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christian
woman

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Your Body Matters

Encouragement for
reaching your spiritual
and fitness goals



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Introduction

Too Fat? Too Thin? Just Right?

Discerning a healthy approach to body issues

By Kelli B. Trujillo



From the perfectly-sculpted and scantily-clad women smiling at us from the glossy covers of magazines to the consistent drone of news stories about America's obesity epidemic, we live in a swirl of confusion about our bodies. Should we aim to be sexy, thin, and "perfect"? Or is trying to get fit a "worldly" goal, incompatible with the spiritual life of a God-focused Christian?

Does it even really matter in the eternal scheme of things if we're overweight or if our eating habits and lack of exercise



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are leading to health problems? Rather than feeling bad every time we look in the mirror, shouldn't we just quiet the body-image demons that whisper constant lies about us not being good enough? Shouldn't we just be content in God's love?

If you take a close look, you'll see God-honoring truth woven throughout the questions above—but you'll also find some very unbiblical ideas creeping in. Why? Because the way we think about our bodies (and diet, eating, and exercise), can get really complicated. This isn't just some purely philosophical or theological discussion after all. We each *have* bodies. (In fact, some theologians would remind us that in fact we *are* bodies.) We each have our own issues with body image, fitness habits (or lack thereof), and self-worth. And our past experiences with success, failure, guilt, insecurity, or hope are inevitably part of the way we each value and care for our own bodies.

So back to those cover-girls and obesity headlines. These polar opposite trends of body-obsession and body-neglect are really nothing more than an age-old pendulum swing in new, postmodern clothes. There's idolatry of the physical body on one side (hedonism) and neglect and undervaluing of our God-given physicality on the other (Gnosticism).

For some, the weight-loss goal, the ab-definition, the fastest marathon time, or body-fat percentage easily become an all-consuming obsession. Exercise becomes an addiction and trying to achieve the perfect (air-brushed and unreal) model-type body sneakily takes over as the center of their identity and value. For others, our culture's body-obsession leads them to spiral into lethargy and dejection; while idolizing the unreal perfect, they start to hate their own bodies. Feeling too fat, too flabby, too out-of-shape to be worth much, these women buy into our culture's



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fitness idolatry while feeling cut down at the knees after their first taste (nearly immediately) of failure.

Then there's the modern-day Gnosticism that can lurk hidden behind truisms like "God loves you no matter what" and "looks don't matter." Of course both of these ideas are fundamentally true! The danger comes when an elevation of the "spiritual" is inevitably tied to a disdain for the physical; when the importance of spiritual life leads to minimizing the importance of one's in-the-flesh life. When we lose sight of the value of what God made and called "very good" (**Genesis 1:26-31**), it's no problem at all to neglect our physical health. If bodies don't really matter (only souls do), then we can feel entirely justified in letting ourselves go.

Toss into this mire the difficulties we all face with self-worth and it's a dangerous mess! How can we overcome weight gain when we feel utterly discouraged from past failures? How can we set realistic, God-honoring goals for fitness while avoiding the pitfalls of body-idolatry?

This *Today's Christian Woman* resource will help you navigate questions like these as you find personal inspiration, theological encouragement, and practical tips for your journey toward a more fit you. Wherever you are in this journey—whether you're discouraged about your weight struggles and feel timid about starting a fitness plan yet again, or if you're recovering from fitness addiction and trying to get your priorities straight—this resource will provide you with insights to honor your God-given body as you deepen your relationship with God.

There *is* a healthy middle between the extremes of body-idolatry and body-neglect and, fundamentally, it's worth pursuing. My hope is that you find encouragement from



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these authors and from God's Word, and in the power of God's Spirit take the next step toward physical and spiritual health in your life.

Grace,

Kelli B. Trujillo

Managing Editor, TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN downloads

Leader's Guide

How to use “Your Body Matters” for a group study



“Your Body Matters” can be used for individual or group study. If you intend to lead a group study, some simple suggestions follow.

1. Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have their own guide.
2. Consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.
3. Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.
4. Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.
5. When working through the Reflect questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.
6. End the session in prayer.

Faith in Action

Pursuing God, pursuing fitness

By Trillia Newbell



Five o'clock in the morning comes early for anyone. For Sally, a mother of three, it sometimes feels like a two-by-four has been placed on her forehead, pushing her back down into her soft down pillow. But when the alarm rings, resisting the urge to stay in bed, she slowly rolls over, placing one foot on the floor and then another, struggling to find her workout clothes in the dark. She knows that if she doesn't do it *now* it will never get done. So Sally heads to the living room, eyes half-shut, and begins her routine: read the Word, pray, do a 30-minute workout.

Sally has set a new goal for herself: to work out every day. Week one went by, and was smooth sailing. Week two came and went, and she finally began to feel like she had a



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solid routine. But by week three, the scale got the best of her. Sally had bought into the world's promise for quick fixes and ideal beauty. She started to feel discouraged because though her energy and stamina were increasing, her weight had only *slightly* changed. After all that work! Frustrated and discouraged, Sally began to think of alternatives.

She thought about a popular new diet she heard about from a friend that guaranteed a loss of 10 pounds in one week! She tried it and lost some weight (but not quite the promised 10 pounds). Eventually, though, her enthusiasm for the diet's restrictions waned. Once off the diet, Sally quickly gained all the weight back.

Frustrated once again, Sally decided to take a different approach. She went to a trusted friend for help.

"Are you doing this to be healthy or because you want to be skinny?" her friend asked.

Sally knew that she had to answer honestly.

"I want to be skinny," Sally replied.

Her friend gently said, "Perhaps that's the problem. If you go about this with a desire to be healthy and glorify the Lord with your body, you will be satisfied. Not necessarily satisfied in yourself or how you look, but satisfied in God."

