

The Spiritual Benefits of Pursuing Health and Fitness God's Way

Note: This week's post is a guest blog by a dear friend and sister in Christ whom I've known since seventh grade! Haley Campbell, as one can swiftly gather from spending two seconds on her social media accounts, is a beautiful, big-hearted young woman with a radiance that shines from the inside out! Her love for Christ is evident in every area of her life, from how tenderly she tends to toddlers to how passionately she helps other women pursue and maintain healthy lifestyles. She knows a thing or two about excuse-proofing your life and keeping fitness at the top of your priority list! – Diana Anderson-Tyler

As a wife, mom to two toddlers (3 and 2), friend, daughter, Sunday school teacher, retired fitness specialist, small group leader, cook and chauffeur, my days are often full of refilling sippy cups, wiping day-old milk off of the couch, and making sure I don't lose any of my children in the piles of laundry, all of course ... in my yoga pants.

Nothing short of glamorous, I tell you. Just an average day in the life of a stay-at-home mom with *big* dreams that go beyond my four walls. It's in those small cracks of the day that I get to live out a passion laid on my heart years ago: helping women discover, or rediscover, their beauty in Christ through fitness. I get to go after dreams that the Lord has placed upon my heart. Dreams that I would have laughed at 10 years ago because my younger self would have never thought I would actually be capable of pursuing them.

I never really believed in myself before. I never really thought my "purpose" was significant ... until God showed me that

He can and will use anyone who is *willing*. So here I am, pursuing this passion that burns deep within my soul anyway. And it all goes back to these moments:

As an adolescent, I watched everyone in my family struggle with their weight—except me. My dad, my mom and my little sister all battled the physical, mental and emotional struggles that come with carrying extra weight. I watched my mom talk down to herself as she tried on clothes in the dressing room. I watched my little sister come home with tear-stained shirts because of the bullying that took place at school. I watched my dad not care about the clothes he wore or how he fixed his hair because taking care of his physical body wasn't a priority.

What I experienced in those moments were the brokenness, heartache and pain of an ongoing cycle that weighed my family down. But from my perspective, I never saw any of that in them.

My mom was so beautiful and wise. My sister had an undeniable ability to see others' needs and to comfort them. My dad could do/make just about anything he put his mind to. It wasn't about the physical. We all shared a bond that ran deep in our veins, and my love for them was so strong that I saw past their physical characteristics.

I believe this is much of how God sees us too. 1 Samuel 16:7 says "But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees. For man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.'"

God sees your heart, too.

I vowed in those years that weight would never be something I struggled with because I *watched* how emotionally tolling it is on your life, how it affects everything, from your job, to your relationships, to your attitude about life.

And then I had my first child—a beautiful, perfect baby boy.

For the first time in my life I looked in the mirror and saw a different person. Before him, I had never had to worry about weight or looking in the mirror at a round face. But that had become my reality and it weighed me down. The marks left on my body were proof of carrying my son for nine months. And though I was grateful and would do it all again in a heartbeat, and actually did nine months later, I struggled.

It wasn't necessarily about the extra few pounds but the changes that I experienced with my body. It was letting go of the "old" to embrace the "new." It was a transition I wasn't mentally prepared for at all.

One day, as I stood facing myself in the mirror, studying every scar, I realized it went beyond the physical ... *it was a matter of the heart.*

I believed the lies that I wasn't good enough, that I wasn't capable of being the mom my son needed, and that I was failing as a wife struggling to juggle the new life that comes with having a new baby. I saw myself through eyes of rejection, pain and betrayal. And to compensate, I was seeking perfection, which we all know doesn't exist.

After several years of this cycle and another baby later, I finally sought out the truth and vision of how God sees me. Through prayer, soul searching, counseling, and letting God's words fall on me, I began to break the chains and see myself as my Father in heaven sees me.

Here is where *true* freedom lies. Here is where *true* freedom begins. Here is where *true* redemption is. Let these words sink into your heart, dear friend.

You are a new creation in Him. " Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things have passed away. Look, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

You are forgiven. Christ yearns for healing and forgiveness in your life. *"All this is from God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their sins against them, and has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18-19).*

You are saved by grace, not by anything you have ever done or will ever do. *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8).*

If you are a daughter of the King, you possess the same power within you that rose Christ from the dead. *"Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly I say to you, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit'" (John 3:5-6).*

As I started focusing on growing myself, physically, mentally and spiritually, and stopped ignoring the pain and scars of my past, *that* is when the weight was lifted and I was freed. Freed from the negative self-talk. Freed from the lies that I wasn't good enough. Freed from the unforgiveness that ate away at my soul.

Laying it *all* down at Jesus' feet and embracing the imperfect scars which adorned my new body was a pivotal point in my adult life. Through that season, I learned I needed to let go in order to gain. And once I did, that was when healing began and I saw myself in a different beauty—*His* beauty.

So my friend, where do you find your beauty? Is it in others? Is it in what you see when you look in the mirror? Is it in pursuing perfection? Is it in fitness?

For me, pursuing fitness and health in my own personal life is a vessel that brought about redemption and healing. But I

often have to remind myself that, *“Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised” (Prov. 31:30).*

I am reminded that my pursuit of a healthy lifestyle is not about what I might gain but about bringing glory to God, so that not only may I feel my best, but so that I can also give my best—where God has called me.

So friend, remember these things, too:

Nothing you have ever done is too far from the forgiveness of God’s grace. “Therefore repent and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

We are called to be a light in the darkness. ” For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

We are royalty, daughters of the Most High. “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may declare the goodness of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

Will you let go of the lies so that you can gain life? Will you proclaim these truths over your heart? Will you say them out loud and listen to the words as you speak them?

If any of this blesses you or speaks to your heart in any way, I would love to hear from you! Or if you would like to learn more about my journey and how I help other women pursue a passion by helping them find their beauty through fitness, reach out to me! I’d love to chat and get to know you!

Email me at Haleycampbellfitness@; follow me on Facebook at **fitness.**

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