

Want to Be Fit? Exercise Your Faith!

Perhaps you're motivated to become fit because you have a health condition that is out of control. Maybe you're overweight and it's preventing you from being as active as you'd like to be. Or, perhaps your blood pressure, cholesterol or blood sugar level is sky high. In your attempt to make changes you may have tried many approaches to starting an exercise program and been unsuccessful. Have you diligently leaned on your faith and God's power to help you turn things around through exercising and other related health behavior changes? Let's take a glance at what that might look like. After all, I think that God would want you to be as healthy as possible so that you can better do the things He has planned for you.

What the Research Says: In a video produced by John Hopkins University on the role of spirituality in health entitled "*Plans to Prosper - A Patient Guide to Faith and Health*," the researchers lay out five principles that are important to promoting good health. One of the principles that they discuss in this film is that of allowing others and God to help you. Research by others points out the significance of faith on health-related issues. In his book, *God, Faith and Health*, Jeff Levin, Ph.D., writes "Simple faith benefits health by leading to thoughts of hope, optimism, and positive expectation."

What the Bible Says: Listed here are a few verses that address the value and importance of asking God for help and living according to God's principles:

"Give your burdens to the Lord and he will take care of you."
Psalm 55:22

"But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it." *James 1:25*

"The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right; his ears are open to their cries for help." *Psalm 34:15*

What You Can Do: Recognize that you need help and that God is there to help you. As when we try to make any change in our life, we often can not do it alone. We need the help of others... a trained professional, a close friend, a significant other or a family member. God is there for us to lean on as well.

Turn to God in a deeper way as you take action. Something happens spiritually when we admit openly to God that we need Him and then ask Him for help with an aspect of our life. Throughout the Bible there are countless examples of when the authors write about their dependence on God and then cry out to Him for help in a genuine way.

There's nothing like a heartfelt prayer of desperation and surrender that gets God's attention! Include Him in your efforts.

Be obedient as possible to the principles of God. The more our behavior lines up with His commandments and principles found in the Bible, the more likely it is that He will answer our prayers and requests for help. This is addressed in James 1:25, "But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it."

Ask God to help make available necessary resources. There are some minimum resources that you'll need to be more physically active. You'll need comfortable clothing and a good pair of shoes. That's really all you need to start a brisk walking program. When you're ready to do some resistance training to improve your muscle tone, you'll need some weights or some exercise tubing. Or, you may consider joining a fitness center. And you might need access to a swimming pool if your joints can not handle the impact of walking.

Ask for God's help in being consistent with the exercise activity you've chosen. This will include having the ability to overcome obstacles that are in your way. Often people will say they do not have enough time to exercise. The remedy for that is to make a thorough review of your values and to prioritize your schedule accordingly. Invite God to guide you as you reassess your values and use of time.

Include God in assembling a support team. In addition to receiving God's help, you'll benefit from the support of others who can encourage you along the way. Take some time and ask for God's direction in showing you who can be a part of your support team in this endeavor.

Stay motivated by God-honoring motives. Typically one is motivated to stick with an exercise program by some of the following reasons: to be healthier; to improve appearance; to manage stress; to have improved function; to manage a chronic health condition or to sleep better. Consider this. Focus on how you might have much more energy to use the unique talents and gifts that God has given you to make a difference in the lives of others around you. After you do become more fit and have included God in your efforts along the way, make a commitment to share with others how God helped you. Give Him the glory that is due.

If you're struggling in your effort to be more fit, then see if exercising your faith more diligently might help. God wants to be at the center of everything you do... including your efforts to become healthier. He can help you make changes in your behavior that will bring about improved fitness and health. When this happens and you give thanks and glory to God, you'll have a more full life and He will be glad!

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