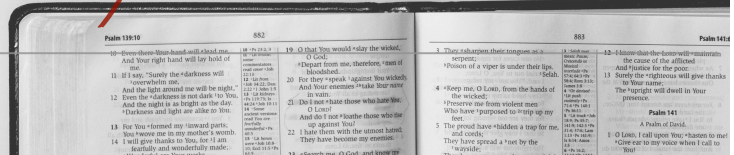


WORDS *of* TRUTH

“Strength”



Youth Article

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Ladies Article

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Theme Articles

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Spiritual Giants

Goliath was feared not just because he was tall. His size gave him strength allowing him to heft armor and weapons other men could not wield. The inclusion in Scripture of the weight of this weaponry is for the purpose of indicating the strength of Goliath.

Who are the strongest spiritual giants in the Kingdom of God today? Surely the names of some powerful preachers come to mind. The application of their studies has made itself manifest in their personal lives, and they have justly earned our respect. Equal in strength with powerful preachers are many of our esteemed elders. These men may not receive the recognition of preachers, but their knowledge, dedication, and humility are worthy of renown.

This issue examines spiritual strength and what we can do to cultivate it. The Lord needs strong Christians!

—DD

Joe's Journal

Strength in Youth

Joe Manasco

As light pours into the room and sweeps away the darkness, your heart drops into a pool of excitement mixed with worry. Fighting back against the apprehension that begins to tie you up and take you captive under your blanket, you swing your legs around toward the edge of the bed. In a moment that feels more like a decade, your feet finally make their way to the floor. As you stand up and make your bed, you realize that today marks your entrance into a whole new world, and all you can do is hope that you have the strength to make it back home alive. This is a new era; this is high school.

Confusion. That's what you feel taking over as you listen to the teacher explain all the new rules in your homeroom class. Why would anyone do or say any of those things? What kind of place is this? Where do I go for my next class? As the day continues on, you see and hear things you haven't heard or seen anywhere except in movies. You have so many questions and you feel so much anxiety. You think to yourself again and again, "Am I really going to feel this way for four more years?" As the day finally comes to a close and the last bell rings, your mind rests and your strength comes back. You make it home and feel whole again. You don't know it now, but this won't get easier—you will need to get stronger. You don't know it now, but the most important question you'll face in the next four years won't be on a test at school; instead, the question will be: Where will your strength come from?

If you're reading this, I'm sure you can understand the situation I just imagined in the previous paragraphs. Strength is one of the required materials that life demands young people be equipped with on the first day of class; the only problem is, it can't be bought at Walmart or Target. Strength is manufactured, produced and built in the heart and mind; sadly, there are no classes on where or how to find and build it.

Whether in high school, grade school, or college, young people need strength to survive in our world. Often, youthfulness has a measure of built-in energy, resilience, and strength; however, if it is not cultivated and built up over time, that strength will cease to be enough to bear the burdens that are laid upon them. In the age of social media, I believe that the prior statement is even more true. If young people don't find a source of strength outside of themselves in today's world, the chances that the influences of modern world will crush their spirit rise dramatically. I realize that this sounds like a dire situation; I believe that it is. What can be done?

God desires that the strengths of young people be used to benefit his kingdom. The energy, resilience, durability and dedication of the young is not to be forsaken; Paul makes this point to Timothy as he suggests that Timothy "let no one despise his youth" (1 Tim. 4:12). Solomon encourages the young to "remember your creator in the days of your youth" (Ecc. 12:1). If we truly seek to honor God's will and utilize the youth of the church for the expansion of the Kingdom, God's people must find a way to provide support to its younger brothers and sisters. What can be done?

With humility, I'd like to make a few suggestions. As someone transitioning from youth into young adulthood and working with youth often, I'd like to make some general observations from my own experience.

