

Spiritual Exercises
July 26, 2015

Most of us know that exercise is good for us, even if we don't engage in it ourselves. The benefits of regular physical exercise are well documented. Even senior adults who exercise gain benefits. Exercise gives us more energy, improves sleep, and increases muscle strength. Exercise does not have to be strenuous or time consuming to gain these benefits. Walk for 15 minutes twice a day. Pick up a can of vegetables and move it around in the air as you sit in a chair watching TV. You do not need gym clothes or to purchase special equipment. Getting moving and enjoy the great benefits of exercise.

Likewise there are great benefits to spiritual exercise. For example, you will gain a deeper appreciation for spiritual truth. You will have more victories over temptation. You will live closer to God. You will firm up your theological flabbiness. You will live with more joy. You will discover new solutions for dealing with your problems. All this and more can be yours through regular spiritual exercise.

But, Before you begin exercising: Get a spiritual examination.

If you read anything on exercise, almost without fail the first recommendation is to check with your doctor before starting any kind of exercise program. If the doctor found you had a bad heart, he would suggest dealing with that problem first. If you ignore the heart problem you could do permanent damage to your system. You cannot ignore your doctor's advice and get healthier.

That is good advice for your spiritual life too. You want to start with the advice of someone more knowledgeable about such things than you are. So just as you might get a physical exam, you need a spiritual exam.

So pray this: [Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you...](#) Psalm 139:23-24 (NLT)

Open your heart, mind, and soul to God. He will look at your heart to see what is there, what is motivating you. God will ask personal questions about your lifestyle. He will ask about your spiritual diet, what ideas, beliefs, and attitudes you are accepting in your heart and mind. You need to answer these questions openly and honestly. You must be honest with God about your spiritual condition, about your spiritual apathy, laziness, and avoidance of Him.

One woman tells about her son's honest prayer at the supper table one night. "Dear Jesus, sorry for the mess we made in the yard today." After a slight pause, he concluded, "Thank you for the fun we had doing it." There is more to be desired in his attitude, but at least he was honest. If you can be that honest with God, then God can produce some real heart change in you. If you can admit to sins in you, then you and God can root them out and prepare yourself for the benefits of spiritual exercise.

God may find sin in you and tell you so. If so, you need to deal with that sin. If you ignore this sin and then engage in spiritual exercises, you aren't going to make any headway. In spiritual exercise you are asking God for new spiritual blessings. God will say no if you ignore sin in you. So when you go to God for this spiritual examination be

honest and admit to God the problems He finds in you. Then deal with them through confession and repentance.

In addition to a spiritual examination,... **Get a trainer. (a spiritual heart specialist)**

The spiritual exercise you are about to engage in is spiritual heart work. You need a spiritual heart specialist. The Holy Spirit is that specialist.

So pray this: "Fill me with Yourself, Holy Spirit." (Ephesians 5:18)

Ask the Spirit to fill you with Himself. This is giving the Holy Spirit permission to produce spiritual change in you. **Your heart, mind, spirit, words, thoughts, desires, attitudes, beliefs, and behavior all need changing.** So pray to be filled with the Spirit as you begin your daily spiritual workout. The Holy Spirit is ready to get you into spiritual shape.

After getting a spiritual examination and getting a personal spiritual trainer you are ready for some spiritual exercises.

Start by **Stretching your spirit with praise and thanksgiving.**

Psalm 100 instructs us in this.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Psalm 100:4-5 (NIV)

Let me suggest a definition for the difference between praises and thanks.

Pray praises for who God is, followed by thanks for blessings received.

Praise God as the only living God. Praise Him as the creator of the heavens and the earth. Praise His wisdom. Praise His presence in all the world. Praise His power. Praise His love of beauty and order, both of which we see in creation. Praise His plans for the world. Praise His importance. Praise His fairness to all. God is just.

Then turn to what He has done. Give thanks for how God has blessed you. Thank Him for life, for family, for friends, for your Savior, for health. Thank Him for your church, for the Bible, for your Bible teachers, for your food, clothes, and shelter. Thank Him for His promises of eternal life and heaven in the future.

You might pick a different area of your life each day and give thanks for your blessings there. For example, on Mondays you might thank God for the blessings of your job. On Tuesdays, give thanks for the blessings associated with your family. You get the idea. Areas of your life include, job, school, hobbies, material blessings, your church, your ministry, your service activities, and your health. There are so many things to give thanks for. You could start a Blessings List and put a new item on it each day. Some people in our church did that a few years ago and were much blessed by that activity. Stretch your spirit with thanksgiving and praise.

