

Introduction

In Biblical times, there were no health clubs, running groups or weight loss plans. Other than with the very rich, we don't read much about overeating. The Bible does speak of gluttony, (Proverbs 23:20-21) but the need for counting calories and exercising at least 30 minutes a day is not something Bible writers mention. The answer to why this is the case is really very simple, and there are two parts. First, food in biblical times was very simple, fresh and organic. It was mainly whole foods, and there were no boxed, processed choices. This means that people generally ate healthier than we do today. Second, the main mode of transportation was on foot. Sure, sometimes people travelled by chariot, camel, horse, ox, donkey or boat, but most travel in the Bible was done on foot. Depending on the condition of the road and the load of the traveler, people could walk up to twenty miles in a day (<http://bibleresources.americanbible.org>). So, exercise was a built in part of the lifestyle.

Looking at the life of Jesus, Dr. Don Colbert figured that Jesus walked at least 3,125 miles during his 3-year ministry. Another sources site that Jesus probably walked about 21,000 miles in his lifetime. This means his average was about 2.5 miles per day. In addition, Jesus was a carpenter, which is a physically demanding job. In fact, most jobs in Bible times had a significant physical element to them. The people of the Bible clearly lived in action and motion. They might not have called it exercise, but they were definitely active and not sedentary. They simply did manual labor pretty much every day and walked wherever they needed to go.

In this study, we are going to look at walking as a simple way to become healthier. Then, we will look at walking in the spiritual sense. Where applicable, we will bring the two realms – the physical and the spiritual – together.

The Perfect Exercise

Dr. Don Colbert in the [Seven Pillars of Health](#) tells of a patient who started walking briskly four times a week for thirty minutes, and after one year she had lost eighty pounds. He asked her about her diet, and she said she did not change her eating habits at all.

Dr. Colbert says that walking is almost the perfect exercise because it's virtually free and can give you three times the normal amount of oxygen you would normally get. Additional physical benefits of walking include:

1. Increased energy
2. Weight control
3. Lower blood pressure
4. Improved cholesterol levels
5. Decreased heart attack and stroke risk
6. Lower probability of adult-onset diabetes
7. Increased insurance against osteoporosis as it helps maintain bone density
8. Reduced risk of certain kinds of cancer, especially colon, breast and uterine cancer
9. Control of joint swelling and pain from arthritis

10. Reduced anxiety and depression
11. Better able to handle stress
12. Better sleep
13. Improved self esteem

1. What one or two benefits from the above list would you most like to experience?

Walking is considered the perfect exercise because there is very little equipment needed, and it can be done virtually anywhere. The following are aspects to be sure to consider as you begin walking for improved health and increased energy:

1. Buy a good pair of walking shoes, so you don't injure your feet.
2. Walk slowly enough so that you can talk, but walk fast enough so that you can't sing.
3. Keep a steady pace without stopping.
4. Put walking times on your calendar just like you would a doctor's appointment or lunch with a friend.
5. Build walking times into your day by taking the stairs instead of the elevator, parking in the furthest spot from the door, and walking the dog.

Walking for Mental Health

Walking not only benefits the body physically, but it also produces great benefit mentally as well. In a culture that has made progress and success almost as gods, walking has a way of slowing us down. As we slow down, we are able to take stock of our lives in a variety of ways, because walking has many mental benefits. Benefits of walking regularly include:

1. Experiencing time & geography differently – time seems to slow down, and we see things we don't normally see as we rush past them in our vehicles.
2. Seeing distance differently – distance is a partner in your quest for improved health & wellness.
3. Feeling like you are going on a mini retreat – leave your cell phone at home and enjoy the world around you.
4. Finding courage & conviction – when the physical self is being disciplined, the mental self and spiritual self are able to strengthen their muscles as well.
5. Relaxing – studies show that physical exercise does wonders for stress levels.
6. Time to practice spiritual disciplines – use the time to pray and to listen to God.
7. Engaging the whole body & mind at the same time – both sides of the mind are engaged and stimulated.
8. Being creatively engaged – creativity seems to increase with physical activity.
9. Becoming more aware of our senses – take time to notice what your 5 senses are showing you when you are out walking.
10. A time to reflect and remember – use it as a time of reflection and remembrance for the things God has done in your life.