First, I think it is important to remember how strength is acquired. If one seeks to gain physical strength, he or she must lift weights, tearing down muscle fiber until ultimately, they fail and are unable to lift the weight. With every repetition and every failure, muscles eventually build strength and endurance. Strength in youth is acquired much the same way; young people must work hard, push through difficulty, and sometimes fail in order to grow—and failure can be painful. As our young people learn, grow, and fail, it is vital that other adult members of the church support and care for them in ways that demonstrate the love of Christ. Rather than enacting an immediate punishment or harsh rebuke, I believe it would be helpful for churches to offer encouragement, advice, and wisdom; and of course, discipline when necessary. All too often, strength is never truly built within young people because either, after the initial failure, young people fear the judgment of fellow members and never truly begin the rebuilding process, or the failure is never acknowledged, merely brushed aside as unimportant. Both of these extremes are undesirable outcomes and should be avoided by the church at all costs.

Since time is the greatest asset a young person has at his or her disposal, the church must teach the young to use the power of time for good. Recent trends suggest that many teens leave the church as they enter their college years and thereby forsake some of their most formative time, becoming less likely to be Christians later in life in the process. In order to address this, I think the church must make an effort to integrate the young into the church as a whole, and not just a youth group. By encouraging young people to see themselves as individual parts of the whole body rather than a collective body within *the* body, the transition to becoming a part of church later in life becomes less uncomfortable.

The strength of young people in our day and time is great. Few, if any groups exert as much influence online and in our culture as do younger people. Our bodies, minds, and hearts are full of ability, potential, and strength; they simply are waiting on a cause for which they can apply themselves. It is my prayer that Christians everywhere will find ways to develop young leaders and help them make a positive impact on the world for Christ. With youth there come many weaknesses, most of which are rooted in a lack of wisdom. Perhaps then the solution is to intentionally combine the energy of youth with the wisdom of older, more experienced Christians in the Kingdom. Time will not make life easier, and youth will one day turn to old age; I pray that somewhere in between youth and agedness, the strength of youth can be cultivated, expanded, and utilized for God's glory.

Strength in Body

Destyni Dindy

The question was presented to me, “How does staying physically fit benefit you as a Christian?” I had never really considered this concept before then. I guess the easiest and quickest answer for me would be that it allows me to interact with more people on a daily basis. Which would then allow me to share the Gospel more often. Again, that was an easy way to answer that. After putting more thought into the question I realized that fitness can be both a benefit to our Christian responsibilities, and be a parallel example of how we can grow spiritually.

Before I start any training for me or a client we must do a **pre-assessment** to determine the current state of health and fitness. These tests and measurements will allow us to see possible health risks and analyze current levels of strength and endurance. The spiritual application I have learned here recently is that life also has tests that will reveal where we have spiritual weaknesses (Jam. 1:3). The Bible is like fitness standards we go by to measure our level of health and fitness. We can use it to reveal to us where we are lacking in our spiritual health (Jam. 1:23).

When I consider our physical bodies, I am reminded of verses such as 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 and Romans 12:1-2. These verses tell us that our bodies have more purpose than just living life day by day. Paul mentions the phrases “living sacrifice” and “temple of the Holy Spirit,” which by implication mean we are stewards of our bodies. Paul also says that giving ourselves to God is our “reasonable service.” In other words, we have spiritual responsibilities that require physical involvement.

So, what are those responsibilities? Throughout the New Testament, we are given commandments, by Jesus and the Apostles, that would involve our putting forth a physical effort. Listed are a few common responsibilities and the biblical support for doing so: going out to evangelize the world (Mark 16:15), caring for the sick (Mat. 25:35-40), being hospitable (Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9; Rom. 12:13; Titus 1:8), restoring the erring (Jam. 6:19-20), and visiting the fatherless and widowed (Jam. 1:27).

You may be saying to yourself, “I am already doing these things now. I do not work out or watch what I eat. I think I am doing just fine.” I want to encourage you to examine yourself a little deeper. Look into that perfect mirror of truth. What are your limitations? Are you truly willing and able to do all you can in the Kingdom of God? If not, is the reason due to something you can control? Ecclesiastes 9:10 reads, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” Solomon, through the inspiration of God, has instructed us to give 100 percent in everything we do. Taking care of ourselves both physically and mentally will enable us to serve God to the best of our abilities. I know that a certain level of physical activity is necessary to improve the quality of life. Some may feel that this is a matter of personal choice, but I am willing to go out on a limb here when I say this. Friends, we have a God-given responsibility to take care of our bodies. I am sure we have all heard the saying, “If you know better, do better.” Well, that is very much a biblical principle and can be found in James 4:17. So, how can we set goals that will bring about both physical and spiritual health?

