

## Physical Health

### **INTRODUCTION**

Why should we take care of our bodies? Or perhaps more importantly, why should we spend precious time and resources exercising and eating well? It is very clear that God wants us to be good stewards of all things: time, money, our families, etc. Our physical bodies are perhaps the most tangible gift given to us. Our bodies are tied to our minds, hearts, and spirits in ways that we understand and ways we do not. Having a healthy body promotes a healthy mind (cf. 1 Tim 4:6-10, Lk 21:34, 1 Cor 6:19-20).

### **PRINCIPLES**

#### **1. Exercise**

Our bodies are designed for work and, since the fall, that is significantly characterized by toil. Exercise and the type of work you do is very personal and dependent on a host of factors. But unless you dig ditches all day at work, you need to make some time to move around.

#### **2. Nutrition**

We need good food, and surprisingly a lot of it. There are a lot of diets out there and many conflict with each other. One principle to consider is the distinction between feasting and fasting. We live in extraordinary abundance and the easiest way to consider what to do is ask ourselves, “Am I feasting or fasting?” Most of us are feasting every day, if not every meal of every day. Maybe you begin to fast a meal each week, or even a day now and then. Maybe you try to eat two smaller meals each day and have a feast with your family or friends in the evening. We need to get away from having whatever we want, whenever we want. This maxim goes far beyond nutritional health, and its ok to be a little hungry now and then.

#### **3. Habits**

All of the above can be considered under habits, which affect every aspect of our lives. An examination of three habits many of us have is important. This section is really more about considering, “Could I stop if I wanted to?”, or “Should I take a little break?” Maybe the best way to put it is, “Do I actually enjoy this?”, or “Has this habit become an idol?” Our habits are meant to be enjoyed, in moderation, of course. Setting aside time to fast from alcohol, caffeine, or tobacco use for a day or two, a week, or more is a good idea to reset your habits and consider what your relationship is with them vs what it should be. This resetting process should be practiced regularly.

### **PRACTICALS**

#### **1. Exercise**

##### **A. Intense Exercise**

Most reasonable studies suggest that we should do intense exercise three times per week or more for twenty minutes or more. This would be running, riding a bike fast, going to a fitness class or bootcamp, etc. It involves a fast heart rate and sweat. Find something you like and get after it. Your mind, body and family will thank you. You could also do less intense exercise for about an hour, such as hiking.

##### **B. Strength Training**

Maintaining muscle mass as we age is THE major determinant of whether we will be convalescing in our golden years or not. This could be weightlifting, or a simple routine of pushups, sit-ups, etc. Being able to do 25-30 pushups and sit-ups in one sitting is a good benchmark to develop and maintain.

##### **C. Active Pursuits**

It is convenient that many of the things we need to do anyway could count as light exercise: mowing your yard, playing with your kids, walking the dog or with the family and/friends, or helping to clean the house. You should make time to do this daily.

#### **2. Nutrition**

##### **A. Fruits and Vegetables**

Do you eat them? Like everyday? Is it a large part of your diet? Most reasonable studies agree that adults need about two cups of fruit per day and four cups or more of vegetables. More is better. Fiber from natural sources like fruits and vegetables is imperative.

##### **B. Food-Flavored Food**

Does most of what you eat resemble food that Jesus would have identified as food? Like meat, beans, fruit,

vegetables, whole grains, and dairy? Michael Pollan summarizes an entire book into, “Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.” That said, there is room in everyone's diet for fried chicken and beer and whatever you like to buy at a gas station, but that is “feasting.” Just don't eat those foods at the expense of the things your body really needs. The word “healthy” is a loaded and often misused term. “Nutrient dense” is more useful. For example, some foods might have a lot of calories or fat, but it has a lot of vitamins, fiber, etc. There are no perfect foods.

### **C. Hydration**

A gallon of water a day is overkill for most of us. However, drinking more water than coffee, alcohol, juice, and soda is necessary. Our brains often misinterpret thirst for hunger. Drink water if you're not sure. Half a gallon of water daily is probably about right for most people.

## **3. Habits**

### **A. Tobacco**

Tobacco is a permissible product to enjoy responsibly, and many do for legitimate reasons. But it should be considered as “feasting.” If you use tobacco regularly, quitting is the single most effective way to improve your health.

### **B. Caffeine**

The un-maligned drug for Christians! Caffeine and addiction to it is not without problems. Caffeine has a twelve hour-half life in your blood, meaning that when you drink coffee at 2pm, half the caffeine is still in your bloodstream at 2am, and it will affect your sleep whether you believe it or not. Caffeine can also contribute to irritability, anxiety, hypertension, and proper hydration. Caffeine is a wonderful performance-enhancer, but it is not our birthright.

### **C. Alcohol**

Alcohol is another permissible product to enjoy responsibly. The real question is, “does alcohol cause problems in my life?” This should be examined carefully. The Bible has clear directives against drunkenness and the habit of drinking.

## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- Am I taking care of my physical health? Am I exercising, eating well, getting enough rest, drinking enough water? If not, why not? What's beneath my lack of attention to my own body?
- Do I have destructive habits? If so, what am I doing to get healthy? Am I asking for help? Am I getting help?
- What is my reason for working out, eating right, etc.? Are they godly reasons or vain reasons? If the latter, why? What needs to shift in my health goals?