

# Training for Godliness—Body, Mind and Soul

If you're anything like me, you've often wondered what God really thinks about fitness, exercise, eating right and working out. Like many other things of this world, these things can often times be a means to an end, sometimes leading to an extreme obsession or lifestyle and an all-consuming cycle of unhealthy relationships.

So does God really care if I strive to be "fit"?

We don't have to look deep into Scripture to discover God's thoughts about this topic. He makes it pretty clear throughout His Word that He opposes laziness and idleness (Prov. 21:25) and that the body is a temple (1 Cor. 6:19-20). But what He cares about more than your physical training is your training in spiritual (soul) godliness. First Timothy 4:8 says, "For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." What He really cares about is our motives behind leading a healthy life.

Walking in faith, growing in grace and being wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord is of more importance than any physical training we could ever do. However, when we exercise and eat right, there are natural positive consequences that follow: our quality of life increases, we have more energy, and we feel better overall. Which allows us to better physically serve without limitations. Our bodies were never made to be sedentary, God made the human body to move. But as a Christian, what good does leading a healthy lifestyle do if we are not using it to fuel our service to Him?

Becoming our "best selves" and living abundantly through Christ (John 10:10) allows us to better serve in the areas the

Lord has called us to. When we fix our eyes on heavenly things, not on things of this world where moth and varmint destroy (Matt. 6:19-20) in conjunction with the abilities the Lord has given us, we ultimately bring glory to Him. I love this phrase that my pastor recently said during a sermon on generosity: Invest in things that do not burn. The areas that you invest your time, energy, money and talents in matter to the Lord. *You* matter to the Lord.

If you are a child of God, meaning you have accepted Christ as your Savior, God has called you to ministry. Your work is a ministry. Your home is a ministry. Your children are a ministry. Your marriage is a ministry. And training in spiritual godliness brings blessings today in our life as well as in the life to come (heaven). He desires that we earnestly and honestly seek Him and His kingdom above anything else and serve in the ministry's He has given us.

So can exercise be a form of worship and lead to godliness?

Yes. With the correct motives and mindset.

What motivates you to exercise? Why do you desire to be fit? Is it to have a certain body shape, to be a certain jean size or to reach a certain number on the scale? Not that those are all bad and aren't goals we should work toward. But physical gain should not be our primary focus.

So what if we viewed exercise as training in godliness instead? When we are exercising and struggling to complete the last three reps of an exercise, where does your body and mind find strength to complete the set? Do your thoughts go directly to gaining those six-pack abs (which we all know are built in the kitchen) or does it go to drawing on the Lord's strength and asking Him to step in and sustain us?

When it's hard, when it's painful, when you feel like you can't do any more, where does your strength to finish come from? In those moments of extreme exertion, do you draw on the

Lord's strength?

When we, in our physical beings, cannot do another rep, take another breath or finish strong the race set out before us (Heb. 12:1-2), let us cling to the grace God provides and testify His good news (Acts 20:24). Let us grow in His grace and dependency so that it leads to His godliness, therefore allowing His grace to spill over into all other areas of our lives.

When we can't find the discipline to say no to one more serving.

When we can't forgive someone.

When we can't face the doctor's diagnosis.

When we can't see God working in our broken marriage.

When we can't move forward from losing a child or having a miscarriage.

When we can't feel God in the midst of infertility.

When we can't go on any more.

May His grace be the first thought in our minds. Because it's in those moments, when our faith has been tested and stretched (just like our muscles in the moments of extreme physical exertion) that the training in godliness becomes a spiritual discipline and we yearn for God's grace. We learn that His grace is the *only* thing that will sustain us in the midst of pain, heartache and trial.

So that following extreme physical exertion you learn to say, it was not I who worked hard, but the grace of God through Jesus that is within me (1 Cor. 15:10).

Let us set our minds on eternity so that our motives to lead a healthy lifestyle produce godliness and spiritual discipline,

displaying His abundant grace, for Him, for others and for us. He cares about your heart, He has called us to serve, and He cares about your love towards others. {eo}

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