

4 Tips to W.H.I.P. Your Loved Ones Into Shape

If you're familiar with my writing and areas of interest, then you may know that I get a thrill from finding parallels between our physical and spiritual lives. Most recently, I've been pondering a few similarities I see between Christian evangelism and, for lack of a better term, fitness evangelism.

How people come to accept and follow Christ and how they come to embrace and enjoy a healthy, active lifestyle may have more in common than we think.

Merriam-Webster defines evangelism as "the winning or revival of personal commitments to Christ." I would argue that what I am calling "fitness evangelism" is "the winning or revival of personal commitments to *health*."

Before I go on, I want to make it very clear that one's choice whether to accept or deny Jesus Christ as Lord is the most important decision he or she will ever make. 1 Tim. 4:8 clearly says that physical training has "some value," but "godliness has value for all things." The reason I emphasize fitness and enjoy helping others establish healthy workout and nutrition habits is because being in top physical condition:

- **Honors** and **glorifies** God (1 Cor. 6:19-20; 1 Cor. 10:31)
- **Enhances** and **improves** our emotional, physical and spiritual well-being (3 John 1:2; Prov. 17:22)
- **Prevents** illnesses and diseases that can cut our lives short (Prov. 23:20-21)
- **Enables** and **equips** us to handle the physical tasks of everyday life (Prov. 31:17)
- **Sets a positive example** for our children, friends and others around us (Eph. 4:15-16)

Having a physically healthy and fit body should never supersede our desire to purify our hearts and sanctify our souls as we pursue spiritual intimacy with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Now, going back to “evangelism,” what isn’t so succinctly spelled out in dictionaries is the method one should employ when going about the act of evangelizing, a verb meaning “to try to convert (a group or area) to a different religion (especially Christianity).”

I do not wish this article to become a thesis opining the proper tenets of Christian evangelism—we can leave that to the preachers and theologians! However, I do think there are some general guidelines associated with spreading the Good News of Christ that can be applied to our mission to help our loved ones become healthy.

Because acronyms are fun and ever-trendy teaching tools, I’ve created “WHIP” to aid us in “evangelizing” those friends and family who need to start, perhaps for the first time in their lives, taking their physical health seriously.

W: Walk the Walk, Save the Talk

Maybe you’ve chatted a lot to your husband, best friend, grandmother, etc. about a certain type of exercise you’re really into nowadays, such as Zumba, CrossFit, Pilates or indoor cycling. Or maybe you’re seeing results from a new nutrition plan you’ve been following and love to talk about how much better you feel now that you’ve given up eating or drinking X, Y and Z. Surely my enthusiasm will rub off, and they’ll want to do what I’m doing!

I’ve thought that before ... many times.

When you read the Gospels, you will see that yes, Jesus taught and preached to throngs of people, but He also simply walked a walk that was consistent with His message. As fit and healthy

individuals, we don't have to rely solely on speaking eloquently or passionately in order to attract the interest of our audience. If we continue to abide by our convictions imparted by the Holy Spirit and informed by the Word of God, our loved ones will see and experience the fruit our lives produce and, prayerfully, be inspired to adopt such a lifestyle.

H: Have a Positive Attitude

Don't give up on those you love. It may be frustrating to continuously watch them make poor food choices while dining out or when you see nary a vegetable in their fridge and only processed junk food in their pantry, but a pessimistic attitude will only perpetuate the problem, and may in fact discourage them from considering a healthier lifestyle at all.

"Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing" (1 Thess. 5:11, ESV).

I: Invite Them to the Gym/Park/Trail/___fill in the blank ___with You

Have you ever invited someone to a Christian concert or special sermon series at your church? This probably didn't require you to lay out the Romans Road to salvation. All you did, I'm assuming, is say, "If you don't have plans this Saturday, I'd love for you to come hear this band with me!" Or, "My preacher is starting a series on Heaven and Hell this Sunday. It sounds like it's going to be really interesting. Want to go with me?"

Is there a 5K or a mud run coming up soon in your city? Does your gym offer free passes to first-timers? If so, invite your friend or family member to go and participate with you. If necessary, ease any concerns or fears they may be feeling by assuring them that you'll remain with them for the duration and go at their pace. For most of us, the first step toward a new routine is the toughest one to make, and having a friend

there to support them and hold their hand, literally if need be, can make all the difference.

P: Pray Persistently

This one goes along with “H” in that it’s imperative that we stay the course of our loved ones’ path to health, most of all spiritually. Sometimes it is challenging to, as they say, “let go and let God,” because as prideful human beings we oftentimes would rather arrogantly go to the ends of the Earth to fulfill our desires than humbly go to our knees in prayer to seek God’s will and ask Him to intervene.

Keep the people you’re rooting for and hoping to positively influence at the top of your prayer list. Ask the Lord to convict them and direct them toward a firm decision to eat healthier foods, stop eating excessively and/or emotionally, and exercise on a regular basis. He knows what is best for them and how to lead them out of their complacency, apathy, stubbornness, what have you, and has lovingly placed you in their lives to intercede for them during your quiet moments of prayer.

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working” (James 5:16, ESV).

Stay fit, stay faithful.

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