

## Spiritual Fitness

When a new year comes, many people make resolutions. They want to make positive changes in their life. Some people decide to save more money. Some decide to travel more or make more time for family and friends. Some will resolve to lose some weight or to be more active. A popular new year resolution for Christians is to read their Bible more and to pray more. In other words to be more spiritually fit. Today we are talking about being spiritually fit.

We understand what it means to be physically fit. We're not talking about being a champion athlete level of fitness. When we say physically fit we are talking about not being overweight, getting exercise each day, eating healthy, not overindulging in things like sweets or junk food, and getting enough rest each night. None of these should surprise you. We have been taught since being a child what it means to be healthy and physically fit.

We all know what happens when we are not physically fit. When we overindulge in junk food or the wrong foods for that matter, we gain weight and lose energy. When we don't get enough exercise our bodies stop being as flexible and we start to develop more aches and pains. When we don't use our muscles we lose them. All these things lead to being more susceptible to getting sick. Basically, when we are not taking care of our physical body we don't feel great, get sick easier, and it can affect our emotional wellbeing.

The answer is to start to get more physically fit. We start to eat better. We purchase a step tracker, like a Fitbit, and start to make sure we get enough steps each day. We talk to a friend and ask them to join us as we start to get healthier, thereby giving us accountability and someone to help us through the difficult days.

Spiritual fitness is no different. Many people made a resolution this new year to read their Bibles more or to pray more. They resolved to gather together in church groups more. Some have said they want to be a better disciple of Jesus Christ than ever before. This is all great. But, like many new year resolutions, it starts to get let go. Let's take a deeper look at spiritual fitness and see how we can develop it and maintain it. We are going to compare it to physical fitness for clarity and understanding.

When we are being physically fit we must eat healthily. This equates to spending time reading and studying God's word, the Bible. As we read and study our Bibles we must keep it balanced. It is important to read both the New Testament and the Old Testament. We must study the words of Jesus and the apostles and also the words of Moses and the words of the prophets.

When reading the Bible, it is important to study it as well. As you read think about what each sentence or phrase means. Think about how it relates to your life and situation at this moment. Look at the context of what you are reading. What were the people facing? How did they deal with the situation at the time? What did they do causing God to address them or this situation? How is it similar to something you or someone you know are facing?

As you read, underline or highlight verses that capture your attention. Write them down in a notebook and write out your thoughts about that verse. This is not just reading but also studying. This is how you can commit scripture to memory. Psalms 119:11 says:



(11) I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

To hide God's word in your heart you must spend time in it and study it. This is the first step to being spiritually fit, just like the first step to being physically fit is eating healthy.

With physical fitness we not only must eat right we must also get enough adequate exercise. Spiritual fitness is no different. To be spiritually fit we must actually be the church, not just read about it. Look at what James says in James 1:22-25.

(22) Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. (23) Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror (24) and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. (25) But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it--not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it--they will be blessed in what they do.

Some translations of the Bible say to not merely be hearers of the word, but be doers of the word as well. We must do something to be spiritually fit. We must exercise our faith in Jesus by being His hands and feet and being the church. We have talked about this many times before. You can read about what it means to be the church in Matthew 25:34-40. We must be feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, housing the homeless, giving water to the thirsty, visiting the captive, and more.

When you are spiritually fit these things come naturally. They are a natural byproduct of being a part of the body of Christ, that is the Church. We reach out to help people in whatever times of need they have. We lend an ear to listen, we share wisdom and encouragement when appropriate, and we help take care of them when they can't take care of themselves. This is how we exercise our faith. James sums it up in verse 27 like this:

(27) Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

This leads us to accountability. When we are trying to live a healthier lifestyle and get physically fit we often team up with one or more others who are also trying to get healthier. This gives us some accountability. This encourages us to continue on when we have one of those days when we don't feel like going for a walk or going to the gym. Maybe they encourage us to eat a piece of fruit instead of a piece of cake. That's what friends do. They encourage us on when we need it.

We read the exact same thing in Hebrews 10:24-25.

(24) And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, (25) not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

We need to gather together as brothers and sisters in Christ, that is the children of God so that we can encourage one another and lift one another up. We can spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Our point is that you can't be spiritually fit by trying to do it alone. It takes others around you, too.



Finally, when we are being physically fit, we are getting enough rest. Our bodies need rest each day. When we do not get enough rest our bodies are weakened and we are more susceptible to illness and disease. Our spiritual fitness is no different. We need spiritual rest, and it is tied to physical rest.

Genesis 2:1-3 says:

(1) Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. (2) By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. (3) Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

When we rest spiritually, we give our bodies and minds time to rest and recover from the effects of this world. As we go through life we are exposed to the world. We are immersed in worldly things. This not necessarily bad or sinful, just worldly. It's no different than sitting around an open fire. You are going to end up smelling a bit smoky afterward and you need to wash up and wash your clothes. Being in the world leaves some of the world on us and it takes rest away from the world to erase that and clean us up again.

When we rest spiritually we come together as the body of Christ. We pray together, encourage one another, worship God together, and relax together. It is this fellowship time where you draw one another closer. It is different than working together with a brother or sister in the Lord. Then your focus is on the task and achieving it together. When you are resting in the Lord, you are content with where you are, and your focus is on spiritual health in Christ and worshiping God more than anything else.

To be spiritually fit means that we are spiritually healthy. We are spending time reading and studying the Bible regularly. We pray often, sometimes as if Jesus is walking right beside us and having a conversation with us. When we are spiritually fit we find it easy to reach out to others and give a helping hand or encouraging word, and we find rest and rejuvenation in time with the Lord.