Find Your Purpose

Many of us can relate to Sally's story. Magazine covers give us a picture of the ideal woman that can only truly be achieved through Photoshop. And then there's all of the quick fix "solutions" that are found in bookstores and on the web. Television and movies proclaim that beauty is defined by our outward appearance. So where do we start?

If we know it's not all about pursuing a cultural "ideal" that



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God didn't create us for, we need to find a deeper motivation for pursuing exercise. So what *did* God create us for? God created us for worship—for himself. We see just a glimpse of this in Psalm 100:3: "Acknowledge that the LORD is God! He made us, and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture." We are his! We are God's creation (**Ephesians 2:10**)! Each intricately designed cell, every single strand of hair, everything—designed by God (**Matthew 10:30**). And we are made for God's glory (**Isaiah 43:7**).

Understanding why we were made helps us fight the temptation to compare ourselves with the brand of beauty sold to us in the world. It also helps us fight the temptation to idolize exercise and beauty. We know from experience that beauty is fleeting. We're reminded daily that we're growing old. Scripture provides us wisdom for this heart-fight: "Charm is deceptive, and beauty does not last; but a woman who fears the LORD will be greatly praised" (Proverbs 31:30).

Proverbs 31:30 makes it clear that exercise does not compare to the inward beauty of godliness, specifically the fear of the Lord. I believe it's with this fear of the Lord that we ought to begin an exercise plan. We enter in knowing that our beauty is fading and that our pursuit is ultimately about *God's* glory, not our own. We pursue exercise not for selfish gain, but as a means of serving others and serving the Lord. With increased energy and strength, we can have increased productivity for the Lord. If we pursue exercise with a mindset of honoring God and fearing him, we will be satisfied not in our looks or how we feel, but in better understanding that our bodies are a means of giving worship and glory to God.

But how can we pursue fitness goals in a God-honoring way? I can relate to Sally's struggle to find time for exercise. After eight years in the fitness industry, I've finally called it



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quits on my part-time job as a fitness instructor. I won't be stopping for good—no way! I do hope to lead group fitness classes again, but right now I'm on a professional hiatus as I concentrate on writing. Because working out was part of my old job, it's been a very long time since I've had to think about when and how I might squeeze in exercise or how to balance working out with parenting responsibilities. But here I am, in uncharted territory, praying I will one day feel the happy endorphins from a good sweat again.

Because I've spent years coaching other women on their personal exercise routines, I know the principles—I just need to implement what I know. I also must be on guard against another temptation: either wanting to exercise too much or wanting the *results* of exercise too much. Idolizing either can be lethal to our faith. Rather than buying into the wrong motivations, we need to understand the real value of exercise and then go after our exercise goals with a proper perspective.

Reap the Benefits

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests that adults get 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week as well as muscle-strengthening activities two times per week. The CDC also suggests an alternate set of guidelines: 1 hour and 15 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity (like running) each week along with muscle-strengthening exercises at least two days per week. So when we think about the amount of hours within a week (168 to be exact), the recommended amount of exercise from the CDC really isn't that much time. A little really does go a long way!

Paul's words to Timothy remind us that "Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising



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benefits in this life and in the life to come" (1 Timothy 4:8). There *is* a benefit or value to exercise. And though godliness or training in righteousness is of much greater value, the inherent benefits of exercise aren't diminished. So that little bit of exercise per week you try to eek out? It matters.

When we're centered in honoring God, we can pursue fitness with a clear conscience and reap the benefits of it. So what are these benefits? At the risk of sounding cliché, the benefits of exercise are almost too many to name. Some basic benefits are: greater strength, endurance, and stamina; increased flexibility; better sleep; increased bone density; and for many, healthy weight maintenance. As a mother of two young children, I have personally experienced the benefits of exercise primarily in the energy and stamina it gives me for the various daily tasks God has assigned me.

Get Practical

Most of us know exercise is beneficial. In fact, for many of us busy moms or full-time employees, the problem isn't a *desire* for exercise—it's finding the time and staying motivated to exercise. Here are some tips I've shared with others and ones I plan to follow too:

I. Schedule: Exercise, like everything else, must be a part of your routine. Be careful not to schedule exercise in lieu of time with God; instead, find a time of day that works well but won't squeeze out other important activities. This may mean squeezing in a brisk walk in during the morning, popping in an exercise DVD, or taking a family walk around a park after dinner. If it's in your budget, you could hire a personal trainer and schedule time with her or you could purchase a



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gym membership and carve out regular times to go. *The key is finding a consistent and convenient time to do your workout every day.*

2. Do: Exercise is only of some value; it is not infinitely valuable. But if you desire to be healthy you must do what's in your schedule. Don't schedule it and then consistently miss it or skip. *Do it.* A great way to stick with it is to recruit a workout buddy. Find a friend who will keep you accountable to do your scheduled workout, schedule workouts you'll do together with a friend, or invite your spouse to encourage you. *Whatever the method, the only way for exercise to be effective is if you do it.*

3. Be Realistic: If you've never walked briskly around a track, now may not be the time to schedule two marathons! Though big goals are exciting, failure to reach them *isn't*. So think about your goals incrementally and realistically. One of the most frustrating obstacles for beginners is the patience to persevere while waiting to feel and see the results. Head off this kind of discouragement by easing into your routine. Workout plans like the **Couch to 5K running plan** are wonderful starting places because they give you realistic and flexible goals to reach each week. *Don't despise the days of small beginnings.*

Pursue Fitness Loosely

We can set goals and go after them with determination and passion. But as we pursue fitness as a lifestyle, we must always be cautious to not grasp that goal *too* tightly. Instead, we pursue it loosely. The culture's messages about fitness are a lie. A "perfect



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body" is *not* our goal. Instead we choose to remember: The only thing that will ever truly satisfy isn't a "thing" at all, it's a person—Jesus.

