

## ***Health and Healing***

# ***Celebrating Spiritual and Physical Fitness***

Lesson #3 for April 17, 2010

Scriptures: Psalm 139:13-15; 1 Corinthians 3:16,17; 9:24-27; Ephesians 2:8; 2 Timothy 2:3-5; 4:7; Hebrews 11:6.

1. This lesson focuses on the benefits and advantages of maintaining spiritual and physical fitness. We will see that there are correct ways to do that, and there are incorrect ways. The question for each one of us is: How can we find the time, motivation, and willpower to increase our spiritual and physical fitness?
2. Read 2 Timothy 4:7. Paul realized that he was about to be killed. As a leading proponent for Christianity, he was regarded as an enemy of the state of Rome. Review all that Paul had been through in his efforts to promote the truth. (2 Corinthians 11:23-29) Considering what you know about the life of Paul, in what ways did he exercise spiritual and physical fitness. Did his faith lead him to attempt great things for God and achieve great things for God? Did walking thousands of miles to all the different cities that he visited and in which he worked for God help to maintain good physical fitness?
3. Whenever either the winter or summer Olympics take place, we admire those who through persistent effort have excelled in their sport. They have trained hard, given up many things that they would perhaps rather have done at the time, and proven that long-term effort can produce spectacular results. The apostle Paul repeatedly compared living the spiritual life to the preparations a runner or even a boxer goes through to excel in his sport. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Philippians 3:12-14; 2 Timothy 2:3-5) Why do you suppose Paul did that? Neither spiritual fitness nor physical fitness is easy. We must work at each one.
4.       Someone once asked an award-winning, long-distance runner if the runner thought this person could become a great runner, as well. "Sure," the athlete replied, "all you need to do is run 15 miles a day for six days a week and then, on the seventh, run 25. Do that for a year, and you'll have a good chance of making it." (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, Sunday, April 11)
5. What is implied by the runners mantra, "Use it or lose it"? Is that true spiritually as well?
6. Do you have a regular exercise program? Do you enjoy your exercise? There have been some studies to suggest that if you exercise but you do not enjoy it, you are losing most of the benefit! Exercise, either spiritual or physical, is not intended to be a punishment. But physical fitness and spiritual fitness cannot be earned and then stored away. Regularity—continuous effort—must be put forward to maintain fitness of either kind.
7. The mind and the body are intended for use. They deteriorate if they are not used regularly in a correct way. Muscles, bones, tendons, and ligaments must be exercised, stretched, and strengthened if we are to maintain physical fitness. In a similar way, faith, obedience, and our relationship with God depend upon regular spiritual exercise. In our previous lessons, we suggested that God's willingness to give us freedom brings with it certain very important responsibilities. Do we understand what those responsibilities are? Do we know what are the most beneficial types of physical and spiritual exercise? What do we need to do to stretch and develop our faith?
8. We know that physical inactivity will lead to wasting of muscles, tendons, ligaments, and

bones. In general, once exercise is restored, the body parts regain their normal strength.

9. Action is a law of our being. Every organ of the body has its appointed work, upon the performance of which its development and strength depend. The normal action of all the organs gives strength and vigor, while the tendency of disuse is toward decay and death. Bind up an arm, even for a few weeks, then free it from its bands, and you will see that it is weaker than the one you have been using moderately during the same time. Inactivity produces the same effect upon the whole muscular system.—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 237,238.
10. Strength comes by exercise; activity is the very condition of life. Those who endeavor to maintain Christian life by passively accepting the blessings that come through the means of grace, and doing nothing for Christ, are simply trying to live by eating without working. And in the spiritual as in the natural world, this always results in degeneration and decay. A man who would refuse to exercise his limbs would soon lose all power to use them. Thus the Christian who will not exercise his God-given powers not only fails to grow up into Christ, but he loses the strength that he already had.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 80,81.
11. Read Ephesians 2:8,9 and Hebrews 11:6. Why is it that our works can never satisfy God? Why do we have to have faith? Is it true that “faith works”? Could you describe the kind of faith relationship that God most desires?
12. So, how do we *exercise* faith? Is that different from works? Do you exercise your faith on a daily basis? A weekly basis? Seldom? Is your faith—your reliance on God and your relationship to Him—growing? There is a time coming when the Devil will appear as Christ and convince almost the entire world that he is Christ. Only a small remnant will resist him. (Revelation 13:3-8) It will not be safe at that time to trust anyone unless we know them very well. What about now?
13. Someone said that when we understand and then trust, that is wisdom; but when we do not understand and still trust, that is faith. Do you agree with that comment? Why? Or, why not?
14. Read Psalm 139:13-15. The psalmist recognized that God is the one who designed this wonderful body that we enjoy. It is indeed a miracle of creation. There is no way that such a body could have developed just by chance.
15. Read 1 Corinthians 6:19,20. What is implied by the notion that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit? Don't we as human beings consider that of all our possessions, at least our bodies belong to us? Shouldn't we be able to use them in any way we want? How can we use our bodies to the glory of God? Compare 1 Corinthians 3:16,17; Matthew 5:16. Is that a threat from God? Do we have the right to destroy God's property?
16. Ancient Greek philosophers must have struggled with their ideas about the human body. They idolized the athletes among them. As seen in the many beautiful statues which are well preserved, they regarded the human body with great reverence and respect. At the same time, the Gnostics among them believed that anything that was good for the body was bad for the soul. That must have put them into a great conundrum and led to a lot of discussions. By contrast, the biblical and Hebrew idea is that body, soul, and spirit—the entire being—are given to us by God and are a gift from Him. The way we treat every part of that gift shows just how we feel about the Giver.