The next exercise is to... **Do some spiritual push ups.**

Pray the following: *Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth (that is, in me, in my life, in my family, in my church) as it is in heaven.* Matthew 6:10 (NIV)

Jesus said that His kingdom is in us. He doesn't rule a bit of geography like most kings we think of. Rather, Jesus rules individual people scattered over the whole planet, from all the nations.

Nor does Jesus rule His kingdom like earthly kings do. He does not rule by political power, financial power, or military power. Jesus rules by love power. He demonstrated His love for us by dying on the cross for our sins. As a grateful response He invites us to trust in His death for the forgiveness of our sins. And then believing we are forgiven, obey Him in love and gratitude. **Jesus rules His kingdom from within our hearts as we live in obedience to Him.**

Yield your heart to Him. Yield your will to Him. Yield your prejudices to Him. Yield your mind to Him. Yield what you read, listen to, and what you watch to Him. Yield your daydreams to Him. Yield your words and behavior to Him. Yield your goals and dreams to Him. Yield your words, your actions, your behavior, your family, your friendships, your home and possessions to Jesus. Push all of these things up to Jesus.

The next exercise is to... **Do some weight training.**

You might be in the habit of one or more of the following kinds of "physical" exercises:

Beating around the bush
Jumping to conclusions
Passing the buck
Throwing your weight around

Dragging your heels
Making mountains out of molehills
Adding fuel to the fire
Tooting your own horn

These will burn a very tiny number of calories. But they won't help you develop spiritually at all. No, the weight training that we need is the following:

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2 (NIV)

As Christians we are called by God to carry the weight of each other's needs. We do so in person, listening to each other, encouraging each other, and doing practical acts of helping each other. We also do so through praying for each other. When we lift each other's needs to Jesus, we are seeking God's power to meet that need.

Include proper walking in your spiritual exercises.

... Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. Galatians 5:16 (KJV)

"Walking in the Spirit" is listening to the Holy Spirit's help against temptations.

Pray the following: *Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me.* Psalm 119:133 (NIV)

We all need the help of God to resist temptation. We were never meant to resist temptation on our own without God's help. We have fallen in sin and we can't get up. We need God's help to get up and stay up. Victorious living over sin is a joint project between us and God. Don't let yourself start thinking you ever have this sin thing whipped. You are in constant danger. So pray like you believe the danger is real.

Give the Devil a workout by doing resistance work.

[Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.](#)

James 4:7 (NIV)

There are different ways to strengthen your muscles. One way to strengthen muscle is to move something. You can move yourself by walking. You can move weights by lifting them. You can move dirt in your garden with a hoe. Any form of movement will build stronger muscles if you move long enough.

Another way of building muscle involves no movement at all. This is resistance work. If you hook both hands together and pull your arms away from each other you aren't moving anything. But you are giving your muscles a workout. You can do all kinds of resistance exercises and still build muscle.

Similarly in spiritual exercise, you can exercise your spirit by resistance. Resist what the devil wants you to do. Resist what others want you to do if it is out of character with Jesus. If they want you to stretch the truth, resist. If they want you to put down someone, resist. If they want you to engage in their off color jokes, resist. If they want you to take something that is not yours, resist.

Sometimes you have to resist your family or friends. Increasingly, Christians have to resist American culture. We all have to resist a lot of advertising. Resist temptation and build spiritual muscle.

And throughout your exercising take in plenty of spiritual water. Learn to do what the writer of Psalm 119 did.

[I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.](#) Psalm 119:11 (NIV)

He did not just have God's word in his eyes, reading it. He did not just have God's word in his ears, hearing it. He did not just have God's word in his mind, thinking about it. He had God's word in his heart, desiring it, adopting it, treasuring it, giving thanks for it, and living it. This Psalm writer uses all of those words and more to describe how important God's Word is to him.

Take in God's word each day. Start your day in God's word, seeing what God wants to say to you. Learn spiritual truth and hide it away in your heart, not to be hidden, but to be safe, and to shape how you will live today.

The shape of America is reflected in the poor physical shape of Americans. The shape of Christianity, and more specifically our church, is reflected in the level of our spiritual condition. Do you want God to do more in us, with us, and through us? Do you want

more people here, learning to live with Jesus? Do you want more baptisms and a greater impact on our community? It all starts with the spiritual condition of each person here. Get into good spiritual shape and see increased blessings from God.

No amount of spiritual exercises or religious activities will do you any good if you are not in a right relationship with God to start with. The way to get into a right relationship with God is by admitting you are a sinner in need of a Savior and that Jesus is the Savior you need. You must receive Him as your personal Savior and turn your life over to Him as your Lord. I've been speaking of continuing that process in today's sermon. Each day we are to live by faith in Jesus as our Savior and live with Him as our Lord. This does not produce a right relationship with Him. Instead, it celebrates the right relationship that He has given to us.

Today, receive that right relationship by receiving Jesus as Savior and Lord.