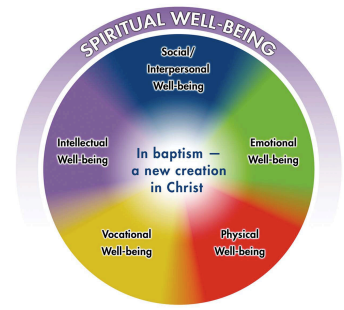


## Procrastination

### From the Bethany Lutheran Church Health and Wellness Cabinet

*"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." – (Philippians 4:6,7)*



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It occurred to me some time ago that it might be illuminating to do a column on procrastination, but somehow I have never gotten around to it. Time to mend my ways. In celebration of the gift of this New Year we have, here it is. The first question I had to address is whether to take a stand *against* procrastination or whether to argue in support of it.

Do you find that you define yourself as a procrastinator? Or do you pride yourself on leaving nothing until tomorrow? Either way, we may find guilt lurking. Guilt can be a powerful motivator. It can also be a destructive force in your life. One of the things that I believe is most common in our collective sources of guilt is feeling like we have committed (or are in danger of committing) the “sin of procrastination.” Turns out there are powerful historical forces pushing us toward guilt about procrastination.

Judeo-Christian wisdom urges avoiding procrastination. Hillel was a famous Jewish leader and sage, and lived in Jerusalem during the time of King Herod. One of his sayings that is still often repeated is, “Do not say, ‘When I am free I will study,’ for perhaps you will not become free.” The admonitions continue in Jesus’ life, as evidenced by this perspective from Mathew (5:23-24) “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”

Matthew illustrates one of the central ideas in the advice against procrastination: the need to take action to close the connection between good intent and good acts. In this sense we can certainly argue the value of avoiding procrastination. If there is healing to be done between you and your spouse, or your friend, or your child, seek the healing. If your heart and the Spirit move you to a charitable act, then see it through.

And today (literally, as I write this, today), writers in the field of American psychology continue the quest to defeat procrastination, not in the name of morality, but in the name of success and mental health. In the words of Bill Knaus (Psychology Today, 12/12/11) “Procrastination comes into play when you make timely, meaningful, and relevant promises to yourself and then don’t carry them out.” What he is referring to is procrastinating about meaningful things like our health -- getting exercise, losing some weight, or changing to a healthier diet.

So it certainly seems that the cards are stacked historically and currently in favor of avoiding procrastination. Makes me feel guilty sometimes, the way I procrastinate. But does this all mean that there is absolutely no value to procrastination? In one of her comedy routines Ellen DeGeneres says, *“Procrastination is not the problem. It is the solution. It is the universe’s way of saying stop, slow down, you move too fast. Listen to the music.”* The message here I think is that procrastination as a lifestyle isn’t very workable, but it does have its moments. And we should pay attention.

If you find yourself procrastinating, be aware of it and answer the question for yourself, “Does this action I am putting off have an important purpose at this place and time?” Think about it. See what you feel about it. Pray about it. Using your mind, body,

and spirit can help you determine the right course and find God's voice in the dilemma. God's wish for us may demand action. But in some things God's wish for us may offer the choice of inaction. You will know which. – Peace and health, Jack Lindsey.

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