In 1 Timothy 4:8, Paul wrote that *“bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for many things...”* Paul also wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 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 was obviously not saying that physical exercise had little value, but he was contrasting its short-term value to the longer-term spiritual benefits of living a godly life – of walking with God. So while we are to take good care of our physical bodies by exercising and eating right to allow us to be as healthy as possible for doing God’s work, more important is that we take care of our spiritual selves. Now that we have a better understanding of the benefits of walking, let’s look at some spiritual truths with regard to “walking.”

Obstacles in our Christian Walk

Just like with water (Lesson 2), walking is another spiritual truth that also has a physical component to help us grasp some pretty major spiritual principles. When Christians talk about their “spiritual walk,” they are making a figurative description of the Christian life. Other phrases used include “walking with Christ,” “walking with God,” wanting a “closer walk with God,” and “walking in the Spirit.” The Bible also refers to a spiritual walk that can be in darkness, which means the person is not “walking with Christ.” As with walking physically, a spiritual walk is a journey that can provide many benefits; unlike walking physically, walking spiritually impacts eternity while physical walking only has short-term benefits since all Christians will receive new bodies in heaven anyway. Although, walking physically can be a wonderful time of walking spiritually and a significant motivation for maintaining a walking routine.

The Christian walk involves a variety of terrains as well as obstacles. Some of those terrains and obstacles are tangible, while others are unseen foes with which we regularly struggle. No matter what the terrain or obstacle, there are specific ways the Bible tells us we can live lives that honor God regardless of what is happening around and in us.

2. Look up the following scripture and list the advice given for helping us in our Christian walk.

- John 8:12
- 1 John 1:6, 7
- Galatians 5:16, 25
- Ephesians 5:8
- Ephesians 5:15

In our Christian walks, we will encounter darkness. Satan is *“prowling about like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”* (1 Peter 5:8) He wants us to focus on the darkness around us and not on the sure path that God has placed before each one of us.

3. What reassurance does Revelation 5:5 gives us that Satan will not prevail?

While Satan is acting “like a roaring lion,” Revelation 5:5 tells us that Jesus Christ **IS** “the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah.” So while Satan is pretending to be a lion, Jesus **IS** a lion. Of course, this is a figurative analogy because Jesus isn’t a real lion like the ones we see in zoos or on television. However, the phrase being “large and in charge” comes to mind when watching lions, and that comparison certainly fits with

acknowledging who Jesus is and how he is the one true king. Furthermore, this verse (along with many other verses) tells us that Jesus has “overcome.” So while Satan may work to make our walks difficult, He can only do so in falsehood.

4. What instruction do the verses listed in question #2 give for avoiding and/or overcoming the obstacles in our Christian walk?

Following Jesus is the one sure way to avoid obstacles, and we do this by spending time with Him, gaining wisdom from His Word, and by being one in Him with other believers (unified). This certainly does not mean we won't have troubles simply because we are Christians, but it does mean that we will have victory because we have the light of Christ to illuminate our paths. Just like physically walking alone in a dark alley or park is not a very wise choice, neither is walking alone and in darkness in our spiritual lives. But fellowship (walking with others), wisdom (spending time in God's word), and staying on the lit path (knowing Jesus) allows us to walk in the victory promised through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:55).

Additionally, these scriptures show us that the desires of the flesh, another obstacle made up of a myriad of obstacles of varying degrees, that we encounter in our Christian walks can be overcome by walking in the Spirit.

