

Aerobics for the Body and Soul
According to Norine

I begin each day with a prayer that contains this line. "...I will try to be faithful in those habits of prayer, work, study, physical exercise, eating, and sleep which I believe the Holy Spirit has shown me to be right." One particular day as I murmured those words I actually heard them for the first time.

My emotions galloped. I went from depression to guilt. I wallowed around in both of these states for a little while until a little voice reminded me that, by the grace of God, I could change this predicament. That morning my meditation changed from the problems of the world to my own problems. I know I can count on God's help with global issues; therefore, I know I can count on His help with my trivial issues.

I tried to rationalize that I had gained weight because I had been so busy helping others that I didn't have time for healthy eating. In other words I tried to blame God for my lack of self control. But I also tried to listen. The message that came across to me said something like this.

"When I placed you in this world you had a perfect body. I wanted it that way so you would be happy, and so you could do my work. I want you to continue to do my work for many more years, but you won't if you fall to the ills of your society. You will eat too much of the wrong foods. You will clog your arteries so neither life giving oxygen, nor my life giving word can make its way to your heart and brain. You will wear out your joints just trying to support you body. How will you support others? I will carry you if I have to but I would rather you would walk with me."

"I know you. You are thinking it's all because of trying to do My work that you gained the weight, but get real. Remember I dwell in you. You have turned my beautifully created palace into a gluttonous galley of sick, disintegrating, shambles. I love you, and will remain with you, but don't you think you and I could get more done if you took just a little time to make some needed repairs. I will help you if you decide to do that."

The next day I found it easier to make the final decision. After five minutes of gyrations on the bed trying to zip up the largest pair of slacks in my closet I went to a local gym and signed up. I reviewed the schedule of activities and decided I would do a low impact aerobics class and a water aerobics class. It would waste almost half a day, and my most creative time for writing, two hours of classes, two hours of transportation, but I had to do it. It would just be for the summer. I would call it my summer camp in an effort to trick myself into believing this would be fun.

Simultaneously I began doing a study of my eating and nutrition habits and made many positive changes. My weight began to reflect these. I also decided to do a little research on the benefits of exercise for someone my age, and that was when I realized I could double the rewards. I realized that almost everything that applies to exercise for

improving the body could also be transposed into exercises to improve the soul. They go hand in hand.

Let me explain this further by imposing my thoughts on some excellent articles I read about fitness and exercise.

One article began “Do you want to live longer and in better health? A program of regular aerobic exercise can help you avoid chronic diseases and some cancers. It can lower blood pressure, build stronger bones, improve muscle strength and flexibility, lessen depression and help control your weight. Aerobic exercise includes walking, running, hiking, bicycling, swimming, stair climbing, rowing, aerobic dance and many other activities.”

I would add to this: Do you want to spend eternity in heaven? A program of regular spiritual exercise can help you avoid chronic problems such as depression, despair, illnesses, and feelings of hopelessness. It can lower your stress, build your confidence, improve your strength and ability to handle life’s difficulties, and keep your body a fit temple of the Holy Spirit.

Aerobic exercises for the soul include praying, meditation, positive thinking, studying, reading the Bible, attending worship services, interacting with and for people, and many other activities.

When you follow a program of regular aerobic exercise, over time your heart grows stronger.

When you follow a program of regular exercises for the soul, over time your heart grows stronger, more loving and generous, and this makes it easier to meet the demands of living a Christian life on this planet.

Cardiorespiratory Endurance is the ability to deliver oxygen and nutrients to tissues, and to remove wastes, over sustained periods of time. Long runs and swims are among the methods employed in measuring this component.

Soul Endurance is the ability to deliver life sustaining nutrients (grace) to the soul and remove wastes (sin) over sustained period of times. Worship and church attendance are among the best methods used to enhance this component.

Muscular Endurance is the ability of a muscle, or a group of muscles, to sustain repeated contractions or to continue applying force against a fixed object. Pushups are often used to test endurance of arm and shoulder muscles.