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Reflect

- *Setting and keeping exercise goals can be really tough. What have been your main struggles with fitness? What other common struggles do you think prevent women from maintaining a healthy fitness routine?*
- *Fitness and the "perfect body" can become idols, both for people who don't exercise and for those who exercise a lot. So is it okay (or even good) to want or strive for a fit body? When can that desire become a problem? What are the dangers of buying into this common idolatry in our culture? Explain.*
- *Trillia encourages Christians to discern wisely between false or dangerous goals (such as wanting to be instantly skinny) and desiring to honor God with their body. Revisit the passages Trillia discusses in her article: **Psalm 100:3; Proverbs 31:30; Isaiah 43:7; Matthew 10:30; Ephesians 2:10; and 1 Timothy 4:8**. Based on these passages, how would you sum up your "fitness purpose" in your own words?*

With All My Body

Conserving resources applies to the most basic thing we possess.

By JoHannah Reardon



When I started walking with Christ in my early twenties, I listened to an elderly man explain why he was going on a dangerous missions trip. "I'd rather wear out than rust out," he said.

I loved that! And I still do. However, what that translated to in my funny little brain was that I had to expend myself beyond my endurance. (*How else was I going to wear out?*). One of the Bible verses I quoted most often to keep myself going at a furious pace was **Philippians 2:17 (NIV)**,



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where Paul talks about being poured out as a drink offering for others.

Perhaps my biggest fear has been that when I get to heaven instead of saying, "Well done, my good and faithful servant" (**Matthew 25:23**), God will say, "What were you doing down there?" I want to know that my life counts for something here on earth. So doesn't it make sense to give, and give, and give until my last ounce of strength is gone? Isn't that being a good steward of what God gave me? After all, that's how I'd approach being a good steward of my finances, the created world, or my workplace, so why not use the same approach when I think about my body?

But *is* that really the approach I'd take for finances, Creation, or workplace? *No!* I'd consider it irresponsible to use every dime rather than saving some for a rainy day or retirement. I'd never think that using up God's created world was okay. I want to conserve it to the best of my ability. And if my workplace demanded every ounce of my strength at the expense of my family and ministry, I'd have a long talk with my boss.

Not My Job

Many years and much maturing later, I have some perspective on Philippians 2:7. I realize that Paul was saying that if *God* poured him out as a drink offering, he'd count it joy. He didn't pour *himself* out as a drink offering. That's just crazy, unnecessary, and even disobedient.

And about the "Well done" part? Who wants a servant who does other than what you tell him? What if you hired a maid to clean your house, and instead she washed all your neighbors' cars? She may even brag that she got five more washed this week than last. So what! You hired her to clean your house. A good servant does what she's asked to do, not whatever she can find



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to do. I'm sure the amount of dirty cars in any neighborhood is endless, but that's not her job.

A Physical Honoring

So what does it mean to be good stewards of our bodies? It means we value and conserve them by using them for the tasks God uniquely calls us to. How can we do that?

- **Watch what you eat.** The busier we get, the less we pay attention to what we munch. During an especially busy time in my life, I was popping carbs like pain pills to keep up my energy. Yet I felt more tired with each bite. A blood test showed I was borderline diabetic. So now I closely monitor what I eat.
- **Exercise.** The only exercise I truly enjoy is walking and riding my bike. And I only enjoy those when the weather is perfect. Since I live in Illinois, that's about two weeks of the year! I have a sedentary job, so I have to find ways to exercise, or I feel lousy and don't sleep at night.
- **Sleep.** The easiest thing to skimp on when you're overly busy is sleep. In my attempt to get exercise, I was getting up in the wee hours of the morning. And to get all my work done, I was staying up late at night. That meant that I was more and more sleep deprived. Something had to go.
- **Just say no.** I found that the first three depended on this one. The busier I got, the more the first three went down the tubes. In fact, my doctor actually prescribed rest. He told me I had to say no to activities every other weekend so that I could rest.



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(*I'm trying—I really am!*). And because I play mind games to keep pushing myself, he wants me to learn to listen to my body. When I'm tired, I'm to rest, not keep pushing. This sounds so reasonable, but I found it almost impossible until recently.

To say no, we have to know what to say no to. I had to take time to listen to God and to examine myself to understand what it means for me to be his servant. Now I wholeheartedly throw myself into that, and say no to everything else.

I still love the idea of wearing out instead of rusting out. I'm using the talents God has blessed me with instead of trying to do everything that comes my way. That way I'll be rested and refreshed to be the best possible tool in God's hands, and will look forward to hearing God say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Let's celebrate together!"

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With All My Body

Reflect

- Read **Matthew 25:14–30** and reflect on this parable's challenges regarding stewardship. What are the wise principles of good stewardship? (Consider for example: What does good stewardship of money look like? Of talents and spiritual gifts? Of the created world?)
- Do you find it easy or difficult, natural or strange, to think of your physical body as something God's called you to be a good steward of? Why?
- What factors (church background, family of origin, cultural messages, friends' lifestyles, and so on) shape the way you generally tend to think of stewardship of the body?
- Review JoHannah's points in the last section of her article. Rather than only prioritizing exercise and eating habits, JoHannah suggests a more balanced, big-picture view of physical health and God-honoring stewardship. Which of the areas she suggests do you most desire to grow in? Why?

Resolving to Lose More than Pounds



What theology might have to do with your fitness resolutions.

