

COUCH POTATO NOT A 'FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT'

By John Gagliardi



Some 14 years ago, I was somewhat offended when a good and trusted Christian friend said to me in church one night: "Lose weight and get fit". Then, just a week or so later, a visiting prophetic speaker singled me out of a large congregation, pointed a long and bony finger at me, and said somewhat portentously: "This sayeth the Lord - Lose weight and get fit".

Quite prepared to be offended again (after all, the Bible does say that offences will come), I suddenly had the thought that the Bible also said something somewhere about things being confirmed by "two or three witnesses". Hmm.

Maybe God was telling me something? After all, I think at the time I was around 105 kg, and although a weightlifter in my late teens and 20's, I hadn't seen the inside of a gym at that time for some 25 years. And I certainly preferred driving to walking.

I was tempted to consign these "words" to the eternal refuse tip of "false prophecies", or at best, to put them "on the shelf", which is a nicer way of saying much the same thing. After all, I remember the good old King James Version saying: "Bodily exercise profiteth little..." (1 Timothy 4: 8). I really liked that verse, and used it many times to justify what had become a typical Aussie "couch potato" lifestyle.

But then, with the benefit of later scholarship and Bible translation, I read the New King James Version of the same Scripture, and discovered this updated and revised version had inserted a little letter "a", making it now read: "Bodily exercise profits a little..."

So I looked at some other, more modern versions and read the following:

- Physical exercise has some value (New Living translation)
- For physical training is of some value (Amplified Bible)

- Physical training is of some value (New International Version)
- Exercise is good for your body (The Contemporary English Version)

It had gone from “*little*” value to “*some*” value, and finally to being “*good*” for your body. So I thought maybe I had better think again, and that maybe – just maybe – God was trying to tell me something. Something I didn’t particularly want to hear, but something I really NEEDED to hear.

Little did I know then, but I was about to embark on a life of greatly intensified international travel, long hours of hard work, and periods of high stress and pressure unlike anything I had ever known in my earlier years in business. Guess what – God knew best!

He knew he had bigger and more challenging things ahead for me, and he knew I would need good health and physical endurance to be able to do what He was calling me to do.

At that time, I decided to eat better, exercise more and try to get adequate amounts of rest. I have no doubt that is the reason that today, at an age when many of my peers are retired and “past it”, I am able to work harder for longer hours than ever in my life – and am loving it! My life is full of ever-new and more exciting ventures and challenges, and I look forward eagerly to each day with enthusiasm and vigor because I am fit in spirit, mind and body.

As Christians, it goes without saying that we must be “fit” spiritually – but we are also enjoined by the Bible to be fit physically – to treat our bodies as gifts, and to steward them as temples of the Holy Spirit that belong to God, not just to ourselves.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6: 19-21, “Do you now know that your body is a temple of the holy Spirit, Who is in you, Whom you have received from God? You are not your own: you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

Paul indeed talks in a number of places of disciplining our body, the importance of self control as a “fruit of the Spirit”, and talks even of boxing and running a race – his way of telling us that God wants us to be the very best we can be for Him.

In the days of Paul and Jesus, people did not travel in cars, ride in elevators and on escalators, and eat fat-laden, high-carbohydrate fast food. They walked and climbed up to 10 miles a day (someone estimated Jesus could have walked as many as 45,000 miles during his lifetime), and ate what we would today call a healthy “Mediterranean” diet of whole grains, legumes, fish, lean meat, fruit and vegetables.

People in those days did not have to join gyms to walk on treadmills – they walked just to get where they were going. As Dr Randall L. Braddom said in a recent article, “For the first time in the history of the human race, we no longer have to exercise! Catch 22: We are now using exercise machines to give us back the exercise that machines took away.”

We are spirit beings, with a soul (our mind, emotions and will) and we live in a body – the body in a sense carries our soul and spirit around, so the state of our body is very important.

