

## Exercise

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*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil (Heb. 5:12-14).*

For most of my adult life, I have tried to exercise. When I was in college, I decided to get a gym membership. I wanted to make some changes for the sake of my health. I thought the habit of going to a gym each morning would help.

Well, like most social settings, a gym makes for an interesting study in human behavior. Each morning, I would see three types of people at the gym. First, there was a group of older men in the lobby. They wore sweatshirts and sat around a table drinking coffee. I don't know if they ever exercised. It appeared their gym membership was purely social. They enjoyed a few laughs together every morning, all the while probably deceiving their wives that they were "working out."

Second, there were always a few ladies on exercise bikes reading magazines. They leisurely peddled their bikes and occasionally turned the page. They seemed more interested in reading than breaking a sweat.

Thirdly, there were people in the gym intensely exercising. They had not come to the gym to socialize or read a magazine. They had come to improve their health, increase their strength, and sculpt their figure.

In some respects, we may approach our lives in God's kingdom like these three types of gym members. Like the older guys drinking coffee, some approach their life in God's kingdom in purely social terms. They enjoy the company of other Christians, but they never get around to exercising. Others are like the ladies on exercise bikes reading magazines. They are distracted. They give the appearance of exercising but never work hard enough to break a sweat. Then, some are dedicated, focused, and hard working. They are intensely working on reshaping their image.

As an aside, I do not want to give the impression that we are saved by our efforts alone. God by the Messiah and the Spirit gives us life and transforms our image (Rom. 8:1-11). Yet, we are to share in this process. We are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9). We have work to do.

In the example of Hebrews chapter five, we are shown Christians who stopped sharing in the process of transformation. They stopped exercising. They had become lazy. Instead of growing, they had atrophied.

These Christians are a cautionary reminder to us. We too can atrophy. Therefore, we must be diligent in our efforts to exercise and grow. But, what is involved with exercising?

**1. The mind.** Exercise requires our minds. Stunting our growth is easy: just stop thinking. This text rebukes Christians for failing to exercise their minds to discern the difference between good and evil. Being a Christian is not about simply knowing a set of facts. Being a Christian is about discerning the meaning of the new day that has dawned by the resurrected Lord.

In another passage, Paul wrote, “*...Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.*” *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is*” (Eph. 5:14-17). Evil is always trying to disguise itself as good. The devil presents himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:4). By the careful use of God’s word, we must train our minds to make wise discernment of good and evil.

**2. Strength.** Through faith in the Gospel of Christ, God empowers us (Rom. 1:16-17). In our weakness, God can make us strong (2 Cor. 12:10). By dedicating our minds to growing, we can increase our strength over time. Like a thriving infant, we can progress from milk to meat. The Hebrews failed to progress from milk to meat.

As we exercise our minds to discern good and evil we become stronger. We gain strength to practice self-control in the pursuit of a godly life (1 Tim. 4:8-9). We gain strength to bear the burdens of our fellow Christians (Gal. 6:1-2). We gain strength to endure hardships for the sake of Christ (Rom. 5:1-5). We can do all things, even the hard things, through Christ who strengthens us (Phil. 4:13).

**3. Determination.** Exercising is not easy. Straining our abilities can be painful. We can be tempted to quit. The Hebrews lacked determination. For them, faith became too hard. The writer would later remind them of the former days in which they had strong determination to serve the Lord (Heb. 10:32). They needed to recapture that spirit of determination: “*And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises*” (Heb. 6:11-12).

**4. Proper diet.** Getting physically healthy always involves a proper diet. There is a saying that, “*You can’t out-work a bad diet.*” We may go through the motions of exercise; however, without a wholesome diet, our efforts will be for nothing. Conforming to the image of Christ, requires us to fill our hearts and minds with godliness.

Paul often identified how we must focus and fill our minds. He wrote, “*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice*

*these things, and the God of peace will be with you”* (Phil. 4:8-9). Not only does he tell us how to think, Paul tells us to put those thoughts into practice.

### **Conclusion**

Exercise is hard work. It requires the right attitude. As Christians, we will never be successful in reshaping ourselves into the likeness of Christ if we have a bad attitude. Thankfully, we do not have to exercise alone. We have each other to help and encourage. Together, we can work to measure up to the stature of Christ (Eph. 4:16).

So, if you have been working hard, keep up the good work. If you are tired, do not grow weary in doing good (Gal. 6:10). If you have quit, repent. Look to God to renew your strength (Isa. 40:31). Let’s work together to grow into the image of Christ to the glory of God.