

1 Timothy 4:6-8 — Get Fit For Jesus

April 23, 2017

Welcome to CrossWinds Spirit Lake Campus. It is great to have you. Before we begin, I have a quick announcement about name tags. We are trying something different on our campus. We are printing name tags and putting them on the wall rather than having you write your own tag. Why are we doing this? It will help us take attendance. It is a challenge to figure out who came on the weekend so we figure if your name tag is still on the wall on Monday, you weren't here.

Our second core value at CrossWinds is authentic community. It matters when people are gone. We want to follow up. If your name tag is still on the wall a few Sundays in a row, someone will try and follow up and let you know you were missed. We care. Even if you are wearing a pre-printed lanyard name tag because you are a greeter or serve in the coffee bar, I need you to take your pre-printed name tag off the wall so I know you were here.

If you didn't see your name tag on the wall, on the front of your Connection Card is a box to let us know and we will have one for you next week. Welcome to the family. After you fill out your Connection Card, leave it in the pew and the ushers will pick it up after the service. I want to thank you in advance for your patience as we try this new way of making sure we are welcoming to one another and as we follow up on those who are gone.

On another note, we have a great Easter week. Just short of 600 went through Experience the Passion at the Dickinson County Expo Center. There

were just under 700 at the SAMI service for Easter. We are thankful so many people had a chance to hear the good news of Jesus.

Today, we return to our study of 1 Timothy. This letter was written by the apostle Paul to a young pastor named Timothy. He pastored a large church in the city of Ephesus. Paul wrote this letter to encourage and guide Timothy in his tough leadership challenge of pastoring that church.

In previous weeks, we learned about some of the problems Timothy faced in the church of Ephesus. Former church leaders turned into screwballs and were leading people away from Jesus. One way they were doing this is they were teaching that those who live ascetic lives are spiritually superior. Ascetic means to avoid earthly pleasures. Some of these guys refused to marry because they thought being single was more pleasing to God than being married. I know some of you think that is weird thinking and nobody does this today. Actually, it is quite common. This is what we see with priests in the Catholic church. To serve in the Catholic church you need to be celibate to be a church leader. In addition, these guys were also saying God wants you to be a vegan and eat only vegetables because they thought it was more spiritual to not eat meat.

Paul said these celibate salad eaters were not more spiritual. Actually, they were less spiritual. They were following doctrines taught by demons. Marriage is good. God created it. God is pleased when a man and woman become a husband and wife. God created sexuality, and he created marriage as the place for sexuality to be enjoyed. In addition, God created meat, and he gave it to us to eat. God is pleased when we eat steak, lobster, shrimp, and Louisiana

BBQ. God gave us all these great foods so we would enjoy them and thank him for the God-given pleasure of eating them. Paul said the self-denying, celibate, salad-eaters were denying God worship because they were denying themselves pleasures God created to be enjoyed with a thankful heart. Celibate, salad-eaters are lonely and frustrated so God gets less worship. Happily-married, meat-eaters give God lots of worship as they enjoy God's good gifts.

The application of these past weeks was to go home and — if you are married — enjoy your spouse and have a big piece of meat for lunch, then thank God for both. I know at least one of you took me literally because you texted me a picture of bratwursts on the grill. So praise God from whom all blessings flow, especially the blessing of bratwurst.

While the last message in Timothy was about the importance of enjoying God's good gifts and thanking him for them, for some people, that could be misunderstood. Is the Christian life just about enjoying pleasures? Doesn't the Christian life involve any restraint or self-discipline?

Today, we will learn about the role of self-discipline in the life of a Christian. Paul discussed spiritual self-discipline, and he paralleled it to physical self-discipline. His words sound like they come right out of the YMCA or "Muscle and Fitness" magazine when it comes to getting physically fit. All the gym rats in church will love this message.

In typical physical fitness fashion, these verses divide into a few words on the importance diet for fitness and then a few words on the importance of exercise. Let's begin with diet.

The Discipline of Diet

If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. 1 Timothy 4:6 (ESV)

Timothy's job was to put the truth of God's Word before the people. The reason he could do this is because he was trained in the words of the faith and good doctrine. Timothy could give the truth to people because he knew the truth. Here is where it gets interesting. The word *trained* in the Greek literally means nourished. It was usually used to describe the care and feeding of healthy food to children so they grew up strong. Paul said, "You can teach the truth to people because you know the truth because you were raised on the truth." We learned earlier in our study from 2 Timothy 1:5 that Timothy's grandmother Lois and mother, Eunice, were believers. His mother and grandmother poured into him the Word of God when he was young. His parents brought him to AWANA. They helped him memorize Bible verses. They send him to Hidden Acres in the summer. Timothy was fed good spiritual food as a kid so he grew up spiritually healthy.