Interview of Gary Thomas by Matthew Lee Anderson

*"Losing weight" or "getting fit" will often top our lists of New Year's resolutions and personal goals. Balanced eating and enough exercise is an outcome of obedience and discipleship, Gary Thomas argues in **Every Body Matters**. Matthew Lee Anderson, author of **Earthen Vessels: Why Our Bodies Matter to Our Faith**, spoke with Thomas about the connection between body and soul.*



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What prompted you to look at food and fitness?

I've been steeped in the Christian classics, and they have a consistent message challenging gluttony and sloth that I hadn't heard addressed much in modern times. Also, gluttony wasn't an important issue in my life for a while, because when you're younger it's easier to look like you're okay. But when I turned 40, I gained three or four pounds a year. That was fine for a while, but then I started notice both the personal effects and the spiritual consequences as well.

Focusing on gluttony and sloth as we age is almost a natural evolution in life. If you look at Augustine, he talks about how lust was a struggle early in his life. But when he became a monk and put himself in a situation where lust wasn't an issue, gluttony became a far more intense temptation. If you can create a sexless life, you can deal with lust, in one sense. But we can't create a foodless life; we are always on the precipice of having to manage this temptation rather than just kill it.

What do you mean when you suggest that our efforts should not be for fitness per se, but building a "silver soul"?

The goal is not an athletic-looking body or a magazine-worthy body, but understanding better how these struggles affect our soul. We keep up our bodies because our bodies carry our souls. They are what we minister out of, what we speak out of, what we travel out of, and ultimately what we pray and worship and serve out of. But Scripture keeps the focus on how this relates to our spiritual journey.

Some people have used spirituality to try to help the weight loss issue. I think that's backwards. I'm trying to say, "How can being a better steward of my body prepare me more spiritually, help me grow more spiritually, help me experience God more



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deeply, give me greater victory over sin, give me greater energy for service to God and ministry on God's behalf?"

How should Christians who want to avoid replicating cultural errors about the body speak about health and fitness?

The cheap line is that we should look at our bodies as instruments, not ornaments. The idea comes from **2 Timothy 2:20–21**, which is a picture of our progressive sanctification. The question should be, *How we are making ourselves available to God?* If I live to 70 or 80, am I keeping up a body that will have the energy and ability to still minister in those years?

My longevity is set by God (**Psalm 139:16**), but I can affect both my frailty and my availability. I could eat myself into a place or neglect myself into a place where I've become so absorbed by doctor visits and a lack of vitality that I'm not as effective as God would call me to be.

That's not to say there aren't immediate benefits right now. I notice an *enormous* difference if my body is in shape in terms of my availability to people than if I'm carrying a few extra pounds and haven't been working out.

Are there lessons Christians can learn from the muscular Christianity movement (which spawned the YMCA)?

One of the lessons is about whether we have a compelling message and presentation. They found that the messengers of Christianity at that time—and there were some theological reasons for this—were undercutting the message. They felt like people who were out of shape and "effeminate men" (which is where it gets a little more perilous) had little interest for those with a more adventurous view of life. They wanted to open up the door that Christianity is a struggle, a battle, a challenge. In making Christianity easier to



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draw more people, we've made it so easy that it shuts out others who want to live the challenge.

Your book leans heavily on the Old Testament and the Apostle Paul, but is surprisingly quiet about the Gospels and the life of Jesus directly. Why is that?

Part of my argument about why the Bible might not be more direct against gluttony—and this is speculative—is that Jesus didn't talk to a lot of obese people. They had to walk for miles to get to him. They didn't have the abundance of food that many of us have now.

Can you talk about why you seem ambivalent about fasting for long periods?

In my own experience, too earnestly pursuing heroic spiritual measures tends to backfire. I either crash and burn, or I become very arrogant. It's easy for people to tend to burn themselves out and practice such disciplines for the wrong reasons, and if they do them for the wrong reasons, it's almost more hurtful.

You write, "Obesity is socially contagious." What social practices would you recommend that Christians implement in order to avoid it?

If a church publicly proclaims physical fitness as a biblical value that stems from the stewardship of our bodies, if we accept the passage that "our bodies are not our own, but we're bought with a price" (**I Corinthians 6:19–20**), we'll start to get in shape within the church out of love for God. And that becomes contagious. The trick is how we proclaim that message in a way that's based in grace, that encourages, and that doesn't create pride, which is more deadly than indulgence.



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A number of arguments have been put forward recently that evangelical worship is disembodied and too intellectually centered. What relationship, if any, do our worship practices have with our physical fitness practices the rest of the week?

I'd look at it from a different perspective. Some of my best times worshipping are when I'm out on a run. And that feeds my Sunday morning worship. Interacting with God throughout the week sets my soul up to be more open to God on Sunday. For me, there's something about getting outside and running that is almost like a meditative state. If you do that several times throughout the week, the pump is primed to connect with God because you haven't been living in forgetfulness the whole week.

How can Christians promote fitness as a spiritual good without marginalizing people with disabilities?

I have a friend who had a stroke and is not able to do a lot of the exercise that other people can do. We were at Starbucks recently and he said he couldn't have the calories anymore because he can't work them off. He's an example of someone who is being faithful and saying because he can't work off the calories, he can't take the calories in.

It's fundamentally about the spiritual issues, the soul-based issues of self-control—not about how your body looks. This world celebrates the young and the beautiful and the strong and the unwrinkled, but the Bible clearly exalts wisdom and character and experience. We must lead the Church in that direction in order to counteract a culture that is foolish.