Walking in the Spirit

Let's face it. One of the main obstacles to any exercise program is the desires of the flesh. Our flesh's desire is to avoid pain and experience pleasure, and the beginning of an exercise program usually does not have either of those elements. However, if you stick with it, exercise can and will provide a stronger body that can withstand more obstacles physically and mentally as well as provide a pleasure that cannot be found any other way. Resisting the desires of the flesh is not only a physical and mental challenge but a spiritual one as well. The problem is getting over allowing the desires of the flesh to make decisions – physical, mental or spiritual – for us, and the only way to avoid carrying out the desires of the flesh is by walking in and living by the Spirit. But what exactly does “walking in the Spirit” mean?

5. Read Romans 8:6-15. Focusing specifically on verses 6 and 12, what do we learn about walking in the flesh versus walking in the Spirit?

First, verse 6 of Romans 8 tells us that our focus – where we set our minds – determines where we will walk. Focus on things of the flesh, and that's the path we'll walk. Set your focus “according to the Spirit,” and you will walk in the peace of the Holy Spirit. In other words, our focus determines our reality.

Second, verse 12 tells us that we have no “obligation” to follow the flesh. This means we have a choice. At first, choosing to ignore the desires of the flesh is very difficult. But as paradigms are shifted and habits are transformed, the choice becomes much easier and eventually more natural. Keep in mind, though, that this battle of walking in the flesh versus walking in the Spirit will never be over until we go to be with our Lord in Heaven. However, we don't have to live lives defeated by the flesh. Our focus and

our choices can take us down a very different path, one that resists and overcomes the desires of the flesh.

- 6. Read Galatians 5:16-26 and highlight the fruits of the Spirit in verses 22 and 23. Take a few minutes to prayerfully consider the status of each of these fruits in your own life. Spend time listening for God to speak to you in these areas.**
- 7. Galatians 5:24-26 provide specific action steps the Christian can take to move toward a life of walking in the Spirit. Name these steps.**

These verses in Galatians first show us that walking in the Spirit requires that we crucify the passions and desires of the sinful nature. This means they become dead to us. This is not a one-time deal, but a regular house-cleaning process. This portion of scripture (you'll remember we studied part of this earlier as well) also indicates that we are to "walk by the Spirit," which means that we are to follow His leading in every part of life. The more time we spend in worship, prayer and God's Word, the easier it becomes to recognize the leading of the Spirit. Just like the more consistently we follow a walking regimen, the easier it becomes for us to keep that healthy habit in our lives. Finally, this scripture shows us the importance of unity. Verse 26 gives us a prescription for how to act – or rather, how not to act – toward one another. Avoiding boasting and envying, brings us back to the first step we just discussed of crucifying the passions and desires of the sinful nature, and doing so allows us to more fully walk in the Spirit. These verses provide us with an upward spiral of progressive sanctification that we obtain by the *small choices* we make every day.

Now we come to the dilemma that causes most to simply stop moving forward. Just like life can get in the way of a regular exercise routine, even if it's just walking 30 minutes 4 times a week, most Christians also eventually face the idea that they have no idea of how to live out how Galatians – or any other part of scripture – tells us to live. Life gets in the way, our flesh takes back control, and the progress we've made seems to have been erased almost instantly. We have this battle of the sinful nature versus being Holy Spirit led that we seem to constantly be fighting, and these opposing forces can cause feelings of frustration and impatience within us. As we've already said, our choices are never free from this conflict. Let's look to another portion of scripture that may help in solving this dilemma.

- 8. What word does 2 Peter 1:5 & 10 use to describe how we should approach the growing of our faith?**

We are to be diligent. Diligence means "constant and earnest effort to accomplish what is undertaken." (www.dictionary.com) So when we are diligent, we are consistent and we proceed with passion. This should be true of anything we decide to accomplish, whether it's walking to exercise regularly or walking in the Spirit. The New Living Translation appropriately replaces "diligence" with "make every effort" to indicate that diligence is an all-in kind of deal. We either are or we are not going to work toward living a godly life. Someone once said, "You're either green and growing and ripe and rotting." In other words, there is no standing still when it comes to becoming healthier physically, mentally or spiritually.