Muscular Endurance for the soul enables the human to sustain force against evil, and not crumble to social pressures. Living without prejudices is a good test of the muscular endurance of the soul.

Flexibility is the ability to move joints and use muscles through their full range of motion.

Flexibility of the soul is the ability to live a Christian life in all circumstances. Christian living Monday through Saturday, rather than just Sunday, is a good measure of the flexibility of the soul.

The toughest and most important step of an exercise program is getting started. Often people think they need to tackle a strenuous program right away to prove they are committed. But in reality, slow and steady is the best way to begin.

God doesn't demand nearly so much of us. It's easy to start with Him. He would like it if we spent hours a week in prayer and worship services, but He will be happy and reward us with a stronger spiritual life if we just occasionally let our thoughts drift in His direction. A few seconds to a few minutes of prayer several times a day will bring noticeable results and will increase without any extra effort. It doesn't cost us anything and we don't need any special equipment or outfits.

If the thought of doing the same old exercises every day keeps you from starting an exercise program, cross training may be the answer. Cross training means that you include a variety of activities in your fitness program. For example, you could alternate jogging and swimming during the week, and play a game of tennis on the weekend.

If the thought of doing the same old exercises or reciting the same old prayers, every day keeps you from starting a program of spiritual exercise, cross training may be the answer. This means you include a variety of activities in your program. You could pray, talk to someone who is lonely on the phone, help an elderly neighbor with a chore, visit someone who is sick, prepare a meal, enjoy a game with a child, baby sit, tutor, smile, work in a garden, and the list goes on and on. These are all spiritual exercises.

Cross training can provide a "total body tune-up," something you won't get if you concentrate on just one type of activity. Including a variety of activities in your fitness program will help prevent boredom. That can help you stick to the program.

Spiritual cross training can provide a total soul work up. Christ set the example. He prayed. He fed the hungry, cured the sick, ate and visited with friends and strangers welcomed the poor and the outcasts. He even changed water into wine. He walked and rowed. He performed miracles and He died on a cross.

Spiritual cross training is guaranteed to prevent boredom and the greater the variety of what you do, the more you want to do. An active Christian is never bored.

Cross training also implies working on flexibility and strength. These are needed for both the body and soul. The flexible Christian demonstrates spiritual strength in every aspect of life such as while standing in line, shopping, having fun, at work, at home, going to church, interacting with people, animals, and God's creation.

When I first started going to the gym I felt guilty for spending so much time on my body, but as I vigorously engaged in both aerobics for the body and soul I quickly realized how the two often blend together. Perhaps the realization began as I swam laps and enjoyed the emersion in the water, the warmth of the sun, and that brief total break from the world around me. My mind wandered to how thankful I was that I could do this, that God had blessed me with a healthy body and spirit, the resources of time and money, and that He had created refreshing, cleansing water. My mind continued to wander to Genesis and the story of creation, and every stroke became an action of praise and thanksgiving to God. Swimming a mile like that has been one of the best experiences of my summer camp, and I am sure it is the spiritual high that motivates me to keep repeating it.

My exercise routines include aerobics, swimming, conditioning, and yoga. I started the yoga quite accidentally as I really did not know anything about it, and can't say I had any great desire to learn. One day my aerobics class was cancelled so it was suggested I go to the yoga class as it would be a good way to stretch and improve flexibility. I went, and for three fourths of the class could not imagine how any human could assume the positions the instructor was suggesting or why they wanted to, but not to lose face, I tried. Some things felt pretty good. Some left me wanting to be able to try again, but it was the last five minutes that captured me into the world of yoga. At the end of a challenging and strenuous class the instructor had each person lay flat and still. She told us to concentrate on our breathing. Then she said let your mind drift to anything you like that you find peaceful and relaxing; perhaps a beach, a mountain top, or a lake. I lay there numb and exhausted and let my mind go. When she clapped to announce class was over I was in a most wonderful state with my God. My mind went there completely by itself, undirected by me.

I have learned an important lesson about the importance of a regular planned exercise program to the body and soul. When one feels better, they both feel better.