17. There is an enormous amount of documentation to suggest that physical exercise—done properly—is of great benefit for the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health of the body. We categorically deny the ancient Greek and Gnostic notion that what is good for the soul or spirit is bad for the body and vice versa.
18. Read John 20:24-29. Remember that when Jesus appeared to ten of the remaining disciples on Resurrection Sunday evening, Thomas was not present. He was very upset that he did not get to see Christ. His response was to say that he would not believe until he saw with his own eyes and felt with his own hands. Perhaps, that is what led to the famous saying, “Seeing is believing.” But what about the rest of us? What if we demanded to see the events of the life of Christ physically with our own eyes before we would believe? No one today would have faith. Is that why Christ concluded with, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:29, NKJV)
19. But, is seeing really the ultimate proof that something is so? Certainly, everyone who has seen a modern movie and has some idea about how it was put together will recognize that “seeing” does not necessarily prove anything! So, if we cannot trust what we see, what evidence are we supposed to use to support our faith? Remember that God does not ask us to believe anything for which He does not provide adequate evidence. (*Steps to Christ*, p. 105) Is there some other kind of evidence that is more reliable than just seeing? If you have in your hand the entire biblical record, is that more powerful evidence than just seeing a part of it with your own eyes? What makes the biblical evidence important and powerful? We have the whole Bible to show us the way. Adam and Eve had only a few conversations with God.
20. Those who wish to become championship runners must engage in a very vigorous and regular exercise program. But, they must also have at least one day a week of rest.
21. Read Exodus 20:8-11. Seventh-day Adventists had been foremost among Christians in emphasizing the importance of resting on the seventh day. We are absolutely convinced that this is God’s plan for us. But what about the rest of the commandment which says we are to work six days a week? Are we as adamant in following that part of the commandment? Does that have something to do with physical exercise? And what is it about spiritual exercise that needs to be done daily as well?
22. The requirements of God must be brought home to the conscience. Men and women must be awakened to the duty of self-mastery, the need of purity, freedom from every depraving appetite and defiling habit. They need to be impressed with the fact that all their powers of mind and body are the gift of God, and are to be preserved in the best possible condition for His service.—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 130.
23. An excellent way to understand the needs of the body and evaluate the effectiveness of a given exercise program is to remember the word *fit*. FIT is an acronym for 1) **Frequency**: In general, exercising three times a week will maintain your current level of fitness. More than three times a week will improve your fitness. If we are to follow the fourth commandment, we should get good vigorous physical exercise six times a week. 2) **Intensity**: The intensity of a person’s exercise depends on his/her age and current physical condition. A good way to judge how to start an exercise program is to go out for a walk and see how far you can walk at a moderate pace before you become short of breath or tired. When you start to become short of breath or tired, mark that spot as your current exercise tolerance level. Try to repeat that level of exercise on a daily basis for the first week. If you do not have any problem,

increase the intensity or the length of your exercise approximately 10% each week until you reach your desired level of fitness. 3) **Time:** 45 to 90 minutes of exercise per day would be wonderful. Thirty minutes per day is probably minimal. But, if you have not exercised for some time, you should not begin an exercise program without consulting a physician.

24. The amount of exercise you get on a daily basis may be divided into sections. You can do 15 minutes early in the day, maybe 15 minutes during your lunch break, and 15 minutes in the evening to get 45 minutes of exercise per day. That is not quite as good as 45 minutes of continuous exercise, but it is close and certainly better than no exercise or only 15 minutes total.
25. Most of us who read these handouts live in the United States of America and realize that our country is currently experiencing an epidemic of obesity, hypertension, type II diabetes, and elevated cholesterol. These diseases have become so common that when a physician sees someone with them, he/she is inclined to think, "Welcome to America"! Most of these medical problems are a direct result of lack of exercise. Each would be enormously improved by the proper kind of regular exercise.
26. But, there are many other benefits from regular exercise. With regular exercise the mind thinks more clearly, the rest of the body is stronger, the production of endorphins makes us more pain tolerant, even Alzheimer's disease is delayed. Mental performance as well as physical performance is improved by exercise. Exercise is one of the best possible ways of dealing with depression and other mental health problems. Exercise is also an excellent way for reducing the risk of cancer of the breast, prostate, and colon. The list of benefits from exercise goes on and on. At one time, it was believed that a person who became fit enough to run a marathon would never have a heart attack. We now know that is not true, but cardiovascular disease can be almost indefinitely delayed by a good exercise program.
27. There are many excuses that people use to avoid regular physical and spiritual exercise. In light of what we have already learned, none of those excuses is worth giving up all the benefits. "Pencil *pushing*, truth *stretching*, and *running out* of excuses do not count." Vicariously exercising by watching other people do all sorts of physical activity on television does not count either!
28. We need to set achievable exercise goals. These should be reasonable and appropriate. If you have no idea what to do, consult a physician who is familiar with exercise physiology.
29. Physical exercise will not ultimately prevent death. Every one of us who lives long enough will die here on this earth. However, proper, well-maintained spiritual exercise fits us for a life that will never end.
30. Those of us who believe that we can become true friends of God must take His recommendations for spiritual and physical exercise seriously. Friends do not ignore or refuse requests from their friends. Does our spiritual and physical exercise meet God's standard?

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