Anyone who has made an attempt to grow spiritually knows that this battle between following the flesh and walking in the Spirit is a losing one if we attempt to fight it on our own. So what are we to do if we hope to have any victory over the flesh?

9. According to 2 Peter 1:3, what does Jesus give us to help us in this battle?

10. Based on 2 Peter 1:4, what are we promised as a result of what He gives us?

We are given Jesus' "divine power," which gives us "everything" we need to live a godly life. What's more is that we are promised to be allowed to be "partakers" of His divine nature that has escaped the corruption of the world. In other words, knowing Jesus provides for us everything we need to overcome the flesh. The answer is always more of Jesus. As we studied earlier, our focus determines our reality. As we focus on Jesus through prayer and spending time in His word, we can know him more, and as a result His divine power becomes increasingly active in our lives. And as Jesus was able to withstand the temptations of the flesh, so too can we as His Spirit dwells within us to guide and direct us in godly living.

When deciding to become more physically active, what we focus on as motivation for beginning and continuing the activity will certainly play a huge role in the success that we find as a result. If you've ever watched "The Biggest Loser" on NBC, you'll quickly realize that losing weight to lose weight is not a reason that will provide long-term motivation for making permanent lifestyle changes. In fact, many of those who played the game to win the game ended up gaining the weight back. Their reason (focus) did not hold up in the long term. Instead, those motivated by becoming better people as a whole and over a lifetime – realizing the journey was never finished – were the ones who found success they were able to maintain over the long term.

As we have noted already and will note again, focus is crucial spiritually as well. A person can be dedicated and passionate but also devastatingly wrong if they place the focus of their faith on anything by the one and only God. What we focus on in our spiritual walks will also determine the legacy we leave behind. To emphasize that point, let's look at two individuals who are remembered for "walking with God" during their sojourn here on earth.

Walking with God

Walking with God takes faith, commitment and consistency. Let's look at each of those aspects through Enoch, who lived in the time period just before God judged the world by flood. Enoch shows us how to live as we wait the Lord's return since he lived at a time characterized by sexual perversion and uncontrolled violence, which could well describe our own current time period, and yet he is remembered for being someone who "walked with God."

11. Enoch is mentioned only two places in scripture, Genesis 5:21-24 and Hebrews 11:5. What do these two portions of scripture tell us about Enoch as well as give us as keys for successfully walking with God?

From the brief scripture references about Enoch, we see that he “walked with God,” that he “pleased God,” and that he “obtained a witness” as a result.

Noting the original Greek is quite relevant here because it adds a significant dimension to our understanding of “walking with God.” According to John Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible, the word used was “yithhallech,” which can be understood to mean he “*set himself to walk, he was fixedly purposed and determined to live to God.*” Additionally, Clarke notes that “*a verb in the conjugation called hithpael signifies a reciprocal act, that which a man does upon himself.*” What all this means is that Enoch deliberately chose to walk with God, and he did so in spite of what the culture was like around him, even though he held commitments to family and job he might have had (he was married and had children), and without having a written word of God (the Bible) to rely upon.

12. What important truth does Amos 3:3 reveal about what it means to walk with another?

Walking with another, especially and including God, means that two people walk together and are in agreement. So, we can surmise that Enoch’s choices were in agreement with God’s desires. Enoch’s appearance in scripture may be brief, but it offers a powerful and poignant description of what a life walking with God entails. Enoch’s walk with God was of such significance that scripture tells us simply that “*he was not, for God took him.*” (Genesis 5:24)

Like Enoch, Levi also walked with God, and God used his example as He disciplined others.

