

HABIT TWELVE

Enjoy Physical Health for Spiritual Reasons

“... honor God with your body.”

1 Corinthians 6:20

It is man’s prime duty to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. This means that everything — including our attitude and practice regarding health issues — should glorify God. Trim, disciplined, exercised bodies create a better impression whether one is a Christian or not. Christians, however, have additional reason to be disciplined and fit in body, mind, and spirit: They want to bring glory to God. Most of the habits of effective Christians deal with becoming beautiful spiritually. However, Christians should also want to glorify God at the physical level by caring for their body. This chapter provides evidence that healthy, trim, strong bodies, free of diseases that are caused by our own sins and excesses also bring glory to God. This, in turn, augments the greater glory brought to Him by godly attitude and behavior.

There are two extremes we want to avoid. The first is greatly emphasizing only spiritual things while neglecting our bodies. This can lead to habits that are destructive to our health. The second is too much emphasis on the care of our bodies. Some in our society glorify, over-emphasize, or idolize ideal bodies. This worship of the body is equally in error. Scripture portrays a balanced position in which we give greater care to spiritual concerns than

to the body. Nevertheless, we are called to exercise self-control in a way that glorifies God in our bodies — the temple of the Holy Spirit. When a person has a physical handicap such as a thyroid problem, there are other principles to apply. God has given us our individual bodies. To the degree that our care for them makes a difference, we ought to keep them in good shape.

To the Glory of God

There is enough in the Bible about healing — regardless of what we believe about its application today — for us to know God values health. Health is the ideal that makes healing valuable. Jesus said that a man was born blind not because of his sins or his parents' sins. Rather, he was born blind to bring glory to God. Yet surely, it was not the blindness that brought glory to God but rather the healed state. His sight eventually glorified God. In other words, health is better than healing. Job's healing also brought glory to God, but still, health is the state from which healing — its restoration — derives its value.

Here is a spiritual illustration. In a world lost in sin, living a holy and useful life is better than falling into the sin that requires redemption. Even though redemption is a wonderful thing when it is needed, not needing it is better — redemption itself implies this. Maintaining health is better than being healed since being sick is what necessitated being made healthy. Having and using energy for godly work and service is better than experiencing the lack of energy that makes receiving it necessary. We celebrate the increasing number of people around the world who receive supernatural healing in answer to the prayer of faith. However, some diseases — including those God is willing to heal — can be avoided through regular preventive maintenance. As acts of obedience to God, let's discipline ourselves to do those things that give and maintain good health. It is better to rest, exercise, and eat well to attain the energy to serve vigorously than to need healing to restore what we could and should have maintained. What brings greater glory to God, our obedience and safety — or His rescue?

Maintaining health is better than being healed.

The Greeks, more than the Hebrews, were guilty of over-celebrating the beauty of strong healthy bodies. Paul may have

had that aspect of the Greek worldview in mind when he told Timothy, “Physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things” (I Timothy 4:8). Of course, it is better to discipline and train ourselves in godliness as most of this book emphasizes. Nevertheless, even physical training contributes to godliness since we can serve God better with healthy bodies. Healthy, strong bodies allow us to better accomplish the more important exercises of prayer, fasting, study, and work. The Christian maintains bodily health and strength for an eternal purpose. That desire extends beyond the physical strength and appearance that preoccupied the Greeks. This is one difference between Christians who strive to glorify God with their bodies and those who live merely at the physical level.

Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). Peter’s list of godly qualities mentions that self-control should be added to knowledge (II Peter 1:6). God wants to use us and will as much as our character allows Him to. Just as He works more through people who have other fruits of the Spirit — love, joy, peace, etc. — it makes sense that He can work more through someone who also has self-control than someone who does not. The Bible clearly commands us to “honor God with your body” (I Corinthians 6:20). This includes more than just the moral conduct of our bodies. It also includes their care and discipline. We are to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1), so shouldn’t we offer Him the best body we can maintain?

“Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

I Samuel 16:7

We are enriched when we come to know people at a deep level. Nonetheless, our first impression of them is based on mere appearance — the body we see. As Samuel considered Jesse’s fine son, Eliab, God told him, “*Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart*” (I Samuel 16:7, emphasis mine). We rejoice that God knows our hearts and motives even when others only see the outside appearance. To glorify God fully to man, however, we must start with the first impression — our *outward appearance*. To dress our bodies neatly is appropriate. To keep our bodies in good shape is equally appropriate. We can do both for godly and spiritual reasons. To glorify God is a spiritual reason to stay fit. It matters how our bodies appear.

Far more importantly, the disciplines we exercise to keep our bodies fit and trim spill over into the other areas of our lives. They influence us as we discipline ourselves for prayer, obedience etc. We become better people. Self-control in the physical arena is not just a physical thing — it is spiritual, too. Similarly, areas of indiscipline also spill over into other areas. If our goal is to be all we can be for God, we should strive to achieve and maintain a fit, trim, and healthy body. That is spiritual.

We express spirituality in the way we use our minds and bodies, not just through spiritual worship. We show love for God in care for our bodies in three categories: rest, exercise, and diet. All three deserve our serious consideration. There is much to do for God. With healthy bodies, we can feel better, look better, do more, do it more easily, have more fun doing it, and live longer. That glorifies God and brings us closer to being our best possible self.

Rest

We often think of the sixth day of creation, when God made man and woman, as the grand climax to the story of creation. However, the seventh day is the more fitting pinnacle. That was the day on which the Creator paused, surveyed, appraised, rejoiced, and declared His work good — the all-encompassing event to celebrate and the example to follow. Rest from successful work is restorative. God created the Sabbath, commends it to us, and commands that we follow His example. Why?

God knows us because He created us. He knows our physiological make up and understands that our bodies need periodic rest. He knows our psychological makeup and understands that our minds also need a rest from the pressures of daily responsibilities. He knows our spiritual makeup and understands that we need to take some deliberate time to nurture our spiritual man. We are rejuvenated in the presence of God when we worship. He commands it because it is good for us. He blesses us with a weekly appointment with Himself, a time for teaching, worship, rest, recreation, fellowship, and prayer, as well as just plain fun. If your responsibilities make it possible, Sunday seems a natural time to take a day off each week.

If your job requires work on Sunday, take another day for rest. If you don't, after years of misuse of your body, you risk becoming ill. This happens because we would have lived beneath our privilege, violated God's provision for our health, abused our