Kids from 5 to 15, let me talk to you. You do not realize how privileged you are to grow up in a Christian home where you have a mother and father that take you to church, AWANA, CW Academy and pray with you. The basics of Jesus you learn at home will be incredibly valuable for the rest of your life. Growing up in a solid Christian home is worth a year or more of higher Christian education. Growing up in a Christian home is part of what qualified Timothy to be a church leader.

In addition, we know Timothy received on-the-job training because he was a traveling companion of the apostle Paul for a number of years. He went from learning his Bible from his mom to learning it from his mentor. The picture we have is Timothy was fed good spiritual food as a kid from his mom and as a young man by his mentor, the Apostle Paul.

Timothy was not done with his training in the Bible when he became an adult. He was now to continue to train himself. The verb tense in Greek is a present tense which means this training took place in the past but it was to be a continual action into the present.

Some of you teenagers grew up in home where your mom fed you balanced meals every day. She helped you grow up strong. Now that you are on your own, you are eating junk food, candy and trash. You cannot survive on junk food. When you get older you will understand why your parents fed you good food and why they hoped you learned to feed yourself good food.

Paul said to Timothy, “Your parents brought you up on good spiritual food called the Word of God. It is your job to continue feeding yourself the Word of God, good spiritual food.”

Some of you young adults are at this stage. You are halfway out of the house. Mom and Dad fed you good spiritual food. They prayed with you at night and read you the Bible. Now you have to learn to feed yourself God’s Word if your walk with Christ is to thrive. Look what Jesus said about the importance of reading God’s Word.

“It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Matthew 4:4 (ESV)

Just like we need food every day to sustain our physical lives, we need God's Word every day to sustain our relationship with God. The discipline of a good spiritual diet, regularly reading the Word of God, is essential to staying spiritually fit.

Avoid Mental Junk Food

Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths.

“Timothy, while you need to make sure you feed yourself the nutritious word of God, avoid spiritual junk food that will rot your brain and sap your energy.” Paul called these things silly myths. Some translations call them old wives tales. Old wives tales is a literal translation of the Greek. Philosophers of the day used the term *old wives tales* to describe common sayings that were devoid of truth. Let me give you an example of what these look like. When I was growing up, my mom told me I shouldn't drink coffee or it would stunt my growth. It worked. I didn't drink coffee! I am taller than my parents. Now is it true that coffee stunts your growth? No! That is an old wives tale. Let me give you another example. They told me to eat my vegetables because that would put hair on my chest. For a 10-year-old boy, that was a real incentive. Eat vegetables and be a man. Guess what happened. I ate a ton of vegetables, but it didn't help with hair growth! If eating vegetables puts hair on your chest, I should look like a wookiee. I love vegetables. Vegetables putting hair on your chest is an old wives tale.

Timothy was not to avoid old wives tales about caffeine and vegetables. The silly myths he was to avoid were the popular spiritual teachings of his day that pulled people away from Jesus and God's Word. They were myths that focused on being spiritual without Jesus. We know two of them were that

celibacy was more pleasing to God than marriage and that eating meat made you a more spiritual person. Of course, none of that is true. All that matters is Jesus.

What are some of the irreverent silly myths that pull people away from Jesus today? Rob Bell denies hell but Jesus talks about it all the time. Rob Bell is teaching a silly myth. Benny Hinn and Creflo Dollar teach the Bible is about getting rich, not about Jesus. They teach silly myths. Avoid them. Sarah Young author of the book Jesus Calling boldly claims her book contains the very words of Jesus. She is teaching a silly myth. Avoid her. Joel Osteen teaches not about Jesus but about happiness and prosperity. Avoid him. Those folks are serving up spiritual junk food, not the nutritious Word of God.

We all know that if we eat McDonald's every day for two weeks we would be plump as a marshmallow. We would be unhealthy. What you are feeding yourself spiritually? Is it the pure and nutritious Word of God or spiritual junk food that doesn't have a focus on Jesus and God's Word?

The Discipline of Exercise

Make fitness a part of your daily routine.

