

Cybercolumn by Berry D. Simpson: All my strength

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CYBER COLUMN: All my strength

By Berry Simpson

Since last spring, I've been walking every day for an hour, instead of running, hoping to let my left knee heal a bit more. My goal was to keep walking until I got my weight down to 190 pounds, and then start running again as a new, lighter, more nimble Berry. Through the hot summer months, I put in lots of miles walking in the neighborhoods around Cowden Park.

I did drop about 10 pounds during the summer, putting me consistently in the "1's" instead of the "2's," so that was good. But my knee felt the same all summer long: it never got better, and it never got worse.

Berry D. Simpson

During a Labor Day backpacking trip into the Guadalupe, I was confronted with the flaw in my plan. Walking had kept my legs strong, and lifting weights kept my upper body strong enough to carry a 68-pound pack up to Pine Top, but walking didn't do anything for my lungs. On the hike up to Pine Top, I had to stop too often to catch my breath. I was surprised how

short-winded I'd become.

So why was I walking so much was the question I couldn't answer. My knee felt the same, and I was losing fitness.

I decided to change strategies and follow marathon coach Jeff Galloway's advice—mix running with walking breaks to see if I could increase my fitness. What surprised me was how awkward I felt. My legs felt stiff and gangly, as if I hadn't run since 1978, as if I were starting over. What happened to all the muscle memory? Where did all my training go? I was surprised how hard it's been to get my groove back.

It reminded me of some thoughts I had while reading a weekly devotional book published by my church. One of the featured verses was Deuteronomy 6:5: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

I don't know whether the author of Deuteronomy was talking about physical strength, or emotional strength, or intellectual strength. He may have been talking about spiritual gifts and talents as strengths.

I thought I had a grip on loving God with all my heart and all my soul, although I'm not sure I understand the difference between the two, but loving him with all my strength was something I hadn't thought much about.

Some people are born very strong and stay strong their entire lives. All the rest of us have to work out if we want to be strong. And not only do we have to work out, we have to keep working out if we want to stay strong. Strength fades away if left unattended. I had lost a lot more running strength last summer than I expected. I knew I would lose speed, but I didn't think I'd lose strength.

To stay strong at anything requires constant attention. And so, maybe

loving the Lord with all my strength implies working out to keep my strength up.

Then there are other kinds of strengths—our skills and talents, our intellect, our speaking ability, our social skills, our musical talent, our visions, our tenderness, our compassions, our creativity. It's the same thing. If we intend to love the Lord our God with all these strengths, we can't let them die away from disuse or lack of training. We have to keep training to get strong and stay strong. It's part of loving God.

How sad for someone to spend years serving God in their strengths and loving God with all their strengths, only to reach a point when they slow down and start walking to ease some discomfort, only to find their strength has frittered away. Taking a rest break is OK; lay off too long, and we get stiff and gangly. Is that how we want to love God?

My friend David wrote in the devotional book: "This verse tells us our faith is to be life-oriented, not information-oriented." We can't grow our strengths by merely studying and learning more information. We have to work out to get stronger. It does me very little good to read a lot of weight-lifting magazines if I'm not willing to go to the gym and lift weights. It doesn't help to read marathon-training books if I won't do any long runs myself. To love the Lord our God with all our strengths means to keep building our strengths stronger and stronger.

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