In the fitness world we use a method called SMART goals. SMART is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-based goals. If strength or growth is the goal this is how I would go about achieving it using the SMART method.

Specific: When a client comes to me with a general goal such as, “I want to lose weight,” or “I want to get stronger,” I always ask them more questions so that they narrow it down to a specific goal. For example, instead of just losing weight we will choose a specific amount of weight which is influenced by the previous assessments taken. The same is true for someone who wants to get stronger. We will choose a specific amount of weight that can be lifted based on the previous fitness tests. I want to make this applicable to us as Christians. So, instead of saying, “I want to be a stronger Christian.” We will be more specific by looking at the elements of Christianity and strengthening each one of them. Thus, making us stronger all together. I will talk about those elements in the next point.

Measurable: How is strength measured? In the fitness world, strength is measured relatively by what is called a PR or Personal Record. On lifting days, I record the most weight I can lift for three specific exercises. The bench press, the squat, and the deadlift. These are known as the “Big 3.” Every time we lift more weight than we have before that is a PR. Since the focus is on spiritual strength, I will make our “Big 3” applicable. They are these: Study, Prayer, and Service. We can also label these as Faith, Hope, and Love (1 Cor. 13:13). So, then the question now is, how do we measure spiritual strength? Strength can be measured by our love and service to God and others, strength can be measured by our faith and devotion to God, and strength can be measured by our hope in heaven (Col. 1:4-5; John 14:15; Mat. 22:37-40).

(continued on page 7)

Strong in the Lord

Terrance Brownlow-Dindy, Sr.

The New Testament contains multiple exhortations towards ascertaining or maintaining strength. In the midst of the Corinthian correspondence, the apostle Paul commanded the first century saints in Achaia to "...be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13, *KJV* – All scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted). The same Spirit-inspired servant of the Lord exhorted the Ephesian brethren to "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10). In like manner, Paul charged his son in the faith Timothy, "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1). From these, and similar exhortations, we learn of God's desire for His children to develop, sustain, and promote strength.

The strength advocated here, that which pertains to our life in Christ, is spiritual strength. The acquisition of *physical* brawn via bodily exercise is exhilarating, rewarding, and generally advantageous to our health. However, in the words of Paul, "bodily exercise profits little" (1 Tim. 4:8). The word employed by Paul is *ολιγον* (oligon) in the Greek, and carries the meaning of *for a short time*, or *for a little while* (Perschbacher 292). The apostle provides a reminder of the *temporary* benefits of physical strength in contrast to the *eternal* rewards of "exercise unto godliness" (cf. 1 Tim. 4:7-8).

When considering the subject, *Strong in the Lord*, three important aspects of the topic come to mind immediately. These are:

1. Sources of spiritual strength
2. Necessities of spiritual strength, and
3. Rewards of spiritual strength

This article will briefly survey the first aspect: The sources of spiritual strength. Subsequent articles overviewing the remaining two points will be forthcoming.

According to *IBISWorld*, the personal fitness training industry in the U.S. has generated 20.4 billion dollars in revenue for the year 2020 (www.ibisworld.com). The year 2020 is not even over! This fact reveals that Americans are extremely interested in learning how to develop physical strength and defeat physical weakness. If *spiritual* strength is the goal of the Christian, and it certainly should be, then we too must recognize that an avenue abounds wherein we may learn how to grow stronger in the Lord. That avenue is the Bible!

