

# **Voices: How physical fitness is like biblical fitness**

June 21, 2022

Physical fitness, wellness for life and working out are ubiquitous concepts within the North American culture. Individuals annually invoke New Year's Eve resolutions or the spring clean idea as an annual practice to "prepare that body for summer."

Fitness gurus and corporations have cashed in on this insatiable desire developing various training regiments and programs. Even the pharmaceutical industry has cashed in on the quick-fix approach, proclaiming, "You can be new!"

The Apostle Paul admonished Timothy, "Physical exercise profits little, but godliness is profitable unto all things" (1 Timothy 4:8).

This simple but not-so-subtle apostolic challenge identifies the reality that culture often creates images and narratives that benefit us asymmetrically.

## **Necessity of exercising correctly**

Physical exercise, or any form of personal discipline, is essential for the development of a healthy, maturing human being. This development is essentially the balance we need in our mobile and static lifestyles. Yet physical exertion can damage the body if not done correctly.

It is important for individuals beginning an exercise program to consult their physician first and participate under the guidance of a trained fitness professional. Failure to gain this expert knowledge can result in the person doing more damage than good to her body.

A novice can expend and exhaust himself in a workout and actually be worse off than before he began. Sweat does not equal equity, and exhaustion does not equal gain. The goal of a workout is a better quality of life. Such is true of religion and religious practices.

Religion is humanity's way of creating space and designing experiences to become more aware of the divine. These practices and patterns of behavior are best suited for human development when prescribed by God's spiritual leaders.

Yes, anyone can read the Bible, but the goal as stated in Timothy is to "rightly divide the word of truth." The implication is a person must be prepared or developed in understanding of the word of God and its relevance to life.

The priests and prophets were responsible for this development in the Old Testament. They were spiritual fitness experts regarding the design, communication and implementation of God's intentions for his covenant people. It was through their disciplines that the people learned God's word, ways and witness for community and culture.

The life that pleases God, or is spiritually fit, has to conform to standards and habits that not only influence the external development but enhance the internal disposition.

Jesus the greatest expression of priest and prophet stated, "This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Matthew 15:8, Isaiah 29:13).

This is a direct quote from the prophet Isaiah, a contemporary of [Micah](#). This God-life, just as with physical fitness, has to be practiced on a regular basis.

# Priests, prophets and core fitness

Fitness experts focus on what they term core muscles as the most essential to fitness and balance. Athletes who have gone through rehabilitation are encouraged to “strengthen the core,” in addition to rehabilitating the injured part of the body.

Core muscles are the infrastructure for overall quality of life. The core holds the posture in place. The core balances the exertion of stress and posture for the lower back and spine. Thus, the core of physical fitness is evident in religion, as well.

Throughout the Old Testament narrative, the priests’ and prophets’ righteousness, justice and compassion are essential for participation in God’s community. These core muscles or principles are vital to balance and overall quality of life.

Yet any underutilized muscle will atrophy. This is true with God’s people, also. Although the priest can prescribe the way of life, only the prophet can correct poor application. It is the prophet who corrects posture, exertion and wellness.

These key core muscles must be addressed to enhance overall quality of life. Strengthening the spiritual core has personal influence upon the individual and communal implications upon the body of Christ. Failure to strengthen the spiritual core potentially can deform the overall quality of life and the community.

In the current contextual milieu, North American Christians are challenged to develop habits and practices that enhance and renew our ability to participate in the God-life. Quick-fixes and shortcuts abound in the fitness world, but spiritual fitness takes time.

Cultivating habits of the heart and mind are essential to strengthening obedience through one's relationship with the divine in worship and service through one's relationship in community.

It takes time. To prepare for and engage in your own personal spiritual fitness, and to enhance your overall quality of life, take your time in reading the [Not-so-Minor Prophets series](#) in the *Baptist Standard* Voices column.

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