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Reflect

- *What's your reaction to Gary Thomas's suggestion that we look at our bodies as instruments rather than ornaments? Share some examples of what these two mindsets look like. How does this challenge speak to you personally?*
- *Read **1 Corinthians 6:19–20** and **2 Timothy 2:20–21**. How do these passages provide a proper sense of perspective on the importance of one's body and one's health? On the other hand, what are some wrong or imbalanced ways people may misuse passages like these?*
- *Gary concludes by saying one's focus regarding fitness should be on "soul-based issues" rather than on "how your body looks." Read **Galatians 5:22–23**. How can these traits of the Spirit-led life infuse your habits as you care for your physical body? Select several traits listed here and explore how you could more directly apply them to your fitness routine.*

Eat, Pray, Grow

God used something unusual to get my attention about my soul: food.

By Sandra Byrd

My doctor and I were shocked. I, a seemingly healthy 40-year-old woman, had a blocked artery. Then there were my blood profiles: both cholesterol and blood sugar, too high. I became determined to set things right, chopping veggies and putting them into baggies, adding salads to each night's downsized dinner. As the knife struck the cutting board, I heard the Holy Spirit murmur, *It takes time and commitment to be healthy, doesn't it?* I knew he wasn't just talking about my body. He was talking about my soul.

Because it's easier to ignore spiritual issues, God often





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uses physical symptoms to help me take a closer look at what's happening inside. Insomnia forces me to examine what I'm not handing over to God. Tension headaches ask me to slow down and loosen my grip. My physical illness got my attention, so I decided I'd work on what lay beneath.

I'd developed a pattern of taking on too much. In order to (falsely) comfort my overly busy self, I ate the wrong things in the wrong quantities. I finally understood that my overfed but malnourished body was an outward reflection of an overfed but malnourished soul. While I had many activities that looked good on the outside and garnered praise, they ate up time I might have spent deepening my relationship with God.

I'd relegated my prayer life to rushed pleading in the midst of trouble; my relationship with God felt empty and silent, stagnant and struggling. My body displayed on the outside what was happening on the inside. In the process of healing one, could I heal both? It was time for me to take a serious assessment.

Changing Habits

First, I looked at *how* I ate. I'd run to a warehouse store and stock up on high-quality processed foods that were easy to slap together—maximum bang for my time and buck. Lots of prepackaged items, lots of convenience, lots of microwave ding. Though my family dined together many nights a week, when we timed ourselves, we were astonished to be finished and rushing to the next activity in fewer than 15 minutes.

Sadly, that's what my spiritual diet looked like too.

Instead of savoring and pacing my lessons, I'd wait until nightfall to scan the Bible and fill in the blanks for my weekly Bible study. I was more concerned about showing up with filled blanks than in deeply understanding what the teacher, and the Word, might have in store if I'd spend the time to digest slowly



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and meditate. What was the "real" meal I needed to savor? In Matthew 4:4 Jesus reminds us, "People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

That wasn't how I wanted to handle physical or spiritual eating, so I had to make some changes. Considering my blood sugar profile and that I'd had gestational diabetes, I knew I had to minimize my refined carbs intake. I'd heard if you cut back on bread, after awhile you lose your taste for it. With a twinge of sorrow, I realized that abstaining from daily Bible reading had caused me to lose my taste for it. I'd put off spending time with Jesus and reading the Bible until the end of the day—after I'd gotten everything else done. Unfortunately, by then, I was either too tired to learn, or I simply told the Lord that I needed time for "me," certain he'd understand.

Metabolize!

3 Tips to Boost Your Healthy Lifestyle

1. A Dramatic Walking Partner. I never liked listening to audio Bibles—they seemed cheesy or boring. My mind wandered and I could never remember what I'd just heard. Then I discovered the amazing *Inspired by the Bible Experience*. The cast of 80 actors brings Scripture to life in a remarkable way. You can hear Joseph's smarmy teenage voice gloating to his brothers about his dreams, Judas Iscariot sounds like a hustler right out of *Ocean's Eleven*, and Jesus' teaching shakes my soul. Old and New Testament add up to 100+ hours of walking and listening. The time flies by.

2. Hot Lunch. In their best-selling book, *You: On a Diet*, Doctors Roisen and Oz state, "Sex and hunger are regulated through the brain chemical NPY. Some have observed that having healthy sex could help you control your food intake; by satisfying one appetite center, you seem to satisfy the other." If you're married, consider inviting your husband to meet you at home for "lunch" one day a week while your kids are in school. You'll draw closer to your spouse and never miss the food.

3. Spread Sheets. I learned that the "spread" in my tummy indicated a laxness in other areas of my life. As I learned to stick faithfully within a food budget, I experienced better ability to stick within my financial and time budgets too. Disciplining one area reinforced growth in the others. Examine your "spending" in those three budgets—food, money, and time—to see if they may correlate.



Like a husband who's been ignored, God became distant. The apostle James urges, "Come close to God, and God will come close to you" (4:8). I can testify that the opposite is also true. Lonely and longing for our former intimacy, I realized that just as I needed to decrease the amount of refined carbs I put in my body, I needed to increase my time with Christ, the Bread of Life for my soul.

I spent 10 to 20 times the number of hours reading books or talking with friends as I did reading the Bible or talking with God. Most of the Bible studies I attended were based on supplemental books—valuable, but not direct, exegetical study. What I got tasted good and, to some level, nourished my soul. But it was predigested—it didn't require my body, or my soul, to do the hard work. God designed our bodies to extract nutrition, phytochemicals, minerals, and other good things from raw food. Supplements are only supposed to *supplement!* Might our souls work that way too?

Becoming Nourished

Next, I looked at *what* I ate. When I made a commitment to eat only healthy, natural foods, I weeded out much of the refined sugar in our diet. My 13-year-old daughter came to me one day, asking, "Where did you buy this orange?"

"Safeway," I answered. "Why?"

"It's so sweet," she said.

The oranges weren't really sweeter. They tasted that way because we'd removed everything from our diets that would give us a quick high—refined sugar and its diet dupes.

