

Why You Should Embrace a Physical Challenge

I've stated often that working out repeatedly sets the stage for faith-building parables to unfold in my life. Ever since my initial struggle with anorexia as a teen, the Lord has spoken to me about the sanctity of my body as a temple.

He also has spoken to me about the importance of patience, self-discipline and self-control; the necessity of pain in order to stimulate growth; and the power of encouragement from the mouths of other believers through the symbolism of proper physical nourishment, challenging exercise and the people who push us to keep pursuing both. The last five weeks at my and my husband's CrossFit gym, CrossFit 925, have provided yet another source of spiritual inspiration.

The 2014 CrossFit Open has just ended. For those of you unfamiliar with CrossFit, the annual Open is a five-week competition for CrossFitters around the world. For some, the goal is to qualify for the regional and ultimately compete at the CrossFit Games in California this summer. For most, however, the competition is a simple invitation—that is, a challenge to complete each workout and test the strength, speed, stamina and endurance we've accumulated thus far in our CrossFit journey.

This year, our box (CrossFitspeak for *gym*) hosted its second Open. Each Friday evening for five weeks, roughly 40 of our athletes had CrossFit “troubles come [their] way” (to quote Saint James) in the form of workouts that presented skills, such as double-unders, that they'd never performed before, weights they had never lifted before and mental barriers they'd never crossed before.

Every workout posed unique challenges to each individual

athlete. For some, it was the aforementioned double-under, in which the jump rope must pass underneath the feet two times per jump. For others it was performing 15 135-pound deadlifts ... followed by 20 155-pound deadlifts ... followed by 25 185-pound deadlifts. I think you get my point; the Open was a virtual marathon of Herculean tasks—a marathon, however, that was not without its grand rewards waiting at the finish line.

All of our athletes faced the Open with optimism and excitement. Fully aware that the road would be long and arduous, rife with steep hills and deep ruts, they ran the race with perseverance, poise and infectious positivity. Even during workouts in which movements were prescribed that some deemed impossible to perform at their current fitness level, they gave it their all.

Some even did double-unders for the very first time, then abruptly squealed with surprise and danced for joy, invigorated by the surprise of their newfound skill. Indeed, many other “impossible” feats were accomplished that would have remained buried by fear, doubt and pessimism had the phrase “I can’t” been uttered and the white flag (or gym towel) raised before the workout began.

A few days ago, I judged and cheered for one of our athletes who, despite being a marathon runner, still declared the final Open workout to be one of the most intimidating physical challenges she’s ever faced. Suffice it to say, she was *not* stoked about doing it!

But after 41 minutes and 12 seconds, she was done. As soon as she took a seat on the floor, her two young sons, Colby and Riley, jumped down from their perch atop our plyometric boxes and raced over to their mama, whom they pounced on and covered with congratulatory kisses. Rachel texted me later, saying:

“I met my ultimate goal, which was to get one score in each WOD [workout of the day]. I’ll definitely do it again next

year!”

There it is—the spiritual analogy that has inspired this article. The CrossFit Open overflows with tests, just as our lives as Christ-loving men and women do. Entering the Open—or any athletic competition, for that matter—with a positive outlook and a humble spirit is analogous to facing life’s giants with faith and not fear, with humility and not pride. Whether they are spiritual or physical, challenges have the potential to make us stronger individuals, fit to run the next race harder, faster, more confidently and with more endurance *if* we consider them “[opportunities] for great joy.”

“If we desire our faith to be strengthened, we should not shrink from opportunities where our faith may be tried, and therefore, through trial, be strengthened.” –George Mueller

Stay fit, stay faithful.

Diana Anderson-Tyler is the author of Creation House’s Fit for Faith: A Christian Woman’s Guide to Total Fitness and her latest book, Perfect Fit: Weekly Wisdom and Workouts for Women of Faith and Fitness. *Her popular website can be found at , and she is the owner and a coach at CrossFit 925. Diana can be reached on Twitter.*

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