

August Fitness Challenge: Physical Fitness

3 of 4

1 Corinthians 3: 16-17; 6: 19-20

08 21 2011 Sam Jones Memorial United Methodist Church

Rocky DVD Clip: Begin: 1:30:43 End: 1:33:225

Introduction

Physical fitness is big business in our society. Products and programs promise to produce renewed and improved bodies. Space age creams promote youthful skin, make-up covers any blemishes, follicle creams encourage hair growth, teeth whiteners grant brighter smiles, miracle diets melt away the pounds, and home gyms give six-pack abs of steel.

Physical fitness is also an important part of Christian discipleship. The Bible is very concerned about our physical health. Today is the third week of our worship series entitled **August Fitness Challenge**. This morning we explore how to care for our bodies.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20

In the Beginning

In the beginning, God created human beings as physical creatures. Genesis 2 describes how the Master Potter knelt in the dirt and formed First Man from clay. Then God breathed life into his new creation, and the man became a living being.

The Lord created humanity from earth and air, matter and spirit. We are **psychosomatic** creatures, possessing both body and soul. What affects the one also affects the other.

From an Old Testament, Hebrew perspective, humans don't possess bodies—we ARE bodies. Our identity is inseparably entwined with our physical being. This viewpoint is reflected in the New Testament's emphasis on the *bodily resurrection* of Jesus and the promise of *new bodies* in God's kingdom.

When creation was completed, the Lord declared everything was VERY, VERY GOOD. The Judeo-Christian heritage has always taught that our bodies are good gifts given to us by a gracious God.

The Temple of God

Physical fitness is a vital part of Christian discipleship. When we accept Jesus as our Savior, we also invite Christ to become **Lord of our bodies**. In 1 Corinthians 6: 19-20, Paul wrote:

*Do you not know that your body is a **temple of the Holy Spirit**, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.*

The Jewish people believed that the Jerusalem Temple was God's Temple. They thought the Lord dwelt in the Holy of Holies at the center of the Temple. Using this imagery, Paul described how God's Spirit dwells in our bodies. We are holy or set apart for the Lord's use.

Another way to talk about Christian physical fitness is to use the language of **stewardship**. Stewards manage what they do not own *as if* it were their own. We are stewards of our bodies. Our bodies are loans given to us by God while we live in this world. We are to use our physical being to honor our Lord.

However, Christians recognize that some day we will return our bodies to the Creator. The committal ritual in a funeral reminds us: "*Ashes to ashes and dust to dust.*" We return to the ground from which Adam was formed.

The central question of physical stewardship is: "**Whose temple is it?**" Are we using our bodies for our own purposes *OR* to as wise stewards to glorify God?

The Two Extremes

In the Christian stewardship of our bodies, there are two extremes to avoid: **neglect** and **obsession**. Both are counterproductive to our physical and spiritual health.

A. **NEGLECT**

One harmful extreme is to **neglect** our physical health by acting as poor stewards of our bodies. If the body is God's temple, then some of us have let in the Philistines! The Lord's house may be in desperate need of renovation and repair.

Life is a constant struggle to determine whether we will rule our desires or our desires will rule us. Although we live with an illusion of self-control, oftentimes our physical passions control us.

Due to our sinful nature, humans also tend to be **self-destructive**. Even when we KNOW certain things are harmful to our health, we do them anyway. Four of the more common, self-destructive practices include **weight, tobacco, alcohol/drugs, and stress**.

- **Weight:** Americans are losing "*the Battle of the Bulge.*" This is growing health risk in our society, and the surgeon general declared that obesity has reached "epidemic proportions" in the United States. This is a complicated issue that combines nature and nurture, heredity and environment, metabolism and personal habits.
- **Tobacco:** Tobacco is pure poison. Smoked or smokeless, cigarettes, cigars, dip, or chew, tobacco causes cancer and a host of other health issues. Older generations were raised not knowing the dangers. However, new generations continue to get hooked; and it is a tough habit to kick. According to some studies, tobacco can be more addictive than cocaine. Mark Twain once said: "It's easy to quit smoking. I've done it hundreds of times!"
- **Alcohol:** The abuse of alcohol is a third area of concern. Those who have witnessed the ravages of alcoholism can testify to its destructive nature. It is a terrible addiction that destroys lives and families; and studies show that at least 50% of all car deaths are the result of drunk driving.