When my body and spirit are tuned only to recognize "sugar high" experiences, the natural sweetness and goodness of a quiet relationship between God and me goes unnoticed. Instead of demanding immediate (and positive) answers to prayer, great insights, or tangible blessings, I'm developing a taste for simple



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conversations, Bible reading that reaffirms what I've learned but doesn't necessarily lead to great insight, and long-haul trust without instant answers.

A friend and I recently reminisced how when we were kids, dessert was atypical—a looked-forward-to experience. I realized I needed to stop expecting dessert every day. Once in a while, God gives me a spiritual brownie—an immediate answer to prayer, a financial windfall, or a situation immediately resolved. When he does, I relish the sweetness for its rarity.

Just as we use the healthy food pyramid to know the types of food to eat, we can use Scripture to guide what we ingest spiritually. The apostle Paul tells us, "Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father" (Colossians 3:16–17). This means that I spend regular time ingesting the message about Christ and let it fill my life. Sometimes I listen to the Bible or hymns or praise music on my iPod; sometimes I spend a few minutes reading in the morning or online over my lunch break, or I sing along to worshipful music.

As I continued these habits—hard to build, at first—I realized how much I missed them when I skipped a day. I'd reacquired my taste for God.

Getting Active

Finally, I realized it's not just about eating; it's about *getting active*. An article in the *New York Times* noted, "Fitness isn't about working out at the gym or running a marathon Fitness is important for coping with life's emergencies, big and small, whether it's running to make an airport connection



or fleeing a burning building." Our motive shouldn't be to look good, although that might be a pleasant side effect. We need to exercise for overall health and to prepare for unexpected but unavoidable calls upon our reserves.

Similarly, the spiritual muscles I'm building aren't for flexing at Bible study, hammering my family, or pontificating with others. In addition to helping me live more healthfully day-to-day, they allow me to flee when tempted, endure when tested, and stand firm during suffering. Our family recently took an unexpected and harsh financial blow. A restored relationship with God allowed me to weather the storm with tears and faith—not a bag of Doritos. Taking care of my body and my spirit isn't for vanity—it's for health.

I'm allowing myself the kindness of a slow but steady increase in health and spiritual growth. I used to be in the "Three pounds a week or I'm switching" diet plan and the "Read the Bible in 60 days" camp. I now understand that my body will release weight gradually, and my spirit will mature slowly. That's okay. I'm willing to take a "long obedience in the same direction," as Eugene Peterson put it. "He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less" (John 3:30).

As this transformation takes place, both physical and spiritual health fall into alignment. I don't give myself quotas—with Bible study, with counting calories, or any other measurable results. I rely on progress in my health and the quality of my relationship with God. In her Bible study, **Thin Within**, Judy Halliday writes, "When we stumble and fall, we rely upon God's amazing grace and the power of the Holy Spirit. He gently leads us back onto the path of his provision."

My heart health extends more deeply than a clogged artery. God graciously allowed the physical pain to draw



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attention to my spiritual need, the heart that in the end, matters most.

Sandra Byrd is the author of numerous novels for women and teens. This article was first published on **TodaysChristianWoman.com** in September 2009.
www.sandabyrd.com

Reflect

- How do you relate to Sandra's story? Like Sandra, have you noticed a connection between your spiritual life and your physical health? How has your own experience been different?
- Have you ever felt like your time for spiritual growth and your time for exercise were in competition with each other? What strategies could help you overcome this apparent conflict?
- As you pursue your fitness goals, how will you be intentional about fostering your spiritual health and keeping God first?

When the Going Gets Tough

It's important to push through when all you want to do is quit.

By Marian V. Liautaud

I've been training all summer for my third Chicago marathon. For the most part, my runs have gone well. Until recently when I hit a wall—**the one runners always talk about**.

I was attempting to do a 23-mile run. I was about 16 miles into it when I snapped. Something inside me begged like a baby to be done—not just with this one run, but with the whole business of marathoning.

You don't even like to run, my brain whined. Stop now, and make up the miles tomorrow or next weekend.

I tried to rationalize quitting: *I don't really have to run*





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all 23 miles. Besides, adrenaline will carry me the last few miles of the marathon, so even if I don't get all my training runs done, I'll still be able to finish the race.

Last year, I made the mistake of going to my high school reunion the night before a race, which meant I stayed out too late and never ate a proper dinner. Between my extreme fatigue and lack of fuel the next day, my brain got caught in a loop of negativity, further fueled by my overheating body and aching hips and feet. I was delirious with discouragement. I pulled over to stretch—then I broke down.

"I'm not sure how I'm going to do 10 more miles," I told Anne, my running partner. I desperately wanted her to leave me and run ahead. I thought I could walk the rest of the miles and cross the finish line at my leisure.

Anne said, "I'm not leaving you. We're going to finish this race, and we're doing it together."

I hated Anne in that moment. But because of her, I got up, put one foot in front of the other, and together we made it the last 10 miles. It took every act of my will and a ridiculous amount of prayer to get to the finish line. But we did it.

We was the key. Anne was willing to stay with me to make sure I got over the mental hump that was making me want to quit. Yes, I was facing a wall that ultimately only I could choose to break through. But Anne's commitment to *help* me break through made all the difference.

The other key was *methodically* breaking through the wall. When I was doing my training run, I got out of my funk by breaking down the remaining miles into bite-size pieces. Instead of thinking I still had seven more miles to do, I focused on getting the next three minutes under my belt. Then I thought about doing one mile seven times, as opposed to seven whole miles. Reducing a long-term goal into fractions of the whole



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sometimes helps us make steady progress overall. Debt reduction counselors preach the same concept: Pay down the smaller bills first so you have a sense of accomplishing your overall goal. By breaking a mega-deficit into manageable, attainable goals, before you know it, you're on your way to being debt-free.

