

# A Simple Way to Make the World a Healthier Place

*"You can change the world. You really can. Oh, you can't fix the economy or solve world hunger or stop wars. But you can change your world. You can help a few people today, a few tomorrow."*

That's a summary of my church's latest sermon series, "One Hundred Happy People." Renowned preacher and storyteller, Max Lucado (who also happens to be our pastor here in San Antonio), challenged the Oak Hills Church to make 100 people happy throughout the next 40 days. Our church body comprises 10,000 individuals.

If each one of us accepts this challenge and takes it seriously, positively impacting one million lives, what a difference could be made in our city! And beyond that, what a difference could be made in *us* ...

Mr. Lucado ended the sermon by expressing his eagerness to see how this challenge affects not just the people we seek to cheer up, help, or encourage, but how it will affect *us*, the happiness heralds, if you will. It's amazing how even the most curmudgeonly Scrooge can become the most beneficent saint when he allows the Holy Spirit to work in his life, replacing his heart of stone with the generous, gift-giving heart of our Father!

Jesus said that it is more blessed to give than to receive, and how true that is! Giving anything, be it a relaxing day at the spa for your spouse, an extravagant donation at a fundraiser, a ham sandwich to a beggar, or a simple smile to a crestfallen cashier at the supermarket, has the remarkable ability to bless both the giver and the receiver. I'm sure you would agree that there have been numerous occasions in which

you were on cloud nine just watching as someone unwrapped your gift or responded with a smile as you spoke light and life into their dreary day.

King Solomon wrote that a cheerful heart is good medicine. It's a poetic sentiment to be sure, but it also carries a substantial dose of medical truth! Take a look at a few facts and stats on the happiness-health connection:

- Studies have suggested that states of happiness may be associated with lower stress-related hormones and better immune function.
- Performing acts of kindness or altruism boosts moods.
- A 2012 review of more than 200 studies found a connection between positive psychological attributes, such as happiness, optimism and life satisfaction, and a lowered risk of cardiovascular disease.
- A study in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* found that people ages 60 and older who said they enjoyed life less were more likely to develop disability over an eight-year period.
- In studying the lives and deaths of the nuns, researchers were given clues to their emotional state and made this important discovery about happiness and health: Positive emotion is correlated with longevity! Of the most cheerful quarter of nuns, 90 percent was alive at the age of 85, whereas only 34 percent of the least cheerful quarter lived to that age. Similarly, 54 percent of the most cheerful fourth was alive at age 94, versus 11 percent of the least cheerful.

As you can see, happiness does much more than elicit a smile on one's face—it brings health to one's entire body! The One Hundred Happy People challenge, I believe, will inevitably reward the Oak Hills Church and its outreach with an all-encompassing sense of wellness, working its way from the inside out.

But whether or not you personally participate in this 40-day challenge (by the way, you can follow the challenge on social media via “#100happyypeople”), why not do something today that will bless someone? Seek wisdom and direction from the Holy Spirit and let Him lead you as you endeavor to put others before self and Christ before all else.

Here are a few ways to share a bit of happiness today:

- **Engage** in meaningful, upbeat conversation and really listen.
- When inconvenienced, don't act inconvenienced. Instead, take a breath, slow down your pace and **initiate** pleasant conversation or **offer** a genuine, “Hello, how are you?”
- **Buy** an extra cup of coffee at Starbucks and **hand it** to a stranger.
- **Invite** a neighbor to go to the gym or on a leisurely walk outside before dinner.
- **Call** up a friend you haven't spoken to in months, maybe even years, and see if there's anything in their life you can **pray** for. Then pray for them.
- **Cook** dinner for someone you know who's got a lot on their plate (no pun intended!).
- **Volunteer!** (Check out for ideas.)
- **Invite** someone to go to church with you and your family this week.
- Pay someone a **compliment**.
- **Commend** a waiter, ticket agent, receptionist, etc. for a job well done, and thank them for what they do.
- **Thank** a soldier or a veteran for their service to our country.
- **Smile** at someone—it's contagious!
- **Smile** at someone, even if you don't feel like it!

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For the original article, visit .

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## Are We Sinning at Times, or Perhaps Simply Foolish?

For years I had wanted a radar detector. Why? I couldn't say, because I don't generally drive in places where I would need one. And I've only had a handful of tickets.