I have heard super-spiritual “giants” say they don’t have time to exercise and worry about what they eat – they are too busy serving God. But no less a giant than C.H.Spurgeon died at the age of 61, overweight and unfit, regretting the fact that he had not taken better care of himself over the years. If he had taken more seriously the dictum to be a good steward of his body, he may well have had many more years with which to bless and enrich the Body of Christ.

Dr Scott A. Johnson, a Florida-based Board certified physician, had this to say in a recent article in www.christcentredmall.com: “One of the greatest ways the enemy has come against not only the church but also society in general is through their bodies.

“1 Thessalonians 5: 23 says: ‘And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole SPIRIT and SOUL and BODY be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ Most Christians do not understand how important it is to take care of these separate parts ...

“Our flesh, for the vast majority of Christians, is in total control of our dietary and exercise practices. This is why so many millions of Christians and non-Christians suffer defeat.”

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Ultimately, like so many things in life, whether we decided to be good stewards of our bodies or not is a matter of personal choice – it is just a decision away from the next time we tuck into a fatty hamburger and sugar laden drink, or decide to walk up the stairs instead of taking the lift.

Dr Kenneth H. Cooper writes in his book *Faith Based Fitness*: “I told the crowd (240,000 at a Billy Graham crusade in Brazil) that I had recently become more convinced than ever that each of us is designed to be a flesh and blood temple of God. Our charge on earth is to serve Christ and our fellow man, to exercise our gifts and talents to the maximum – and to care for all the assets God has given us, including our bodies.

“Christians believe, quite rightly, that the spiritual dimensions of their lives are of supreme importance. But then they proceed to the assumption that their physical bodies are unimportant, and may be neglected with impunity.

“They fail to understand that their spiritual lives ... are closely connected with the conditions of their bodies. If the body begins to break down, the person may lack the endurance and energy required to serve others, stay in a good mood, or even spend extended periods in prayer.”

Gary F. Zeolla, in an article entitled *Should Christians be Concerned About Physical Fitness*, quotes the Apostle Paul as saying that no one ever hates his own body, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church (Ephesians 5: 28-30). Your body is a ‘good’ and

wonderful gift from God. It is capable of miraculous feats, if properly taken care of. And with God the Holy Spirit living inside your 'temple', how can you not take care of it?

"...Your service for the Lord will suffer if your health begins to break down ... It takes just as long to eat an apple as it does a candy bar. It is just a matter of food choices ... As for exercise, it is not needful or even desirable to put in long hours at the gym. A basic level of physical fitness can be attained in as little as 30 minutes three or four times a week.

"As people get into better shape ...the end result is increased, not decreased productivity. Moreover, healthy habits will very possibly increase one's life span, thus increasing the number of years one has to serve the Lord.

"Paul said: 'But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection... ' (1 Corinthians 9: 27). The key word here is 'discipline'. Starting and maintaining a proper diet and exercise program involves, more than anything else, discipline and caring enough for yourself ... to take care of yourself."

It is ultimately a question of choice and balance – we can choose to take the steps necessary to make our bodies healthy and productive and our minds positive and energetic, or we can slouch along and end up as sad, dispirited "couch potatoes" whose constant cry is the all-too-familiar "if only..."

In his article, Gary Zeolla posts a timely warning that we should avoid the two extremes. At one extreme, is the person who doesn't care at all about diet and exercise, and at the other extreme is the person who becomes obsessed by exercise and food restrictions, ultimately turning their bodily care into almost a religion.

"A balanced concern for diet and exercise is needful, so that Christians will have the vigor to serve God and our fellow human beings," he concludes.

With the Apostle Paul, let us be reminded above all else that our body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and that our body is not our own to do with as we want. God bought us with a price – the inestimably, unthinkably high price of the life of His Son, Jesus Christ, and we are His workmanship, designed and created to do His good works (Ephesians 2: 10).

Just as we must feed our spirit with good food - the Word of God – and exercise it in prayer and meditation, so must we feed our body with good, healthy food and exercise it with a sensible and sustained regime of physical activity.

Couch potatoes are – after all - not a "fruit of the Spirit"!