On a larger scale, the biggest aid for pushing through a wall is maintaining a vision for why you're doing what you're doing in the first place. I never liked to run—I couldn't even run one mile when I signed up for my first marathon three years ago. The reason I run is to **raise money for clean water projects in Kenya** through World Vision. When I learned that women and children were spending hours each day hauling jugs in search of water, only to retrieve bacteria-infested water from mostly dried-up riverbeds and creeks, I couldn't shake the horror of it.

When I ran my first marathon, it was the vision of these women with jugs on their backs that pushed me across the finish line. When I hit my wall during my training run recently, I wondered whether these women hit a wall going so many miles each day in search of water. How do they push through? Quitting the quest for water would mean death to their families. For me, quitting the marathon will mean death to families too. By keeping this vision front and center, the wall pushes further and further back for me, and I have a greater reason than myself to break through it.

Walls pop up when we hit our limits, and the lies I tell myself on the marathon course sound suspiciously similar to the lies I tell myself in life. Like when I hit a wall at work and immediately attempt to justify my procrastination with personal affirmations: *I deserve a break. I've been working hard . . .*

And in my marriage, I opt to slack off, thinking I can make up for my relational laziness later: *I'm tired of working on our marriage. Dan won't notice if I spend more time on Facebook*



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instead of with him. I'll spend time with him tomorrow.

Whether it's during physical exercise or just tough life circumstances, it's important to push through when all you want to do is quit. No matter what wall you're facing, call on a friend to help push you through. Take small steps to keep moving toward your goal. And grab hold of a big vision that can compel you to keep going.

Marian V. Liautaud is a regular contributor for **Today's Christian Woman**. She also serves as editor of **church management resources** for Christianity Today. This article was published on the **Today's Christian Woman blog** in September 2012.

Reflect

- *What "walls" have you hit in your fitness and health goals? Be honest about times you've given up . . . and times you've pushed through.*
- *Marian's honest reflections on the desire to quit when the going gets tough expand to all of life—not just her marathon training. When have you felt like giving up in another area of life (relationships, work, parenting, and so on), but somehow made it through? What helped you stay the course?*
- *Reflect on Isaiah 40:28–31. What encouragement do you find for your own fitness journey in these spiritual principles?*
- *Drawing upon all you've read in this download and in Scripture, what specific step(s) will you take to develop greater perseverance in your health and fitness lifestyle?*

Additional Resources

Dive deeper into these topics with the articles, books, and Bible study guides listed below.



Articles

Appetite for Living—*I lost weight by taking better care of both my body and my marriage.*

By Tammy Bovee, from TodaysChristianWoman.com

The Culture We Embrace—*One morning I asked God for a year-long challenge. He told me to give up sweets. And I learned some important and eye-opening things!*

By Jennifer Petitt, from TodaysChristianWoman.com

Discovering a Healthier You—*Christian wellness professional Ruth McGinnis offers tips to help you feel better and more balanced physically and spiritually.*

By Amy M. Tatum, from TodaysChristianWoman.com



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Additional Resources

Flex Appeal—10 reasons to squeeze a little strength training into your life.

By Joanna Bloss, from [TodaysChristianWoman.com](#)

God Has a Wonderful Plan for Your Body—It includes sex, diet, and sports . . . but so much more.

By Matthew Lee Anderson, from [ChristianityToday.com](#)

I Couldn't Stop Dieting—*My fears of inadequacy were fueling an obsession with thinness—and destroying my marriage.*

By Lisa McCabe, from [TodaysChristianWoman.com](#)

I Was a Food Addict—*Could I find support someplace other than my kitchen?*

By Karen Rabbitt, from [TodaysChristianWoman.com](#)

It's Just a Number—*Would I ever make peace with my scale?*

By Audrey Barcus, from [TodaysChristianWoman.com](#)

The Thin Cage—*Constantly thinking about how much you weigh? A former chronic dieter takes on our obsession with being skinny.*

By Jane Johnson Struck, from [TodaysChristianWoman.com](#)

Why Willpower Fails—*Your willpower is limited, so use it wisely.*

By John Ortberg, from [Leadership Journal](#)

The Year I Became a Total Hottie—*What I saw looked great. Who I was needed work.*

By Nancy Kennedy, from [TodaysChristianWoman.com](#)



Books

Earthen Vessels: Why Our Bodies Matter to Our Faith by Matthew Lee Anderson (Bethany House, 2011). Does your body really matter? Revealing what's missing in a Gnostic "soul-only" faith, and seeing the physical self as a gift from God—for our good and his glory—Anderson examines what a biblical worldview has to say about embodiment as it relates to community, pleasure, technology, sexuality, tattoos, death, prayer, and the church.

Every Body Matters: Strengthening Your Body to Strengthen Your Soul by Gary Thomas (Zondervan, 2011). Drawing wisdom from the apostle Paul, Thomas explores real-life examples of this correlation—from a 300-pound pastor who discovered his obesity was eroding his ministry, to a woman who strengthened herself to endure a divorce by training for a marathon.

Made to Crave: Satisfy Your Deepest Desire with God, Not Food by Lysa TerKeurst (Zondervan, 2010). Has food become your source of comfort? After a hard day at work, or a long day with the kids, don't you deserve that big piece of chocolate cake? Lysa TerKeurst used to think so, but that was before God showed her that what she really needed was more of himself. In *Made to Crave*, Lysa explores why we make unhealthy food choices. She'll help you discover what it is you're really seeking, and how that need can only be met in our faithful heavenly Father. And when your cravings are satisfied with his love, a healthy body will follow.