Maybe I thought I would get even fewer tickets with a radar detector, or none at all.

Whatever my convoluted reasoning, I didn't want it so I could drive faster. I just wanted one. It seemed like a cool idea to know where the cop was before he knew where I was.

So, I bought one. It came in the mail and I told my wife what I had done.

"Are you out of your stupid mind?" she asked me. "What were you thinking?" Within 15 minutes I realized I needed to take advantage of the 30-day money back guarantee.

It's worth distinguishing between an error in judgment and an integrity problem. Have I done something dishonest or immoral? Yes, that needs to be dealt with.

But, sometimes we're just foolish.

**Patrick Morley's** mission is to help men grow as disciples and disciple makers—starting at home. In 1991, he founded Man in

*the Mirror, which consults with churches in all 50 states to help them more effectively disciple their men. He teaches a weekly men's Bible study to 10,000 men and is the best-selling author of 20 books, including The Man in the Mirror. Learn more at and .*

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## **7 Things Wives Should Stop Doing**

Ladies, I recently blogged about 7 things husbands should stop doing. Today, it's your turn.

As I started putting together the list of things, I remembered a good article I had previously read from *Family Life*, "15 Things Wives Should Stop Doing." So I picked these seven things wives should stop doing from that list and added some of my own thoughts:

- 1. Don't put others before your husband.** If you don't make your husband a top priority, your marriage will suffer. Wives, please remember to give your husband your freshest and best, not your leftovers. [Tweet This]
- 2. Don't expect your husband to be your girlfriend.** He converses differently. He thinks differently. He processes things differently. So don't treat him like a girlfriend or be frustrated if he doesn't respond to you as a girlfriend would.
- 3. Don't dishonor your husband.** You can dishonor your spouse by the way you talk about him in a negative light to others or by the way you talk to him as if he were a child or an idiot. Be careful not to question his judgment and abilities.

**4. Never use sex to bargain with your husband.** Your sexual relationship is not a game. It should not be used to get what you want. It should be a very important part of your relationship. It is not something that must be “earned” by your husband, but rather should be “freely” given in your marriage relationship.

**5. Stop giving your husband your long-term to-do list.** Keeping your “honey do” list short-term means keeping it manageable. If your husband feels like the list is never done, he may feel defeated and discouraged about helping you with the things that need to be done. Celebrate together the projects that you finish. If you don’t, it may also communicate that you’re never content with anything he has done or will do.

**6. Don’t make your husband earn your respect.** Just as a husband should unconditionally love his wife, a wife should unconditionally respect her husband. That does not mean that she should like everything he does or agree with him on everything. And it does not mean that she should not address inappropriate behavior or actions with him. But it does mean that no matter what he does or says, she should treat him with dignity and honor because he is her husband.

**7. Do not expect your husband to be prince charming.** News flash ... no husband is the perfect prince charming of your dreams. If you keep expecting him to meet every dreamy expectation you have, you’re bound to be disappointed and he’s bound to feel wholly inadequate. Try to focus on the things that you do appreciate about him.

What are some other things you think wives should stop doing? Sound off, graciously, in the comments section below.

**Mark Merrill** is the president of Family First. For the original article, visit [.](#)

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# Study Finds Doing This Can Extend Your Lifespan

Do you want to know the key to living longer? It could as simple be as thinking and feeling younger than you really are.

New research proves that people who believe that they are younger than their actual age have a lower death rate than those who feel older than their age.

## Living Longer

*JAMA Internal Medicine* online published this new research.

In a study that collected data from 6,489 participants who had an average age of 65.8 years about how old they felt. The study reported that many felt a little less than 10 years younger than they were. These participants did not feel like they were as old as their real age. The average was to feel about three years younger but there was a small percentage (4.8 percent) who reported feeling a year or more older than they really were.

Researches from the University College London checked in on these people throughout the following eight years. They discovered that about 14 percent of those who felt younger than their years had died, compared to 24 percent of the people who felt older and 18 percent of those who felt their age.

## How Being Happy Is Healthiest

Research is being conducted to try and understand the differences between these three groups of individuals.

The study concluded, "Possibilities include a broader set of health behaviors than we measured (such as maintaining a healthy weight and adherence to medical advice), and greater resilience, sense of mastery and will to live among those who feel younger than their age. Self-perceived age has the potential to change, so interventions may be possible. Individuals who feel older than their actual age could be targeted with health messages promoting positive health behaviors and attitudes toward aging."