13. Read Malachi 2:6 and list the three aspects of Levi’s walk with God noted there.

Levi was an example of peace, truth, uprightness and righteousness. Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible outlines Levi’s example well by noting five aspects that God was pointing toward as qualities of someone who walks with Him. Those qualities are as follows:

1. He feared God.
2. He acted continually as if in the presence of a just and holy God.
3. His own conduct and that which he directed in others was founded on God’s law of truth.
4. Nothing contrary to justice and equity ever proceeded from his lips.
5. He walked with God in peace and lived in such a way as to keep union with God.
6. He turned many away from iniquity by his upright administration, faithful exhortations and pious walk.

Enoch and Levi provide sound examples of what a life walking with God must contain, and through our diligence in pursuing, imitating and knowing Christ, we too can be said to “walk with God.”

Focused Diligence

For every Christian, a goal is to become productive in the knowledge of the Lord. Just like we see our bodies develop and improve as we exercise, as we focus on being productive Christians, we see the development of holiness in our lives most obviously through the fruits of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-23) We have talked about being diligent in growing our faith, and a logical next question would be, “Where

do I focus my diligence?” Realizing that we will never arrive at perfection until we arrive in Heaven, the Bible does provide areas of focus to help us gauge our progress.

14. What areas of focus does 2 Peter 1:5-8 give us?

15. Why, according to 2 Peter 1:9, are these qualities important?

As we are diligent to imitate and pursue Christ, we will work to develop moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. These qualities are important because they show that we have a vision for the eternal and because they show that we have truly turned away from a life of deliberate sin.

16. According to Galatians 5:22, 23, several of these qualities are also what?

Self-control, patience and love are also fruits of the Spirit. The other qualities of moral excellence, knowledge, perseverance, godliness & brotherly kindness are certainly ones that are mixed in and developed by the active growth and application of the fruits of the Spirit in our lives.

17. Based on 2 Peter 1:10 & 11 what are the results of practicing these qualities in our lives?

If we practice the qualities outlined in 2 Peter and Galatians 5, we have the result of not stumbling in our Christian walk. Because we are imperfect, we will imperfectly carry out these qualities. However, because we are redeemed, we are able to learn from our mistakes, forgive and be forgiven, and move on toward godliness. In addition to not stumbling, we read that we will also *“have a triumphant entrance into that everlasting kingdom where Christ reigns”* and will *“reign with him for ever and ever.”* (Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary) Pursuing these qualities and fruits in our lives equals pursuing Christ, and in doing so knowing we are on the path to one day being with Him in Paradise.

The process toward godliness outlined in 2 Peter begins with faith, which begins with believing in Jesus as the one and only Savior.

18. According to Romans 10:17, where does faith come from?

19. Based on John 17:17, how are we made holy?

Faith comes from hearing the Word of God, and we are sanctified (made holy) by God’s word (truth). Spending time in God’s word is the key to a healthy and growing spiritual walk. Just like consistently drinking water and walking can bring enormous physical benefits, consistent time spent with Christ begins the process of a growing faith, which leads to the many other qualities and benefits that come through knowing Him. In a nutshell, as we focus on knowing and pursuing Christ, imitating Him becomes our reality.

In Heath Care You Can Live With, Dr. Scott Morris sums up the role of faith well in saying that *“being connected to God is not an intellectual undertaking, meaning that you get all the right theological pieces in place and then you’re all set. It’s a life undertaking, a habit, a discipline that comes through regular,*

faithful practice. A healthy faith life often gives people the courage to eat right, move more, restore relationships, and find meaning in work. Faith drives us to the ultimate goal of being in communion with God, and from that perspective we see the whole, full, abundant life God wants for us.”

Accountability

There is one final element found in 2 Peter 1 that can provide tremendous help in obtaining the consistency we need physically and spiritually, and that is the idea of accountability. Good coaches constantly review and reinforce the basics of a sport with their players. Having a coach to encourage and instruct is crucial for any sports team. Likewise, having individuals who can encourage and instruct us in the basics of healthy living both spiritually and physically is crucial.

