

A Gym-Free Way to Get Spiritually and Physically Fit

With summer fast approaching, is the thought of getting outside, moving, exercising, breathing fresh air, feeling the wind and sun hit your face and the joy of sweat beating down your forehead as you hit the road running, hiking, walking or biking overwhelming your mind? Perhaps for some, but I know this is probably not the case for everyone, but I do want to encourage readers to consider a couple of things. First, moving and getting regular physical activity is good for our bodies, the bodies that God provided for us and that we have been entrusted with to glorify God through and care for. Second, it is possible to experience the glory and riches of God's kingdom outside as well as inside. And third, the bible is full of stories and testimonies of worship and praise of God's glory while being out-and-about in the world.

“Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15)

“The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; The world and all it contains, You have founded them” (Ps. 89:11).

“I have made the earth, the men and the beasts which are on the ground by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and have given it to whom it seemed good to Me” (Jer. 27:5).

Nature is one of God's most beautiful creations. Through nature, God is able to teach us, speak to us and provide a place for us to move in. We find peace and solace, hope and joy in nature. We find and achieve health and fitness while in nature. We are encouraged and inspired to explore and enjoy God's playground. I have a close friend who owns and operates a Parkour gym, and she once said to me, “When I walk out that

door, my gym awaits me outside.” That statement has had a profound effect on me as a fitness professional, because my life in fitness has largely been focused inside. To this day, I’m still not a big fan of health clubs. Yes, they provide a safe and effective place to go and get fit, but they cost money, they can be inconvenient and it is possible to gain most, if not all, of the same benefits of exercising indoors, outdoors.

Parkour

Parkour is a training discipline using movement that developed from military obstacle course training. Practitioners aim to get from one point to another in a complex environment, without assistive equipment and in the fastest and most efficient way possible. Parkour includes running, climbing, swinging, vaulting, jumping, rolling, quadrupedal movement and other movements deemed most suitable for the situation. Parkour’s development from military training gives it some aspects of a non-combative martial art.

A healthy lifestyle (exercise, health supporting diet, adequate rest and other strategies) offered to God, pursued with God, can offer spiritual, emotional and physical benefits. If the pursuit of a healthy lifestyle is biblical, affording tremendous benefits, then as followers of Jesus, we should be doing everything we can to avoid neglecting our bodies. Jesus and His disciples were role models for how we should treat and care for our bodies. Many of the stories of Jesus were told from the perspective of being outside in nature. Jesus taught us to glorify God in all that we do, including glorify God through how we care for and treat our earthly bodies. We are all called to care for our bodies because our bodies are not our own; they belong to God. The pursuit of a healthy, active lifestyle is a symbol of being a good witness, as we have more energy and are better equipped for what God has planned for us. Jesus modeled healthy lifestyle behaviors throughout His ministry. We too are called

to be Christ like, glorifying God in all we do (mind, body & spirit). Obedience to a biblical view of a healthy and active lifestyle plays into God's plan.

God wants you to be made new from the inside out—spirit, soul and body. God puts them in that order, “May the very God of peace sanctify you completely. And I pray to God that your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, who also will do it” (1 Thess. 5:23-24). God wants a new you who not only looks different, but who lives and thinks and speaks and acts differently. He wants a new you who is being transformed by the renewing of your mind—a new you who is being transformed into the likeness of Christ. Ephesians 4:23-24 says, “and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that you put on the new nature, which was created according to God in righteousness and true holiness.” Our culture treats the mind and body as if they were separate entities. Jesus came to deliver humanity—complete restoration (mind, body and spirit).

Jesus said to come follow Him, walk with Him, be renewed in mind, body and spirit.

Many early philosophers also promoted the health benefits of moving, caring for our bodies and getting out in nature: “In order for man to succeed in life God provided him with two means, education and physical activity. Not separately one for the soul and the other for the body, but for the two together. With these two means man can attain perfection”—Plato.

Hippocrates said, “Walking is man's best medicine,” “Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food” and “Natural forces within us are the true healer of disease.” So exercising outside and experiencing the many blessings of being out in nature is nothing new.

Benefits of Exercising Outdoors

- Exercising outdoors provides an opportunity to be physically active in a constantly changing environment.
- Wind resistance can help you burn more calories.
- Sunlight and fresh air are good for your health.
- Exercising outdoors is a great way to save money.
- Networking: Exercising at your local park is great ways to meet your neighbors.
- Family time: Going outdoors gives you the opportunity to turn your exercise time into family time.
- There is a growing body of research that suggests that outdoor exercise provides greater benefits than sweating indoors.
- Exercising outdoors is good for the environment.
- No equipment is needed.
- No experience is necessary—walking and going for a hike is excellent exercise.
- Enjoy nature and good conversation with others.

Next week I will look at how to start an outdoor devotional fitness program. Praise God, meet friends, encourage others to praise God and get fit outdoors, all while having fun. {eoa}

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