Dr. Sharon Bergquist of the Emory University School of Medicine is an assistant professor of medicine and a physician who specializes in healthy aging. The information did not take her by surprise.

"Research is showing us that personality can be tied to your destiny," Bergquist said.

### **Know What Type of Happy You Are**

Optimism and conscientiousness are two of the main personality traits that have been linked to people who live longer with new research.

There is more of a will for someone who has these personality traits to actually do what is necessary for their health and live a healthier lifestyle that can help them live longer.

She went on to say, "Aging well can certainly become a self-fulfilling prophecy."

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For the original article, visit .

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# 'American Sniper' Blasts Way to the Top of Best-Seller List

The popular Clint Eastwood movie *American Sniper*, which has sparked heated debate throughout the country between liberals and conservatives, including filmmaker Michael Moore, has become a popular book once again.

First released in January 2012, the autobiography Chris Kyle, the most lethal sniper in U.S. military history, has ridden the coat tails of the Eastwood film, has made its way to the top three spots of the print best-seller list, according to Nielsen BookScan, which tracks approximately 80 percent of print sales, according to *Publishers' Weekly* magazine.

*Publishers' Weekly* revealed that the movie tie-in trade paperback edition of *American Sniper* sold just under 79,000 copies for the week ending Jan. 25. The mass market tie-in edition sold about 33,000 copies and the traditional mass market paperback sold about 26,000 copies. In total, the three editions, all published by HarperCollins, sold approximately 138,000 copies at outlets that report to BookScan.

The first non-*Sniper* best-seller was *The Girl on the Train*, which sold approximately 24,000 copies, putting it in fourth place.

*Publisher's Weekly* reported that *American Sniper* not only did well in print last week, but it also held two places on the

Apple e-book best-seller list. An enhanced edition of the title, also published by HC, was the top seller at Apple, followed by the regular edition, which was at No. 4.

The film, nominated for an Oscar, has grossed more than \$250 million and has become the country's highest-grossing war movie ever, replacing *Saving Private Ryan*. It is also on track to become the all-time highest-grossing R-rated movie ever. The 2004 film *Passion of the Christ* currently holds that honor.

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## **5 Tips to Avoid the Facebook Fumble**

With more than billion users, Facebook has become a staple in today's modern culture, a revolutionary social and marketing tool, massive industry with its own vernacular. Let me add a new phrase: the "Facebook Fumble." This is one with devastating repercussions.

By nature, Facebook was designed to connect with old and new "Friends." It's like having a high school reunion online, anytime. You can "like" people, photos, comments and corporate brands and receive regular "posts" on your "wall." You can create "groups" of individuals with similar interests. You can also "stalk" others from a virtual distance by viewing photographs and comments of others.

Facebook is so ingrained into our society it's even one of the fastest ways to spread news, outrunning the television and media outlets to breaking events. These days, people wake up to the morning cup of joe and read their Facebook before other news sources.

Unfortunately, all this social enabling, while entertaining and immensely useful to re-connect with people, is causing a threat to the family and marriage.

I call it the “Facebook Fumble” because more than a third of divorce filings last year contained the word “Facebook,” according to a survey by Divorce Online, a legal services firm. The American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers says 81 percent of its members have used or faced evidence plucked from Facebook or other social networking sites over the last five years. And 66 percent of the lawyers surveyed cited Facebook foibles as the source of online evidence with 1 in 5 adults reported to use Facebook for flirting.

Facebook is one ball you don’t want to drop. It can bring you down. It can ruin the “trust” in a marriage, and lead to affairs—virtual or physical.

Here’s the rub: While Facebook is a great social networking tool—and one I’m involved with—it has the power to expose the cracks in men’s character.

### **Tips to Avoid the Facebook Fumble**

Begin by honestly establishing your plan with Facebook. Sounds silly, but take a minute to establish your mission, and align it with God’s mission, and how Facebook can serve as a tool. Then, put in the following measures:

- 1. Watch what you’re looking at.** Your eyes can lead you to think about someone or something, which can lead you to act in ways that do not reflect a God’s man. So many times in the Bible, the word “eyes” and “sin” are connected. In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus taught us to ask God to “lead us not into temptation.” Then in Mark 14:38, we’re warned to “watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” So, be on alert when on Facebook, and watch what you’re looking at so you can avoid being tempted.

