

Confronting Health and Fitness Resolutions in a Biblical Way

It's that time of year again—time for the post-holiday reality check. Once the dust has settled from the wonderful season of Christmas, our focus drifts back to the daily walk of life and the challenges we all face daily.

This year as you start to focus on the road ahead, contemplating your personal health and fitness goals for the New Year, I encourage you to put Jesus first in all you do, including those goals. Make this the year of “Not I, but Christ.”

defines a resolution as “a conscious decision or determination to make a firm resolve or commitment to do something.” For example, “I am going to lose weight this year.” The origin of the unavoidable and often-dreaded New Year's resolution likely dates back to the Christian liturgical season of Lent.

Regardless of origin, it is now commonly recognized as effort toward some form of annual self-improvement. The types of self-improvement typically at the top of most lists are improved physical well-being (eat healthier, lose weight, exercise more). Though intentions may be genuine, the methods to achieve desired outcomes and results for New Year's resolutions are rarely if ever successful. One study from the University of Scranton suggests only eight percent of people achieve their New Year's goals. Other studies report even lower results.

Jesus said to His earliest disciples, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (Matt. 4:19b) and later, “Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me. For I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matt. 11:29).

This is still the call for all of us to follow as believers today. We must make Jesus central to our lives, putting Him at the core of all our thoughts, motives and desires.

Any health-behavior change is hard enough trying to do it on your own. Putting Jesus first and letting (Matt. 11:29) Him be your hope, strength and motivation for change should be the desire for all of us. Personal resolutions to change, to improve, to become more Christ-like should start with God at the center.

An often-cited passage by Bishop John H. Vincent is a good example.

Finding motivation to change health behaviors is never easy, but without Jesus ... nearly impossible. If it were, everyone would be healthy all the time, effortlessly with unlimited success stories to boot. But the bottom line is that changing health behaviors is not always fun nor easy and convenient to do. We know we need to, but I can usually think of myriad reasons why ... relaxing, working, reading, napping, are more important at the moment than getting out and exercising. So how do we learn to motivate ourselves to change health behaviors such as getting more exercise and losing weight?

What are the secrets others use to help them get fit and lose weight? Apparently, there are lots of experts who think they know how. Just look at the number of books written about how to motivate oneself that are best sellers around the beginning of the year. Readers need to learn to become more realistic, realizing that the information must relate to them. At the core of motivation is our faith; and for followers of Jesus, being overweight is detrimental to becoming more Christ-like.

We all need to be more active. Remember, God designed our bodies to move, not be sedentary for long periods of time. According to the World Health Organization, physical inactivity has been identified as the fourth-leading risk

factor of death for people all around the world. Sitting for eight to 12 hours or more a day increases your risk of developing Type 2 Diabetes by 90 percent.

Start out small by trying to include extra steps into your daily life. The reason so many people never even attempt to start an exercise program or succeed for very long is that they set their expectations far too high. Remember, there are reasons why you're not active now (time, desire, skill, etc.) but you know that as a follower of Jesus you have been entrusted to care for the body God has provided for you. Putting things into perspective (Not I but Christ ... HE > i) changes everything. Start slow, keep Jesus as your focus and pray with power and conviction for guidance and support.

When it comes to weight loss, instead of thinking in terms of weight, especially scale pounds, think: *I need to change habits, lose old habits and gain new healthier ones.* Think of Jesus as your role model. Recite 1 Cor. 6:19-20 to yourself daily: "What? Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God, and that you are not your own? You were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." Until you accept the fact that weight gain happens slowly over a period of time and that positive body composition changes will take even longer, you will be defeated before you even begin. Your body composition is the relative percentage of body mass that is fat and fat-free tissue (bone, water, muscle, connective and organ tissues and teeth).

Overweight and obesity are both labels for ranges of weight that are greater than what is generally considered healthy for a given height. The terms also identify ranges of weight that have been shown to increase the likelihood of certain diseases and other health problems. But we need to stop thinking in terms of weight and more in terms of how to eat less, healthier, move more and how best to glorify God with the body

He provides us.

Instead of focusing on weight, first focus on the concept of needing to change your body composition, which may or may not result in a net change in your weight, at least initially. Instead of saying, "I really need to lose some weight," say, "I really need to change my body composition." Instead of saying "I need to go on a diet and lose some weight," say, "I need to reduce my caloric intake and increase my caloric expenditure through exercise to change my body composition."

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2).

"I" Can't, But Jesus Can

You're right: You can't; none of us can. No one can do anything without Jesus; we were not designed to live apart from God. John 5:30 says that "I can do nothing of Myself. As I hear, I judge. My judgment is just, because I seek not My own will, but the will of the Father who sent Me."

If the Son of Man can't do anything on His own, why would we expect to be able to do anything on our own? Christ-centered health and fitness put our motivations into perspective, and with the right perspective (Jesus first), we are destined to succeed. Remember, Jesus came to give life and that we might have it more abundantly (see John 10:10). We were meant to live out our earthly lives in harmony with Jesus, and He will help guide, motivate, and put us on the right path. Not I but Christ ... HE > i.

Habits of a Christ-Centered Health and Fitness Disciple

God wants a new you who not only looks different, but who lives, thinks, 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 says, “and be renewed in the spirit of your mind.”

- Make a commitment to the Lord to do the best you can to take care of your body.
- Realize that as a Christian, your body is not your own; it belongs to Jesus Christ.
- Get a physical (know what your risks are and what you need to work on) plus know what your ideal weight is.
- One step at a time. The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.
- Become active. Include daily exercise three or more times a week.
- Eat a health-supporting diet. Make small changes and focus on body composition, not your scale weight.
- Know what your barriers to exercise are and list ways to overcome them.
- Find a fitness accountability partner or team.
- Avoid fad diets and exercise programs.
- Don't become overly preoccupied with your body.
- Make your body the best it can be, but accept the body style God has given you.
- Engage in daily devotionals. {eo}

Professor Scott O. Roberts is the department chair of Kinesiology at William Jessup University in Rocklin, California. You can contact him at sroberts@williamjessup.edu.