God's Holy Scriptures teach us that, in the first place, God Himself is the wellspring of strength for our souls. The Sweet Psalmist of Israel recognized this truth, and his Spirit-inspired writings are full of praises and petitions concerning the Heavenly Father's provision in this area. "I will love thee," writes David, "O Lord, my strength." The king of Israel proceeds, "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust..." (Ps. 18:1-2). In the New Testament, the apostle Peter's petition on behalf of the saints of Asia Minor was that "the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you (1 Pet. 5:10). Likewise, Paul's pointing is toward God as the source from which spiritual dominance derives. He credited God for his own fortitude (Phi. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:17), and exhorted other brethren to rely upon the power that resides in the Lord (Eph. 6:10, 2 Tim. 2:1, et al). The Petrine and Pauline exhortations are sensible indeed, seeing that the "**weakness of God is stronger than men**" (1 Cor. 1:25 – *emph. TFB*)!

Secondly, the Bible informs us that the Scriptures themselves are an indispensable means through which spiritual strength originates. The elders of Ephesus were commended to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified (Acts 20:32). Peter encourages us to "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). Without the proper nutrients, acquiring strength simply is not possible. Hafthor Julius Bjornsson, the lauded and reigning World's Strongest Man, revealed in an interview with *GQ Magazine* that he consumes an epic 10,000 calories per day in order to maintain his strength while training for competition (www.gq.com.au). Wow! (Don't try this at home – he's putting that many calories into a 6'9", 452-pound frame!) What Christian would not wish to attain to the greatest degree of spiritual strength available? Is your intake of biblical calories enough to achieve this goal?

In the third place, the Bible makes it clear that our faithful fellow laborers in the kingdom contribute significantly to our strength in the Lord. Memorable among the multifarious admonitions and exhortations that Jesus would provide His apostle Peter is His encouraging the apostle (who possibly was disheartened upon the hearing of the preceding revelation – v. 31), "when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32). We have previously noted in this study that Peter indeed heeded the command of the Lord, and was heavily involved in strengthening the souls of the persecuted saints of Asia.

During the initial evangelistic mission of Paul and Barnabas, wherein several congregations were established, the two made it their business to be about God's business of returning through the founded congregations of Asia Minor to strengthen the souls of the disciples (Acts 14:22). The King James translation "confirming" here is the Greek term for "further strengthening" (*επιστεριζοντες*, *episterizontes*). Not only so, but Luke bears record of the evangelists making a second visit (albeit in two separate teams) for the same purpose of strengthening their brethren (cf. Acts 15:36-41). Finally, during his third recorded evangelistic trip among the Gentiles, Paul again included strengthening the souls of the saints as an integral part his mission (Acts 18:23). Times, situations, and circumstances exist in which every one of us stands in need of our faithful, loving, and concerned brothers and sisters in Christ who are willing to "strengthen (i.e. reinvigorate) the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees" (Heb. 12:12, *NKJV*).

Rounding out the multiple sources from which spiritual strength may be gained according to the design of God is prayer. In the context of Christians confessing our faults one to another, brother James teaches us that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much (Jam. 5:16). These prayers of the faithful are not only useful in the arena of seeking God's forgiveness, but also in the sphere of soliciting strength from the Almighty. Concerning both the Ephesians (Eph. 3:14-16) and the Colossians (Col. 1:9-11), Paul prayed that they would be strengthened with might, by God's Spirit in the inner man, according to His glorious power.

Inevitable persecution (2 Tim. 3:12; Jam. 1:2), perseverance (Jam. 1:12), and the prize that God has set before us (Phi. 3:13-14) all demand that the children of God acquire, increase in, promote, and perpetuate spiritual strength as we walk with our Lord.

Strong in Grace

Brandon Jackson

“You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”

2 Timothy 2:1-2 ESV

Preaching, when done well, is a difficult occupation. Finding aptitude in persuasion, in disseminating information, and in opening one’s heart to the lives of others requires unique character. Preaching in the Twenty-First Century requires much of the preacher. Many in America today claim to know Christ. They recognize his name, story, background, and some even value the influence His example has wrought around them. Jesus is an ever-present shadow in our culture. Sadly, it is a shadow which has been twisted and stretched. Today’s gospel preacher tries to shine the light of God’s word upon that shadow to reveal the true Christ. He must use the light to cut through the darkness of false doctrines, misconceptions, failures among His disciples, and two millennia of history to try to reveal Jesus the Christ. What a different world the first century preacher worked to change. The minds of men were receiving the testimony of Christ afresh. There was not a history of Christ or Christianity. The opposition to the message was severe, however. Gospel preachers were setting the world upside down (Acts 17:6). It seems most people do not enjoy having their world turned upside down, and will strike out at those who are doing the turning.