**2. Watch what or who you're looking for.** Ask yourself, what's my motive for being on Facebook? And remind yourself every time you go there. Find some old friends. Share your interests or engage people to follow you and your brand—all healthy stuff. But don't use Facebook to find trouble. Trouble will find you easily enough. In Proverbs, we learn that “motives are weighed by the Lord” so examine yours regularly before you go looking on Facebook.

**3. Watch what you say and do.** Your words and actions on Facebook are tracked, depending on your Privacy settings. So seemingly harmless “Likes” of photos or flirtatious “Comments” can illustrate a track record of your character breaches. More importantly, your words and actions reflect what's going on inside your heart and the true mission you are trying to accomplish. If you're married, don't get into conversations with other women about their personal lives, which can create attachments that precede affairs of the heart, mind and body.

*Establish this rule: Do not engage with any other woman and no private conversations with anyone other than your wife, mother or sisters.*

**4. Ask someone to be your watchdog.** Reality-check time! True transparency is only possible if someone else is watching. Ask a close friend, or your wife, to follow your “Wall” and your actions as a “Close Friend.” You may want to give them your password info so they can help make any instant course corrections. Marriage is sacred and your word is your reputation. So get a watchdog and make changes to your Facebook life. God's man humbly admits his mistakes, does what's right and stops doing what is wrong.

**5. Watch how God can use Facebook.** If your mission aligns with God's, and you watch what and who you're looking at, examine your motive and what you say and do, and have some accountability, then Facebook can serve an incredible purpose. Encourage others. Share Scripture, life learnings and humorous

thoughts, and then watch God move!

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For the original article, visit [.](#)

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## Here's the No. 1 Thing to Do for Good Heart Health

The best thing you can do for heart health is to stop eating processed foods. What are processed foods?

They are foods that have had something "done" to them. Processed foods are the prepared foods that are in packages. They are fast foods and in most cases restaurant foods.

The reason processed foods are so bad for your heart is that almost all processed foods contain at least one of these damaging ingredients—oftentimes all three: sugar, trans fat and Omega-6 fat. All three of these ingredients have been proven to cause inflammation, which leads to heart disease.

Remember, sugar is not only the obvious High Fructose Corn Syrup, but also refined carbohydrates, which have the same effect on your body as actual table sugar. Refined carbohydrates are things like white flour.

It's gotten to the point that when I see a product containing a refined carbohydrate in my mind's eye I no longer see wheat, but sugar. It really helps to avoid the temptation to eat such products if you get in the habit of looking at one and immediately saying to yourself, "That's just sugar."

Trans fats are "hydrogenated oils." As the name suggests, they are oils that have been infused with hydrogen in a lab somewhere. Trans fats are not found anywhere in nature. This is clearly a highly commercialized product.

Trans fats were formulated so foods would retain their shelf life. Trans fats are the reason processed foods do not "go bad" as quickly as foods containing natural fats do. So if you think it's a good thing that you can buy your packaged cookies, crackers, cereals and pastries on one day, put them in your cupboard, and pull them out two months later (usually much longer!) and eat them, think again.

It's actually a very, very bad thing. The trans fat that allows that to happen is only good for people who sell those foods. The fact is, molecularly, trans fats are very similar to plastic. Our bodies do not recognize plastic, and do not know how to process it. So it's little wonder trans fats cause internal inflammation and ultimately heart disease.

Omega-6 fats also cause inflammation. These are the vegetable oils. The most common vegetable oil in processed food is soybean oil. It's been said that every American eats soybean oil every day.

The real problem with Omega-6 fats is the same as the problem with sugar. That is, we eat too much of them. In other words, a tiny bit of sugar and a tiny bit of Omega-6 is OK.

Most Americans, however, consume massive amounts of both, which our bodies are nowhere near equipped to handle, and that overload causes deadly inflammation.

The reason too much Omega-6 fats, the vegetable oils, are bad is because our bodies are designed to operate efficiently with about equal amounts of Omega-6 fats and Omega-3 fats (Omega-3 fats are found in fish oil). The problem is that most Americans consume 20 times the amount of Omega-6 fats compared to Omega-3's, which leads to massive, massive inflammation.