- **Drugs:** Drug abuse is a horrific issue in our society; and Bartow County is infamous for meth production and use. Normally we think of drug abuse as illicit drugs like crack and meth. However, the abuse of prescription drugs can be just as harmful.
- **Stress:** Another killer in our culture is stress. Some stress in life is unavoidable and even desirable. However, too much stress kills—and can rob life of joy and fulfillment. Stress can result in numerous psychosomatic problems, including: worry, anxiety, confusion, fatigue, insomnia, headaches, high blood pressure, and heart disease.

B. OBSESSION

Some Christians neglect their bodies; however, others become **obsessed** with physical fitness. They worship their bodies like pagans kneeling before graven images. Our culture feeds this obsession with unrealistic and unobtainable images of the “perfect” body promoted by Abercrombie and Fitch or Victoria’s Secret.

We are raising a generation of boys who use steroids in order to build muscles to compete in sports. We are raising a generation of girls who starve themselves and then purge after binge eating to have a model’s figure. Our culture fosters a climate of self-dissatisfaction. We want to be bigger, smaller, shorter, or taller.

C. THE HEALTHY MEDIUM

Faithful Christians find a healthy **medium** between the two extremes of neglect and obsession. Disciples practice moderation in all things—including moderation!

Physical fitness means caring for the bodies that God has given us. Our bodies are God’s temple, so we treat them with respect and reverence; but the very function of a temple is to direct our eyes beyond the earthly and towards the heavenly. We worship the Creator and not the created.

Physical fitness becomes a balancing act where we care for our bodies, but we don’t worship them. We are wise stewards of what God has placed into our hands.

A Healthy Lifestyle

So during our *August Fitness Challenge*, consider two questions with me: How many more years do you expect to live? And how many of those years do you want to be as healthy as possible? I’m thinking ALL of them!

God has designed a maintenance plan that helps promote **physical fitness**. Three primary components include: **diet, exercise, and rest/recreation**.

A. DIET

America’s favorite pastime appears to be dieting. The weight-loss industry is big business in the United States. Various organizations offer a smorgasbord of plans from which to choose. However, most diet plans are too complicated. In the long run, few

people will follow the Doctor Jenny Low Carbohydrate of South Beach Rotation Nutri-Weight Watcher Atkins-Craig regime.

One of the distinguishing aspects of God's people in both the Old and New Testaments was what they did and did not eat. Although Christians no longer observe an Old Testament, kosher diet, God is still interested in what we eat.

There are countless books, programs and more on the subject of diet. Most of their advice can be summed up in two simple but effective rules to a healthy lifestyle: eat less and eat better.

1) **Step One: Eat less.** We live in a "Super-Size" society. During my childhood in the 1960s, we drank Coca-Cola in 6.5 ounce bottles. Today "small" bottles in Coke Machines are 20 ounces. We ate small hamburgers at McDonalds before the advent of the Big Mac and the Quarter Pounder.

Servings of both food and drink have grown tremendously. Many of us now follow *Miss Piggy's Guide to Life* which states: "Never eat more than you can lift!"

In 2004, Morgan Spurlock made a documentary film entitled *Super Size Me*. For one month, he ate three meals a day at McDonalds for a whopping 5,000 daily calories. By the end of the month, he had gained 24 ½ pounds and spiked a cholesterol level of 230. It took him 14 months to lose the weight.

After extensive study, scientists have discovered a direct link between food consumption and caloric intake. In order to reduce calories, the serious weight-watcher must eat less food. Less food leads to fewer calories and less weight. Practicing this simple step will result in amazing long term benefits.

2) **Step Two: Eat better.** There really is something to that food pyramid the United States' government spent a gazillion dollars revising. Eat more fruit, vegetables, grains, and stuff that taste like cardboard. Eat less salt, sugar, trans-fat, saturated fat, and deep-fried Twinkies.

Eating better is complicated by how often we eat out. Although most menus offer healthy alternatives, these are not the dishes most folk typically order. Our culture is addicted to fast food because it IS fast and easy. Eating well costs more time and money. However, it is well worth the investment.

