

Why We Fight for Fitness, Inside and Out

I heard Joyce Meyer say something on TV recently that struck me as rather profound. She was drawing an analogy between our physical and spiritual states, pointing out that it is just as easy to become spiritually afflicted as it is to become physical ill, and conversely, virtually impossible to become stronger in body and soul without putting in the work.

I will have to paraphrase her quote because I don't remember it verbatim, but it went something like:

"You can catch sickness. You *can't* catch health."

I'd never really thought about it before. We can stand in line at the grocery store in perfectly fine health one day, and the next day be holed up in our homes, coughing till our stomachs hurt, all because the shopping cart we used was covered in cold germs.

However, we'd be hard-pressed to find any "fit physique" germs lying around. We have to consciously, and consistently, make an effort to become fitter and healthier, through the foods we eat and the exercise routines we do. And unlike the swift onset of cold or flu symptoms, we don't experience the effects of our healthy behavior overnight. It takes time.

The same goes spiritually, as Joyce Meyer said. If we habitually hang out with the world, letting it infect us with falsehoods and unbiblical philosophies, our souls will become sick. If we neglect to nourish ourselves with the water of God's Word and perpetually put off praying, our spirits will weaken and grow susceptible to all manner of spiritual attacks, which often manifest physically. It requires discipline to remain close to the Lord and to be changed into Jesus' image, "from glory to glory."

As Christians, we're regularly reminded, be it at church, in Bible study, through TV or social media, how to ward off and heal from spiritual diseases, as well as how to grow stronger and more resilient, like trained soldiers or disciplined runners, to use the Apostle Paul's metaphor.

We don't question that we cannot simply go to church for an hour on Sunday and expect to have victory the other 167 hours of the week. We don't deny that keeping our Bibles on the shelves is a poor choice if we want to know and declare God's unfailing truths and promises of power.

Here are some of the things we're encouraged to do on a daily basis, disciplines that the Bible assures will keep us in tiptop spiritual shape:

- Begin and end our days with prayer.
- Read our Bibles.
- Give thanks in every circumstance.
- Worship Jesus and praise our Father throughout the day.

Granted, we all stumble, and even the most pious and regimented among us have gone full days without cracking open our Bibles or bowing our heads in prayer. But our God is a God of grace, and doesn't condemn us or erase our names from the Book of Life when we falter. With His help, we are able to get back on track and put Him first. It's when staying off course becomes the norm that our spirits starve and our fleshly appetites take over.

Speaking of the flesh, now seems the appropriate time to address the quote I opened with:

"You can catch sickness. You *can't* catch health." With countless diet fads and exercise trends promising quick results, it's easy to think that health can, in fact, be "caught!" All you have to do, some would have us believe, is take a cutting-edge, "scientifically formulated" pill, use a state-of-the-art piece of equipment, or follow an exotic diet

plan that all the celebrities are raving about, and all your health and beauty dreams will come true!

This mumbo jumbo is the fitness equivalent of relying on an inspirational self-help book to rid you of your relationship woes, or leaning on Yoga, aromatherapy or transcendental meditation to make your worries melt away. Not even a week-long motivational conference can produce true and lasting peace or happiness. Why? Because only Jesus is worthy to remove our burdens, cleanse us of our unrighteousness, grant us peace, give us victory and restore our joy.

“You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things, and they exist because you created what you pleased” (Rev. 4:11, NLT).

Like spiritual fitness, attaining and maintaining a healthy body requires daily discipline. Here are a few of my personal favorite suggestions when it comes to leading a fit lifestyle:

- Drink water like it's your job (or, more realistically, drink half your body weight in ounces).
- Eat natural, God-made foods, for example, fruits, veggies, beef, poultry, fish, nuts, seeds, etc.
- Keep “temptation foods,” such as chips, candy bars and soft drinks, *out* of your house
- Exercise at a moderate to high intensity at least three days a week for 30-60 minutes
- When you get off track, don't beat yourself up, but instead resolve to start fresh tomorrow

As you can see, being fit and healthy doesn't come easy, especially in today's society where sedentary lifestyles and processed convenience foods prevail. And it makes sense as to why fitness, in any area, is difficult: Satan doesn't want us to reign in life. John 10:10 says explicitly that he seeks to steal, kill and destroy! As Christians, it is our duty and honor to fight for fitness and to dedicate ourselves to a

pursuit of health in all aspects of our lives.

If you currently don't have a close walk with the Lord or you don't fuel and train your body properly, start with your spiritual fitness first. You may very well find that as you strive to become more disciplined in your spiritual walk, you will feel yourself becoming inspired to eat better or exercise regularly as you align your will with God's.

When you renew your mind with God's Word and refresh your spirit by learning and meditating on His everlasting love for you, His Spirit will begin to move and whisper within your heart. It will encourage you to prioritize the things that matter most, such as spending more time with your family and your Savior and taking care of His dwelling place—that is, your body.

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