Many Americans hardly ever eat Omega-3 fats. Since Omega-6s and Omega-3s actually compete against each other, even if you are eating some Omega-3s, your body might not get the benefit if your are loading-up on too many Omega-6s.

Another problem with most vegetables oils is the way in which they are processed. Most of the vegetables oils, such as the ones in the clear, plastic bottles lining the grocery store aisle, is that they are heated and refined to the point that they are distorted and dangerous to our bodies.

So, stay away from packaged foods, because they likely contain sugar, trans fat or Omega-6 fat ... or some combination of the three.

Sadly, most restaurants use lots of sugar, trans fats and Omega-6 fats. This goes for fast food restaurants, but also the sit-down type too.

The bottom line is: For heart health, eat whole foods that you cook at home. This requires more time and energy than eating processed foods. But isn't it worth it?

By the way, watch out for hydrogenated oils and Omega-6 fats, even if you're cooking at home. Most margarines, "spreads," oils and shortenings at the grocery store fall into those categories. Therefore, cook with avocado oil at high temperature. Coconut oil and butter are good at medium temperature, olive oil is good raw or at low temperature.

*For the original article, visit .*

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# Are You Abiding in the Shadow of the Almighty?

Because I was late when I arrived at the intercessory prayer meeting I had been invited to attend, I sought a far, vacant corner of the room that everyone seemed to be avoiding.

The frantic hand signals of a fellow intercessor stopped me in my tracks. Her finger was pointing to an ominous reflection on the wall next to me. There, looming bigger than life, was the shadow of a spider—hairy legs and all!

I shivered. My mind raced with pictures of the hairy beast jumping onto my sweater—or worse, into my hair! I shivered again. Thank God someone stopped me! What if it had bitten me? Then I saw the culprit.

Was that it? Why had I been so afraid? I laughed. The actual spider wasn't as big as the shadow it had cast. It raced to a crack in the door and disappeared. Obviously, it had been a shadow.

This reminded me of the enemy and how he works. Satan whispers to us all the time, playing the “What if?” game. What if you lose your job? What if they whisper about you when you leave the room? What if you gain all that weight? What if you go belly up financially? What if you are too old to try something new?”

Satan's lies, like dark, ominous shadows on the wall, loom big, at times bigger than our power to do anything about them. God's Word warns us that the devil walks about like a roaring lion (see 1 Pet. 5:8). He isn't the real McCoy, but his threats can, if we are not careful, get us to take our eyes

off Jesus and His great power that guides, provides for and protects us.

That is not to say that you or I don't need to take care of ourselves and our families as good stewards; but we do so with our eyes on Jesus and not on the fears that overshadow Him and His great powerful promises of God—promises for eternal life and for abundant life on earth, promises for a future, no matter how bad the past has been.

Jesus commands us in Matthew 6:25: "Therefore, I say to you, take no thought about your life, what you will eat, or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on." No worry or ominous threat to us is any match for our Lord, "the God of all flesh" (Jer. 32:27). It is He, after all, who is the "head of all principality and power" (see Col. 2:10).

It is sometimes hard to remember this during seasons in which you see nothing but shadows. Yet God promises to take care of us in such times. Psalm 23 mentions "the valley of the shadow of death" (v.4)—revealing that it is a place one goes through but doesn't live in permanently.

And even in the valley we are to fear no evil, for the Lord our Shepherd is with us. The psalm ends with a promise of position for us—that we are to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. A God who claims us for eternity is a God of power. What, then, is there to fear in the shadows?

You and I are *in* Christ—"the secret place of the Most High" (Ps. 91:1)—which means that you and I are under only one shadow, and that is the shadow of the Almighty (v. 2). When the dark shadow on the wall sees the shadow of the Almighty, in whom we dwell, it has to go.

### **Prayer Power for the Week of Feb. 2, 2015**

This week praise God that we are protected under the shadow of the Almighty when we abide in Him. Choose to believe His Word

and embrace His peace, no matter what you face. Pray in faith, knowing that He hears and answers according to His perfect will. Continue to pray for our president and others whose decisions impact the entire world. Pray for those affected by recent storms and ask the Lord what you can do to help meet needs. As you pray for Israel, remember the persecuted church and ask God for more workers for His harvest fields (Ps. 91; Is. 26:3; 1 Tim. 2:1-8).