Paul knew firsthand the challenges a preacher would face. He had endured many severe hardships in his own ministry. He enumerated them to the Corinthians: “We put no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything” (2 Cor. 6:3-10 ESV). Notice verse 3 explains that this list of hardships was endured by the apostle to commend his ministry of the Gospel. Preaching is hard work.

It was to this hard work that Paul would call Timothy. Timothy was a young man who had been raised in faith. Living with physical pain gave them a shared understanding of suffering: Paul’s thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7-10) and Timothy’s stomach issues (1 Tim. 5:23). Paul held him as a close companion, even calling Timothy “my true son in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2).

As a father, Paul did not want to leave Timothy to endure hardship alone. Paul was accustomed to these hardships and yet, even he would find a hardship that was too much for him. It was in that hardship that the Lord strengthened him. 2 Timothy 4:16-17 says, “At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth.” Paul recounts the hardship of being alone. He would naturally fear that Timothy will be left to spread the gospel message alone as well. Paul knew that the answers to such hardships were only found in the Lord.

2 Timothy chapter four seems to be an elaboration of a two-part statement found in 2 Timothy 2:1-2. “You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” Preaching is hard work. Paul enlists his son in the faith, Timothy, to maintain this hard work by being strengthened in the Lord so that the light of the Gospel might continue to shine. The beginning of verse one demonstrates Paul’s deep affection and concern for Timothy. The means of alleviating this concern is found in Timothy’s submitting to grace. This grace was found in Christ. Timothy had been part of a faithful family (2 Tim. 1:5). He had been adopted as a son in the faith by Paul. He had also been adopted into the body of Christ, where the great gift of grace was found (Gal. 3:25-27). This grace that is in Christ Jesus would strengthen Timothy for the work ahead. Paul had felt the injustice of suffering for preaching the gospel, he knew the pain of standing alone because of the message of Christ, and he had seen it exemplified in Jesus’ own ministry. It might seem logical to turn back when this suffering and pain was attributed to the work of preaching. How could Timothy withstand such unjust hardships? By relying on the strength that comes to one who does not deserve it. It is true grace. Grace sent from one who had endured the most horrific injustice on Timothy’s behalf. Grace that Timothy had re-enacted in his own baptism. Grace found only “in Christ.” By being strengthened through remaining in Christ, Timothy could complete the second part of Paul’s statement. He could continue in preaching the message Paul had delivered to him.

Preaching is hard work. However, what other work comes with the eternal reward of shedding God’s light to reveal Christ in the lives of the lost? With what other work is there comfort knowing that Christ will stand on your side? Yes, preaching is hard work, but Paul was confident that Timothy would succeed. When the hardships would come, Timothy could steel himself as Paul had done, finding strength “by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”



THE BIBLE AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

[Editor's note: *This article appeared in the August 21, 1970, edition of Words of Truth. Bro. Taylor has done incalculable good for the kingdom of God. He continues to labor and work as a writer and preacher at the age of 89.*]

Jehovah's word brought the universe into functional being (Psa. 33:9). That same powerful word of deity upholds all things (Heb. 1:3; Job 26:7). In the glorious realm of redemption, God's power to save is channeled to humanity through the gospel (Rom. 1:16-17; 1 Cor. 4:15; Jam. 1:18, 21). Jesus affirmed that mighty truth would unshackle man from the tyranny of sin (John 8:32). In the midst of these abundant affirmations as touching the tremendous power of God's word it is not surprising to witness just how much difference the Bible makes in the lives of people. Deity so intended for it to be this way.

The Sacred Volume tenders the only authentic account we possess of man's origin, his purpose here and his ultimate destiny. Three of the most challenging queries any reflective mind ever pondered are: (1) Whence came I? (2) Why am I here? (3) Where am I going? The all sufficient scriptures present a number of sweeping statements relative to each of these fundamental questions.