Rather train yourself for godliness... 1 Timothy 4:7 (ESV)

The word *train* in the Greek is the word *gymmazo* from which we get the word gymnasium. It means to train or exercise. It means to work hard, to sweat. Every Greek city had a gymnasium, and Ephesus was no exception. Young men and women spent a lot of time in their teen years with physical training. In Roman times, there was a huge emphasis on physical training to win athletic competitions, similar to high school sports in Iowa.

Paul said, “Just as people go to the gym and they discipline themselves so they work out hard, sweat and get stronger; you should discipline yourself to train, not just physically, but train in God’s Word for godliness. Now that you have the right diet, the Word of God, exercise yourself in that Word so you become healthy and strong.”

It is a present tense verb so it means continual action. The idea is that Timothy was to always be focusing on spiritual training so he kept himself in top spiritual shape.

Paul said self-discipline and training in the Bible are essential for living a godly life. Many of us think that if we attend church, we are in spiritual shape. That is like claiming a membership at the YMCA means you are physically healthy. What gets you in shape is not having a membership at the YMCA but working out at the YMCA. What gets us in spiritual shape is not having a Bible but disciplining ourselves to read and study the Bible.

Physical fitness has value.

..bodily training is of some value...

When I was growing up, this was one of my favorite verses. I still love it because I use it to justify going to the gym. Bodily training has value. We are not just spiritual beings. We are physical beings. It is important for us to take care of our bodies. Cindy and I used to go to the YMCA four days a week. That is off right now but I get up in the morning and exercise in my basement. I like to break a sweat. I feel better. I think better. My patience and kindness is better. I hope it will keep me from dying of a heart attack in the next five years and enable me to live long enough to see my grandchildren. Physical training is valuable. If I

cannot exercise, I am not a happy camper. Some of us should go home and apply this text. We should make physical exercise a value in our lives. We need to be around for our kids and our spouses. We will feel better. We will think better. We will be better spouses, parents and employees if we exercise. It has value.

Spiritual fitness has more value and it doesn't fade away.

...godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. 1 Timothy 4:8 (ESV)

We all know that one hour in the gym is good. Paul said one hour with the Bible, prayer and Christian brother and sisters is even better. If we take the time to get into God's Word and train ourselves spiritually, it will change our attitudes. It will make us better parents. It will make us better sons or daughters. It will make us better employees. It will change us not by releasing stress in our bodies but by the Holy Spirit making us into new people on the inside.

You see, here is one of the limitations of physical fitness: While it is important, it doesn't last. Take a week or two out of the gym and you are out of shape. Spiritual fitness lasts for a lifetime. The verses I memorized as a child still come back to mind every week as an adult. Our physical fitness will go away. We will die. Spiritual fitness lasts for this life plus it goes with us through the grave and pays dividends in eternity.

Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 1 Corinthians 9:25 (ESV)

The Bible reminds us this life is not all there is to life. This life is only the first life. After this life will be the real life, an eternity with Christ and his kingdom. All of the training we do in the Word of God will last until the end of this life, and

we will take it into the next life. The way we grow in godliness now will be rewarded in eternity.

Spiritual fitness and physical fitness are both important. Both are based on diet and exercise. The thing to remember is while a plan for physical fitness that involves hard work is good, a plan for spiritual fitness that involves hard work is even better. All the gains we make stay with us and they even come with us into eternity.

I hope I convinced you that each of us needs a plan for spiritual fitness in the Word of God. I am going to act as your personal trainer and give you a workout plan.

What does a plan for spiritual fitness look like?

1. All spiritual fitness is about knowing Jesus.

But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, **your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.** 2 Corinthians 11:3 (ESV)

If you have someone telling you spiritual fitness is about channeling or seances or something else that is nutty, tell them to take a long walk off a short pier. It is about each of us walking with Jesus. That is the bottom line. It is praying to Jesus. It is trying to read the Word about Jesus. That is it.

2. Spiritual fitness involves a regular workout in the Bible.

But he answered, "It is written, " 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Matthew 4:4 (ESV)

Just as we need to regularly exercise in the gym, God's gym is God's Word. Each of us needs to have a plan to get into God's gym. Maybe you will want to join us reading through the New Testament by reading one chapter a day

Monday through Friday. Another way is to read through the book of Proverbs. There are 31 Proverbs and most months have 30 or 31 days. We can read the proverb that corresponds with the day of the month and read through the entire book in a month. The key thing is to have a plan. Just like going to the gym without a plan will not get you results, going to the Bible without a plan will not get you results.