20. Read 2 Peter 1:12-15 and note how Peter is instructing believers in their diligent efforts.

Peter is letting the people know that he will be constantly reminding them of these basics of walking with Christ even if people already know them. He notes that while his dwelling (body) will one day be laid aside, his hope is that these basics will become so automatic to people that they will be able to recall them at any time without his constant reminder.

In all walks of life – spiritual and physical – we need coaches and teammates like Peter to remind us of what basic elements are crucial in our walks. When walking for physical health, we often need to partner with others in order to maintain our diligence and consistency. This is even truer in our physical lives where the stakes are immensely higher. We need the encouragement of other believers to not only be diligent and consistent, but also to maintain our focus. Most importantly, we need others to constantly remind us that our focus determines our reality. As Warren Wiersbe says in Run with the Winners, *“there is no escaping the fact that outlook helps determine outcome. If you want to live a godly life, you have to focus your attention on the things of God. It is the vision of faith that makes possible the victory of faith. Where we are looking determines how we are living.”*

Small Changes

In their book Small Change: Little things that make a big difference, Susan and Larry Terkel provide insight into the motivation behind making changes in one’s life. Their insights fit appropriately with any area of a person’s life, physical or spiritual. For instance, *“small change is powerful”* and *“provides a gentle pathway to self-improvement.”* In addition, small changes are *“not always easy,”* but are certainly *“easier than big changes or massive makeovers.”* Finally, small changes provide a better pay for sustainable self-improvement than major changes because *“aiming for big changes that are difficult to accomplish often results in no changes at all.”* As you venture into adding small changes to your life in the area of walking, realize and continually remember that all of the small changes you have made thus far combined with the ones you will make in the future are adding up to significant change that can make a huge difference in your life. That is something about which to be very encouraged!

Below are a variety of suggestions and ideas for small changes in the area of walking, both physically and spiritually.

1. Buy a pedometer and track the number of steps you take daily. Work to increase the number of steps each day, even if it's just 5 more than the day before.
2. Have a larger goal of 10,000 steps a day. Why 10,000 steps? A person who walks 10,000 (equivalent of walking roughly five miles) steps a day will burn between 2,000 and 3,500 extra calories per week, which will result in achieving a vastly better health profile and longer lifespan.
3. If you aren't exercising at all right now, start small. Try to walk 5 minutes a day for the first week, 8 minutes a day for as many weeks until you feel comfortable, then increase to 11 minutes a day. Slowly lengthen each walk by 3 minutes or simply walk the same amount faster.
4. Make walking fun by walking with a friend or a pet.
5. Try walking in places you enjoy like a park or shopping mall.
6. Think of your walk in three parts. Warm up by walking slowly for five minutes. Then increase your speed and do a fast walk. Finally, cool down by walking slowly again for five minutes.
7. Try to walk at least three times per week. Each week, add two or three minutes to your walk. If you walk fewer than three times per week, you may need more time to adjust before you increase the pace or frequency of your walk.
8. Set goals and rewards. Some examples of goals are participating in a fun walk or walking continuously for 30 minutes. Rewards can include a new workout clothes or dinner at your favorite restaurant.
9. Keep track of your progress with a walking journal or log.
10. Write out the fruits of the Spirit and spend 5 minutes in prayer on each one. You can do one a day until you work through them if you don't want to cover them all in one day.
11. Encourage one person a day in his/her walk with Christ.
12. Look up a specific topic in a Bible concordance and read through all of the scripture listed.
13. Write out your spiritual journey (walk). Don't worry about grammar, spelling or how good it sounds. Just write down what comes to your mind.
14. Pick one of the people from the Bible whose example we can follow with regard to our spiritual walks. Read all the scripture you can find about him/her. Examples include Moses, Abraham, David, Esther, Paul and John.
15. When you go outside for a walk, pray for the individuals in the houses by which you pass.