The Bible says man has a divine origin. God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness:...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them" (Gen. 1:26-27). "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). Many other scriptures attest to this same truth (Ecc. 7:29; Psa. 100:3; 139:13-16; Mat. 19:4; Acts 17:24-29). Man's glorious origin can be briefly stated in two words, God's offspring. We came from God — not lifeless slime through godless evolution!

Man's purpose in life is to fulfill the King's business. Like the youthful Master we are to be about our Father's business (Luke 2:49). We are to seek God's kingdom first and its accompanying righteousness (Mat. 6:33). Love for God and love for man constitute the very epitome of all Jehovah's commands (Mat. 22:36-40). Solomon says, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecc. 12:13).

Two eternal destinies await human beings. Jesus vividly describes these in Matthew 25:31-46. The closing verse of this great chapter reads: "And these (those on the left hand) shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

The Bible teaches that every responsible individual has sinned and come short of God's glory. Paul says, "What then?

Are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin..." (Rom. 3:9). Later the apostolic scribe wrote, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). John writes, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us...If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1: 8, 10). Man is not born a sinner but becomes one by his own personal transgressions (1 John 3:4; 5:17). If we are lost, it will be due to our own transgressions, not because of what Adam and Eve did in Eden. Original sin has been one of the most damnable errors concocted by man. The expression is not found in God's Word and neither is the idea. Jehovah God never did say that any of Adam's descendants would have to give an account in judgement for what the first couple did in Eden. Only Adam and Eve will have to give an account of that sin and whether they did that which allowed God to forgive it. You will face your own sins in judgment just as the writer will face his own in that final day of ultimate reckoning. We have never had the least fear of being lost due to Adam's transgression. Personal transgressions are the ones which must concern each of us and whether we have them cleansed in the blood of God's Son.

The Eternal Volume teaches us concerning members of the Godhead, their character and what they have done to save man. John 3:16, the Golden Text of the Bible, says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Man is saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:5, 8). Grace is God's part; faith is man's part. Salvation is not by grace only nor is it by faith only. Satan is responsible for putting that word only by either grace or faith. He knows that when man accepts one of these only "isms" that salvation is totally nullified in his case. Man is to hear God's word (Rom. 10:17). Man is to believe in the deity of Jesus or else he will die in his sins (John 8:24). Jesus presents the two great alternatives in Luke 13:3 — it is either repent or perish. Paul told the Athenian inquirers that God "now commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). The deity of Jesus Christ is to be confessed prior to baptism (Rom. 10:9-10). Baptism is a command of Christ, puts one into the Savior, saves him, and is an answer of a good conscience toward God (Acts 10:48; Gal. 3:27; Mark 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). One must adhere faithfully to the divine demands of the Christian system for the remainder of his earthly pilgrimage (Mat. 10:22). He must be willing even to give his life for the Christian cause if necessary (Rev. 2:10).

The Bible makes the difference in the individual's life.

(continued from page 3) **Attainable:** Our goals must be attainable or realistic. So, how is strength attained? The short answer to this question is “In Christ” or “Through Christ”(1 Pet. 5:10; Phi. 4:13). However, we then need to make sure we are in Christ.

Relevant: Our goals need to always be relevant to us and our purpose. Let us always remember that this is a spiritual journey and to keep that in mind especially when applying the scriptures to real-life scenarios. I am sure we are all aware of how commonly used Philippians 4:13 is in the athletic world. It is on the back of shirts, written on shoes, worn on necklaces, and even tattooed on arms. When Paul wrote this letter, he was not playing basketball, lifting weights, on the line of scrimmage, or running a marathon. He was in prison. Yes, he was suffering physically but for a spiritual purpose (2 Tim. 3:12). The same observation is true of 1 Cor. 9:24-27. Paul was speaking to the church in Corinth, a city heavily influenced by Greek culture. The Greeks were basically the gym junkies of ancient times who were obsessed with aesthetics and athletics. Paul uses the example of running a physical race with the goal of obtaining the prize to catch their attention. He shows them the relevance of this goal when he states that the prize we seek to attain, is incorruptible, not corruptible; meaning, this is a spiritual matter.