3. Spiritual fitness means meditating on the Bible, not just reading it.

If you were to go to the YMCA and quickly lift a few weights on every machine then run out in 10 minutes, you wouldn't have done yourself much good in the gym. Sometimes our Bible reading is the same way. Have you ever read a few chapters in the Bible, closed it and realized you don't remember what you read? Don't blame your age. Don't blame your IQ. This happens to everyone. The problem is we ran through God's gym, we didn't work out in God's gym. Reading is exposure to Scripture. Meditation is absorption of Scripture. Absorption of Scripture is what leads to changed lives. Just as the best way to work out in a gym is to keep working on the same muscle to bring it to fatigue to cause it to grow, in the same way it is best to work on smaller parts of the Bible and study them for a while so they sink in and we remember what they say so we can apply them to our lives.

But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. James 1:25 (NIV)

Looks intently means to meditate, to think.

What does it mean to meditate? Meditating is given a bad wrap by the eastern mystics because they hijacked the term. It simply means to read

something and think about it. It is reading and rereading something. If you have 10 minutes to read the Bible, it is better to spend 5 minutes reading and 5 minutes rereading and thinking about what we read rather than reading quickly for 10 minutes and forgetting everything.

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Joshua 1:8 (ESV)

Notice what Joshua said; he said we are to meditate on the Bible. Read it and reread it and think about it. Both Joshua and James said that from meditation comes life application. The only way your life and my life will change from the Word of God is by reading, rereading and thinking about it so we can remember it. That is when God starts to apply his Word to our lives. This takes hard work. This involves mental sweat. That is the only way to spiritual fitness, just like that is the only way to physical fitness.

4. Spiritual fitness involves accountability.

We always make more progress when we are accountable. When it comes to exercise, we will always lift harder and work out more faithfully if we know there is someone waiting for us at the gym. When we don't feel like lifting, they will push us. They help us do extra repetitions. Besides all that, it is more fun to work out with a work-out partner.

It is no different with spiritual fitness. If you can find someone to hold you accountable, you will be more faithful in Bible reading and prayer. You will make more progress in knowing Jesus and walking with him. This is foreign to many of us because we typically think of spiritual fitness as an individual matter.

If you meet once a week with someone, have him or her ask you if you read your Bible that week and then share what you learned. You will be surprised how much more faithful you are in study and how much more you learn when you know someone will ask you about it.

5. Spiritual fitness involves the discipline of journaling.

Journaling means after we do the hard work of reading and rereading smaller parts of the Bible, and we know how to apply it, we take the time to write it down. My journal is on my computer. In my journal I write important things I learn in my Bible study I don't want to forget. What makes writing these things down so important is later in the week I will run into a situation where something I read in the Bible earlier in the week is a perfect connection. I can turn to my journal and remember it. If I don't write these things down, I am quick to forget and not make spiritual progress.

6. Spiritual Fitness Involves Prayer

Prayer is a little like cardio in the gym. It isn't always fun to do but it is important. It gets air into your spiritual lungs when you talk with God and pour your heart out to him.

Look what the Bible says about the importance of prayer.

You do not have, because you do not ask. James 4:2 (ESV)

The Bible tell us that as we go through our days we are to be in the habit of constantly asking God for our needs. We pray before tests. We pray before work. We pray when we are trying to balance things at home.

If you are like me, praying is hard work because it is easy to be distracted. I suggest you try taking a prayer walk. Walk around the neighborhood with your

family and take the time to pray for your needs. When you are in the car driving by yourself, take the time to pray about your needs.

Use prayer prompts. Make a certain place or routine in your life something you use to prompt you to pray. For me whenever I drive past a church in town where I know the pastor, I pray for the pastor. That means Pastor Clint at the Presbyterian Church gets a lot of prayer. As they say in real estate, location is everything. That is my prayer prompt.

Conclusion

This week, I challenge you to fitness both physically and spiritually. It is all about diet and exercise. When it comes to physical fitness, it is about eating healthy and exercising every day. It has value, you will feel better.

When it comes to spiritual fitness, it is about eating the healthy Word of God and avoiding spiritual junk food. It is about developing a plan to get into God's Word and exercise in it, as regularly as you would get in a gym. It is about working hard in the Word, reading and rereading and thinking about how it applies to life. It involves mental sweat. It involves hard work, but the results of the workout will not fade over time. They will last for this life and into eternity. This week, I challenge you to start a plan for physical, but most importantly spiritual fitness. Let's get fit for Jesus!



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