



Allison Nelson, 37, demonstrates a pose during her WholyFit class at Bluegrove Baptist Church. Her mother, Glenda Shepherd, is sitting next to her on her mat and often accompanies her daughter to class. Nelson is a gold certified instructor for WholyFit, a Christian alternative to yoga. She has been teaching classes in Clay County for a year and a half. She sees the class as a ministry, teaching people to worship and exercise in a safe, peaceful atmosphere.

PHOTOS BY SARAH JOHNSON/
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WholyFit

Class teaches worship and exercise in safe and peaceful environment

Religion



SARAH JOHNSON

VIEW FROM THE PEW

Call it a Bible study in motion or exercise with a heavenly touch. As participants are lunging and stretching on colorful mats, they are listening to reassuring words from the Bible about everlasting love, gifts from God and salvation. At the head of the class is Allison Nelson, a fitness enthusiast who is leading the original devotional exercise system that is both powerful and therapeutic.

This is WholyFit, a Christian alternative to yoga that integrates the traditional Christian disciplines of worship, prayer and Biblical meditation with expressive movements.

"The people who take the class say they feel really



Nelson leads a WholyFit class at Bluegrove Baptist Church. The poses are similar to yoga, but WholyFit is based on the traditional Christian disciplines of worship, prayer and biblical meditation paired with expressive movement.

good about it," Nelson, 37, said.

Nelson is a gold certified WholyFit instructor and has been teaching WholyFit for a year and a half at Clay County Memorial Hospital, Bellevue Baptist Church and her home church, Bluegrove Baptist. Her classes are made up of men and women, young and old. Her

61-year-old mother, Glenda Shepherd, can often be found on a mat right beside her daughter.

"WholyFit is a unique combination of honoring God's Word by taking care of my body while worshipping him," said Tiffany Leach, who faithfully attends Nelson's class. "Allison provides an environment in which my

focus can solely be on personal reflection, his sacrifice for my personal well-being, and how to use the armor of God in my daily walk, all while working up a sweat and getting stronger. I leave feeling restored, strong and reminded of his love for me."

WholyFit is based on a verse that sums up the premise of the ministry. I Thessalonians 5:23 says: "May God Himself, the God who makes everything holy and whole, make you holy and whole, put you together — spirit, soul, and body — and keep you fit for the coming of our Master, Jesus Christ."

The postures of WholyFit aim to give strength, flexibility, balance and ease of movement that aid in daily movements. Some of the health benefits include weight loss, increased muscle tone, energy, counteracts depression, better posture, increased coordination, equilibrium and better sleep.

For Mike McClendon, his experience with WholyFit has been two-fold.

See JOHNSON, 9A

JOHNSON FROM 7A

"As a man who will turn 60 very soon, I understand the physical aspects to be gained in HolyFit," McClendon said. "My chiropractor is always warning me about not stretching and staying active. HolyFit gives me good cross training with a trained instructor. Alison is certainly that, but I think more importantly, she sees this as a ministry. This is a physical focus on the body, but also a focus on your spiritual experience of exercise."

The stretching postures are similar to yoga, yet fundamentally different.

"HolyFit protects the knees, lower back and the breathing is different," Nelson said. "The three layers of HolyFit are stability, strength and

flexibility. It's all about safety and you don't go on to another layer until you have mastered the previous one."

Routines are paired with Scripture readings. The first routine participants learn is from Ephesians 6 about putting on the full armor of God. Other routines are the fruits of the spirit from Galatians 5 and being a living sacrifice from Romans 12. A popular routine is the one from the Psalms that emphasizes that for spiritual emergencies you can dial Psalm 91.

Nelson prays over the people in her classes, leaving them with a peaceful feeling as they go home.

"For me, what I get out of HolyFit is an answered prayer," Nelson said. "I prayed that God would show me a way that I can serve him and be a part of a ministry. I didn't realize



SARAH JOHNSON/TIMES RECORD NEWS

Participants in Nelson's HolyFit class listen to reassuring words from the Bible while learning the three layers of stability, strength and flexibility.

that HolyFit was a ministry when I first stumbled upon it in a Google search for alternatives to yoga certification. Not until I read to the bottom of the lengthy application did it mention that its purpose was ministerial. There

have been times that after working an eight-hour day job that I would love to just go home and decompress, but not once have I ever gone to teach a class and not come back completely rested and blessed by those who take time out

of their busy week to come and worship with me as we stretch our faith together."

HolyFit, recognized by the American College of Sports Medicine, was started 12 years ago by Laura Monica, who now lives and teaches in California. According to Nelson, Monica felt the yoga lifestyle was inconsistent with Christian doctrine. She wanted to combine her passion for exercise and worship, as well as her desire to reach people with the Word of God at a practical level through daily activities.

Nelson felt the exact same way.

"Yoga has healthful benefits, but I didn't want to give credit to the yoga lifestyle, especially as a certified instructor," Nelson said.

Nelson's dream is to share HolyFit with the Wichita Falls community and spread the word about

the healthful ministry. "I have been praying for the last year that God would open a door for HolyFit in Wichita Falls," she said. "God spoke to me and dealt with me more than ever about going into full-time HolyFit ministry. Even though I've fought him on it and gave him every logical reason why I'm not anywhere near equipped to take that on, he kept reminding me that my weaknesses are made perfect through his strength."

For now, she is happy leading classes in Clay County. There is no charge for the class, but Nelson does accept love offerings. For more information, contact Allison Nelson at 232-0274 or email her at allisonnelson@wholyfit.org.

Send suggestions for View from the Pew to Sarah Johnson at pvjor@wf.net.