Time-Based: We may not know a specific time for when we will face the judgement and there is no set time or age for when we should be at a certain level of spiritual strength. However, we do know that death is certain (Heb. 9:27), Jesus will come again (Mat. 24), and we are expected to grow in faith (1 Pet. 2:2; Heb. 5:12).

As long as we are alive growth ought to be taking place. We should never become complacent or as we would say in the fitness world “settle for average.” If we hit a spiritual “plateau” it is time to reassess and make the necessary changes to ensure steady growth. The second element of physical fitness is nutrition. I am going to include supplements in this category as well, because they are required for certain goals and health reasons. This could be something as simple as iron, multivitamins, or BCAAs for recovery.

Nutrition: When determining the proper nutrition plan I must consider the goals and where I

currently am on my fitness journey. The same is true for us as Christians. 1 Peter 2:2 says, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.” What we put into our bodies affects our daily output. Again, the same is true for our spiritual bodies (mind) (Pro. 4:23; 23:7).

Supplements: While we rely heavily on our main meals to supply us with the nutrients needed for physical growth, it is also necessary to supplement our diet with other positive things to ensure continual growth and health. God has also prescribed us with several quality ingredients to add to our faith. He even says to add “fruit” to our diet (Gal. 5:22-23; Phi. 4:8; 2 Pet. 1:5-8).

The final element of health I want to focus on is **mental health**. In college, we were taught that mental health is just as important as physical health, if for no other reason than that we cannot function effectively without the proper state of mind. We have all lacked motivation due to a low mood or having a lot going on in our minds. I think it is necessary to revisit Romans 12:2 specifically. It implies that mentality is important when doing the will of God when it says “by the renewing of your mind.” I do not think this is a coincidence, because we can find many passages throughout the Bible that link mentality to physical activity (Pro. 4:23; 23:7)

Conclusion: Like with anything we do in life, consistency is the key to improvement. It is common for us to want to have “cheat days” and take time off, but we need to make sure we are always working towards our goals. God has proven through His word that He is an advocate for consistency (2 Tim. 4:2; 1 The. 5:17; Deu. 6:4-9). Doing what it takes to be physically fit has given me a new perspective on how we achieve the things we want most in life. Sometimes we do not see where we are lacking or weak until we are faced with a challenge. Consider the life of Samson. Samson did not realize how spiritually weak he was until his physical strength was taken from him. The same is true for us when we are faced with uncertainty. In times where we feel vulnerable, that is when our faith is tested and we see just where our strength lies. Physical strength is beneficial for life here on earth, but spiritual strength (godliness) is beneficial for both this life and eternal life. So ask yourself as I try to daily: Am I standing still or am I hitting a new personal record?

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ASK A BIBLE QUESTION

QUESTION: Is a Virtual Affair (i.e., viewing pornography on the Internet) scriptural grounds for divorce?

ANSWER: Viewing any kind of pornography is a sin; however it is NOT a reason for divorcing, according to the Bible. Jesus said, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication [sexual immorality], and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery” (Mat.19:9). Marriage is the uniting of two lives (Gen. 2:24; Mal. 2:14; Mat. 19:4-6; Rom. 7:1-3; Eph. 5:22-33; Heb. 13:4). It means the joining of two bodies, but more significantly it means the joining of two hearts in a mutual covenant of exclusive love. This includes a vow to be sexually faithful to one’s spouse. The sexual union itself, by God’s intention, serves to strengthen the total bond between a husband and wife. The act of adultery strikes, then, at the very heart of the marriage relationship. The very act designed to unite husband and wife is used to join one of the spouses to a third party (i.e., physically joining). Sex by its very nature unites (1 Cor. 6:16). Thus an unfaithful husband (for instance) is not just “having a little fun on the side.” He is forming a union between himself and an outsider; thereby destroying the integrity of the union with his wife. Thus the physical link in the marriage bond is severed. The act of adultery is a violation of the spiritual covenant in which each spouse vows to keep himself exclusively for the other. Therefore, unless sexual immorality (fornication) has occurred, scriptural grounds for divorce are NOT available.

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