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## **Debunking a Myth: Millennial Men Don't Want to Be Reached for Christ**

Reaching younger men—especially millennials—is a hot topic. The deceiver wants us to think that suddenly, after all these centuries, there is now some new, mysterious, opaque wall between the generations that cannot be described or penetrated.

That's Myth No. 1, and it's nonsense. They're our children for Pete's sake, not aliens.

What is Myth No. 2? It's that we can't reach them because they don't want to be reached. Time out.

Do any of us really believe that young men don't have the same dreams and aspirations we also had at their age? Has there been a human nature "reboot" in some secret corner of the cosmos? That's ridiculous! We all want to love and be loved, to understand and be understood.

So how do we reach younger men with the hope, nurture and

guidance that can only be found in Jesus and His gospel?

The way to reach younger men is the same as it has always been. We have to love them and mentor them into manhood, and that takes time. A man can resist, but it's pretty difficult to resist unconditional love (think "dog"). That's what happened to me.

Some men who had been disciplined themselves and were walking with the Lord took me under their wings and showed me the ropes. Jim Gillean, in particular, made me his project. He gave me a vision for biblical manhood. He spent time with me. He cared. Reaching younger men is that simple.

What can you do? Stay alert. Be intentional. Decide in advance that you want to disciple younger men. Make yourself accessible. Make time. You can disciple "along the way," or you can lead a group, or you can meet one-on-one. Start with a decision to be part of God's great plan for the next generation.

And here's a different wrinkle: Don't "mind your own business." Men tend toward isolation when they have problems, so go ahead and intrude. Remember that no man fails on purpose. Yet many men make seemingly small compromises, which slowly, over time, ruin their lives. So show young men the booby traps.

Want to change a young man's world? Here's the silver bullet for discipleship: When God puts a man in your path who is stuck, discipleship means finding out why and then helping him solve that problem.

And here's silver bullet No. 2: Care about people until they care about people. That's how we change the world. Besides, you can't get your official "I Am a Disciple" card until you are making other disciples. And by the way, start in your own family.

It has been 40 years since Jim Gillean disciplined me, and I'm still singing his praises. That's the love and respect some young man can have for you too.

So pass it on. Take a younger man (or several) under your wing and show him the ropes.

**Patrick Morley's** mission is to help men grow as disciples and disciple makers—starting at home. In 1991, he founded *Man in the Mirror*, which consults with churches in all 50 states to help them more effectively disciple their men. He teaches a weekly men's Bible study to 10,000 men and is the best-selling author of 20 books, including *The Man in the Mirror*. Learn more at [and](#) .

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## Are You a Gym-Only Person?

I read the following proverb in The Message translation of my Bible this morning, and it struck me—as certain Scriptures will to believers within the fitness industry—as possessing an intriguing application, not just to our spiritual selves, but to our physical bodies as well. Take a look:

“Clean living before God and justice with our neighbors mean far more to GOD than religious performance” (Prov. 21:3, MSG).

My eyes almost immediately, and involuntarily, turned the words “clean living” into “clean eating,” which naturally led me down a mental rabbit trail on which I began to think about how many of us exhibit ritualistic, “religious” behavior with regards to our fitness, just as countless Christians do concerning their faith.

I have no intentions of sermonizing here, but it's no secret that countless pews are populated by "Sunday Morning Christians," that is, people who attend church for approximately one hour each week, then live Monday through Saturday without cracking open their Bibles or putting into practice what they read about, sung about and heard about during church.

Sunday Morning Christians clap to the beat during praise and worship, say "Amen" or nod piously in all the right places, bow their heads in reverence when the communion trays are passed around, even drop money into the offering plate. But this is all merely, as Solomon wrote, "religious performance." While their bodies are present in the house of God, their spirits couldn't be farther away.

This, what I shall call "Sundays-Only Syndrome," is no less than tragic because those who are symptomatic are very often downcast, weary, and frankly, *weak* individuals. (And for the record, I'm sure you would agree that all Christ followers have been Sunday Morning Christians at one time or another—we all fall short!)

Instead of living a life of abundance that Jesus came to give, they feel they are always lacking. Instead of clinging tightly to God's promises when storm clouds roll in, they latch onto fear and search for answers in all the wrong places. Instead of retreating into silence and praying to Almighty God when an offense takes place or worry fills their minds, they fret and vent, murmur and complain, only exacerbating their troubles.