Your Body Matters

Additional Resources

Thin Within by Judy and Arthur Halliday (Thomas Nelson, 2005). Judy and Dr. Arthur Halliday's extensive experience and study prove that you can reach and maintain your ideal weight by simply listening to your body. If you have suffered being overweight or have struggled with an eating disorder, this book is the truth you have been searching for and it will set you free.

Bible Studies and Online Resources

Feeding On Lies—A single-session Bible study exploring how we relate to food and to God, from ChristianBibleStudies.com

The Getting In Shape Guide—A "next step" downloadable resource providing fitness tips and insights, from TodaysChristianWoman.com

Health Matters—A "next step" downloadable resource exploring critical women's health issues, from TodaysChristianWoman.com

Loving the Skin You're In—A "next step" downloadable resource exploring body image, from TodaysChristianWoman.com

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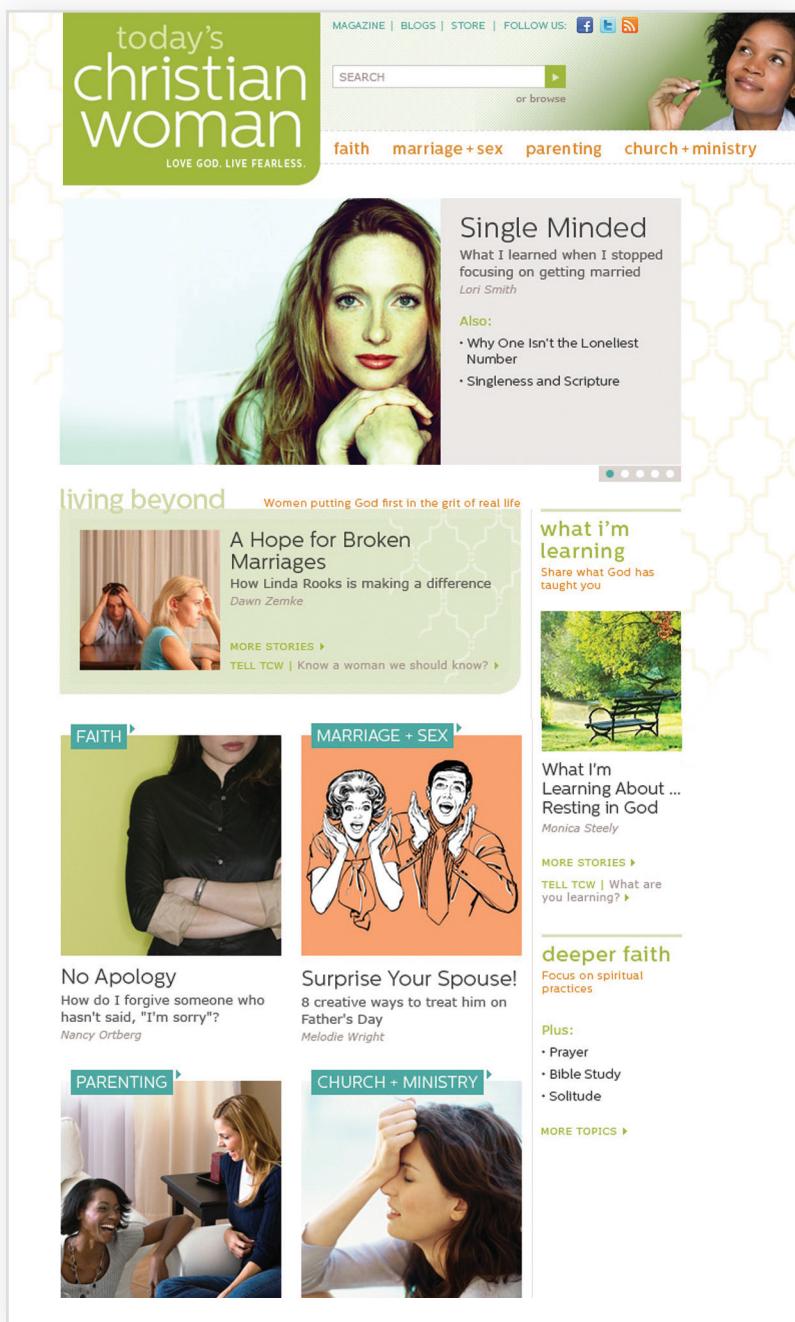
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The screenshot shows the homepage of Today'sChristianWoman.com. The header features the magazine logo with the tagline "LOVE GOD. LIVE FEARLESS." Below the header is a search bar and navigation links for "MAGAZINE | BLOGS | STORE | FOLLOW US: [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [RSS](#)". The main navigation menu includes "SEARCH", "or browse", and categories: "faith", "marriage + sex", "parenting", and "church + ministry". The main content area features a large image of a woman with her hand to her chin. A sidebar on the left is titled "living beyond" and includes a story about Linda Rooks. The main article is titled "Single Minded" by Lori Smith, discussing her experience with singleness. Other sections include "what i'm learning" (by Monica Steely), "No Apology" (by Nancy Ortberg), "Surprise Your Spouse!" (by Melodie Wright), "FAITH" (with an image of a woman in a black shirt), "MARRIAGE + SEX" (with an illustration of a couple), "PARENTING" (with an image of two women talking), and "CHURCH + MINISTRY" (with an image of a woman holding her head in distress). Each section has a "MORE STORIES" link and a "TELL TCW" button.

New Ways to Connect

■ Living Beyond:

Find encouragement and inspiration through stories of God using women who are living fearlessly for his kingdom.

■ What I'm Learning:

Share what God is teaching you in the good times and the hard times. Together we can guide one another through the seasons of life.

■ Deeper Faith:

Grow your most important relationship through spiritual practices.

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