

Day 2

Exercise as a Spiritual Habit

As you age, taking care of this one body God has given you may be one of the most spiritual things you will ever do.

Why? Because this body is the instrument through which you worship, serve, love, and fulfill God's purposes. While none of us can prevent aging, we can steward our bodies wisely. And one of the most effective ways of doing that is through exercise. Regular movement is one of God's ordinary ways of keeping the battery he has entrusted to us well charged.

The apostle Paul addresses this in 1 Timothy 4:8:

While bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and for the life to come.

What does he mean? Paul means that training in godliness is of ultimate worth, because it blesses us both now and, in the life to come. When we present our bodies to God as living sacrifices, physical stewardship becomes an act of worship rather than an act of vanity.

Note that Paul doesn't dismiss the concept of physical exercise. He affirms its value, while addressing it in the context of godliness. Aging well includes the importance of physical health. Throughout this series we will explore how the spiritual, physical, emotional, relational, mental, and vocational dimensions of life work together.

Rather than treat physical exercise on its own, and potentially becoming preoccupied with our bodies, the call of these devotionals is to view exercise as a way of integrating body and soul.

Yet there are "saints" who cannot exercise. Joni Eareckson Tada, who became a quadriplegic at the age of seventeen in a diving accident, describes her wheelchair as her place of worship. While many of us can honor God through physical exercise, our ultimate goal is not fitness but fellowship with Christ. Whether we walk, sit, or lie in a bed of affliction, we can still love, serve and worship him.

Take one of the simplest forms of exercise—walking, as an example of integrating body and soul. The benefits are huge: your blood gets oxygen, your muscles stretch and contract, your lungs breathe in fresh air (hopefully) and breathe out stale air.

Walking has deep biblical resonance. Adam and Eve walked with God in the Garden of Eden, and throughout Scripture, "walking" becomes a rich metaphor for fellowship with God

The Bible incorporates several bodily postures for prayer: kneeling, bowing, standing, and lifting hands. In my own life there is something about walking that activates my prayer life. Walking and praying in this way benefits us in this life and the life to come.

The ultimate example of walking as a spiritual practice is of two friends walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32). As they walk, Jesus walked with them and talked with them. He expounded Scripture and revealed himself as they broke bread. Next time you walk, do the same— walk and talk with Jesus. Commune with him.

If you pressed me for one practice that could help you to age well, I would point to exercise. Walking in fellowship with God may be one of the most spiritual and beneficial habits you will ever develop.

Reflect & Discuss

1. How does your view of exercise change as you consider it as an act of stewardship and worship, rather than simply a healthy activity?
2. Which dimensions of your life—spiritual, physical, emotional, relational, mental, or vocational—need the most attention in this season?
3. If you are physically able, what form of exercise could you intentionally practice in fellowship with God this week?
4. How might you turn an ordinary activity, such as walking, into an opportunity for prayer, reflection, and communion with Christ?

Prayer

Lord, thank you for the body you have entrusted to me. Help me to steward it wisely, not out of vanity or fear, but out of love for you. Teach me to honor you with all that I am—body, mind, and spirit. Whether I walk with strength or serve you through weakness, may my life be an act of worship and fellowship with Christ. Amen.

Scriptures for Further Meditation

- 1 Timothy 4:1-10
- Genesis 5:21-24
- Luke 24:13-32