I'm sure you've heard it said that Christianity isn't about religion; it's about relationship. Along those lines, the late pastor and author Adrian Rogers once said, "Christianity is a *love relationship* between a child of God and his Maker through the Son Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit." Without an intimate relationship with Jesus that is empowered by the Holy Spirit, our Christian walk will be rendered

joyless, anemic and woefully unprotected from the blows of life and the darts of the evil one.

Now, shifting gears from the spiritual to the physical, I've observed a similar complacency in the fitness world, one I will refer to as "Gym-Only Syndrome." Those with this "condition," so to speak, present with this straightforward set of symptoms:

- A habit of working out regularly, maybe even five or six days a week (for some, however, the habit is off and on)
- The discipline to listen to their trainer (if they have one) and diligently follow a training program or attend a specific class
- Frustration and stagnation in their progress that stems from their not-so-healthy activities *outside* of the gym, namely poor eating (or, in many cases, an excessive consumption of healthy foods) and a sedentary lifestyle

Like Sunday Morning Christians, Gym-Only People (the *other* .!) have their game faces on throughout their hour or so of training, but their habits outside the gym reflect those of someone who doesn't prioritize their health.

Here are just a few examples of what Gym-Only People may do:

- Snack on junk food in between meals (it could be that junk food *is* their meals)
- Don't control their portions and eat double or triple what they should
- Sit at their desk for hours on end without taking breaks to walk around, stretch or get some sunshine
- Don't drink enough water
- Don't eat nutrient-dense foods
- Restrict their calories too much, thereby slowing down their metabolism, which can cause fatigue, irritability, listlessness and mental foginess

The results of such a Gym-Only lifestyle also correspond with

those experienced by Sunday Morning Christians. Instead of growing stronger, they feel weaker. Goals are seldom met. Working out feels robotic and dull. Silver bullets to solve their problems are sought after and tried, but they never work.

Like any other close relationship, be it with Christ, our children or our spouse, our relationship with fitness requires effort and devotion that transcends simply putting in the time. When we love someone, we think about them often, talk to them every day (or nearly every day), think of ways to bring them joy and bless them in some small way, even if it means inconveniencing ourselves. Conversely, when we only go through the motions of love, actions that carry no meaning, we distance ourselves from the object of our affection and begin to stray from it.

If you find yourself deviating from a healthy lifestyle during the 23 hours you're away from the gym, then it's likely fitness has become more about "religious performance" than "clean living before God" (Prov. 21:3, MSG). You go to the gym (or studio, or pool, etc.) because you know it's the right thing to do, but that fact hasn't made its way from your head down to your heart. You haven't yet formed a *relationship* with it. And so, you don't tend to your body, your temple, the way you should when you're at home, at work, or wherever the day takes you.

As it turns out, the antidote for Gym-Only Syndrome mirrors the remedy that heals ho-hum, ineffectual Sunday Morning Christians and transforms them into exuberant, unstoppable, victorious all-week ones. There isn't a 10-step process, a book, a program, or a product that can help you "live clean" around the clock. There is only a sincere, soul-deep desire to become fitter, whether inside or outside, followed by specific actions that, at first, may seem obligatory and unexciting, but after a while, will begin to feel like an integral, indispensable part of your day.

Spiritual examples of such actions could include praying a few minutes each morning, watching a sermon on YouTube during lunch, or reading the Psalms before bed. A few physical examples are eliminating processed junk foods from your diet, introducing more fresh fruits and vegetables, or parking farther from your workplace, local grocery store, etc., to ensure you're more active throughout the day.

As C.S. Lewis so eloquently put it, "What saves a man is to take a step. Then another step." Turn the opposite direction of where you're facing right now and simply take a step of faith. A step toward relationship, toward intentionality, toward commitment ... toward "clean living" in body and soul.

Walk confidently, knowing that the Holy Spirit, whose name in Greek means "an advocate, comforter, helper," is there to guide and uplift you along the way. Let Him renew your mind and fix your focus on your heavenly Father. Let a desire to please your Maker and glorify your Savior direct you, and watch as everything else falls into place.

*"Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need" (Matt. 6:33, NLT).*

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