest, we benefit ourselves as well as those around us.

While these are just some of the many areas that could be a theme for you, the best way to choose is to take a moment to reflect on some part of your life you have been wanting to change. Has there been a problem or issue that you have ignored for too long? Imagine how much better you would feel if you gained more control in this area. Ask yourself if you would like to work towards being happier. If the answer is "yes" you are ready to make changes in your life.

Once you are clear about the personal theme you would like to work with this year you have made a big first step. Make a commitment to use this year to turn things around. Now decide what end goals you would like to see. You may wish to write down the things you can do to work towards this area of your life. Then give yourself time to learn and change behaviours and create new routines that work for you. Periodically, take time to assess your progress. It feels good to acknowledge our accomplishments and it motivates us to keep going.

Our personal happiness benefits not only ourselves but those around us. We each have the power to take steps towards making our lives more fulfilling. Take time to dream, choose a personal growth theme, then you are ready to take the next step towards achieving your goals for personal health and balanced living. I hope you enjoy the journey!

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