When combining eating less with eating better, the results are truly astounding. To quote Forrest Gump, "And that's all I've got to say about THAT!"

B. EXERCISE

Physical fitness combines right diet with proper **exercise**. Historians may one day link the decline of Western civilization to the invention of the TV remote control. We have become a sedentary society. Most of us spend the majority of our time sitting at a desk, in front of a computer screen, in the car, or in an easy chair.

An ad in a newspaper read: "Nordic Track—never used. Will trade for bread maker." One survey revealed that 87% of Americans who own running shoes don't RUN! (from *What Counts: The Complete Harpers Index*)

We are also raising an **electronic generation** who spends more time on television shows, video games, Internet sites, and cell phones than they do outside playing. Due to

rigorous academic and financial challenges, time for recess and PE at schools have been reduced. Kids come home and plop down on a sofa.

Study after study shows the benefit of **aerobic exercise**. Most experts recommend a vigorous workout a minimum of three times weekly. However, even simple steps like walking more and climbing steps can make a difference.

Businesses have begun to realize that good exercise is good business because it results in healthier workers. My health insurance company provides **pedometers** to all participants that can be uploaded to an Internet site. We can earn up to \$400 annually for the simple practice of walking on a daily basis.

Exercise affects both our physical AND our mental well-being. When we exercise, the body produces endorphines. Endorphines act as natural pain killers that also produce a sense of well-being.

There was a clinical trial of people suffering from depression and anxiety. Half underwent extensive psychotherapy. The other half engaged in regular exercise. The people who exercised did as well or better than those who went into counseling.

C. REST/RECREATION

The third step to a healthy lifestyle is rest and recreation. We all have harried lifestyles. Young families rush frantically from work to school to community events to civic organizations to church activities to ball practice to dance rehearsal to gym to home and then repeat the next day and the day after that and the day after that.

However, God has created into the very essence of our bodies and world the need for rest and recreation. Daily sleep. Weekly Sabbath. Yearly festivals. In the Old Testament, there was even a “Year of Jubilee” every fifty years.

Genesis reveals that even God rested on the seventh day. Do we REALLY think that we need Sabbath time less than God?!? Rest leads to re-creation. We must develop these times, spaces, and places in our lives.

Next Steps

It is never too early or too late to practice physical fitness in our lives. So consider what the next steps would be in your life. It’s never too early or late.

What’s the best time to plant a tree? Twenty-five years ago. What’s the next best time to plant a tree? NOW! What’s the best time to begin a program of physical fitness? Twenty-five years ago. What’s the next best time to start? NOW! For the most part, we KNOW what to do. So let’s DO it.

Be forewarned—beginnings are hard. A cartoon shows a doctor telling his patient: *“You’re not in good enough shape to get in shape!”*

A **retired couple** decided they should walk two miles a day to stay in shape. They decided to walk a mile along a deserted, country road so that they would be forced to walk the second mile back. When they reached the one mile mark, the man asked his wife, “Do you think you can make it back or are you too tired?” She answered, “No, I

feel good—I can make it back fine.” The man sat down and said, “Good, I’ll wait here, and you go get the car!”

Beginnings are hard, but they are essential if we are going to make any progress. The good news is that the journey begins with baby steps.

Like most disciplines, physical fitness really involves the small decisions of life: small portions or second helpings; fruit or dessert; walk the stairs or ride the elevator; go to sleep or watch the late show; fast food or good food; and the list goes on.

But small decisions have a way of adding up to big choices. The “snowball effect” takes place. Once we have gained some traction and momentum in making good choices then it becomes easier to make the right decisions.

And remember that God created us as individuals in need of community. Disciplined lives are easier when we join with others to keep each other accountable. If you struggle in one particular area of life, then find partner with someone else to provide mutual support. After all, we ARE the BODY of Christ!

Conclusion

This morning I invite you to take a realistic view at your physical health. How are we caring for the bodies that God has given us? What self-destructive habits do we need to allow God to cull from our lives? And what healthy habits need to take their place?

Christians take a balanced approach to physical fitness. Either extreme of neglect or obsession is unfaithful to God’s call. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We are called to be wise stewards of our physical health. Exercising these disciplines can help lead to physical fitness.