
STRENGTHEN FOR THE GOOD WORK

Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work. (Nehemiah 2:18)

I believe there's a lesson here for us. The first thing the people of Nehemiah's time did after declaring they would rise up and build was to strengthen their hands for the work. Sadly, this step is often skipped because of one of two reasons: (1) People don't understand the significance of taking care of the physical body in relation to dealing with emotional problems, or (2) People know but have no desire to embark on that part of the journey.

Yes, I'm talking about diet and exercise. Do you realize that most of the diseases (physical, emotional and mental) we face today are linked to what we eat and our habits (or lack thereof) concerning exercise? It's true, and anxiety and depression are no exception. We are constantly feeding the very things that are draining our lives from us. And here's the crazy part: most of us refuse to change our eating and exercising. We reject the idea of strengthening our hands for the good work.

I'll discuss some of the excuses we make for clinging to our bad health habits in the next section, but for now, allow me to share with you another story from the Bible. In I Chronicles 21, King David sins against God and causes a plague to come upon the people of Israel. Repentant for his disobedience, David seeks to offer a sacrifice to God and plead for mercy. He goes to a man named Ornan and asks to buy a piece of his land on which he wants to offer the sacrifice to God. Ornan, being a good and gracious man, told David that he did not have to buy the land. Ornan would gladly give the land, the oxen for the sacrifice, the wood and whatever else David needed. But notice David's response: *And king David said to Ornan, Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the Lord, nor offer burnt offerings without cost (vs. 24).*

David understood that a sacrifice that didn't cost him anything wasn't really a sacrifice at all. He understood the importance of going above and beyond for the Lord because God had certainly done that for him.

You're probably wondering what that has to do with our health and/or anxiety and depression. Allow me to explain. We are living sacrifices unto God (Romans 12:1), but too often we shy away from anything that's going to cost us something. The Bible tells us that the body is the temple of the Holy Ghost and that we should care for it, but we have a tendency to shrug off the conviction about our health because we know if we do what God is asking of us, it's going to cost us something. It will mean having to give up bad habits, junk food and some of our favorite treats. And sadly, as much as we love God, we obviously love our comfort foods more because we refuse to give them up.

The result is that we are destroying our bodies, and with them, our mental and emotional capabilities. We are unwilling to acknowledge that “garbage in; garbage out” is just as applicable in our physical and emotional health as it is anywhere else. We mistreat our bodies and fool ourselves into thinking that the only consequence is a little extra pudge. We have deluded ourselves and justified our poor health habits, and it has to stop!

I hope you are reading this book because you’ve reached the place of King David. I pray you’ve come to the point where you can say, “I know it’s going to cost me something, but it’s definitely worth it. I’m doing this for God, and I’m doing it for me!” If you’re ready to be a living sacrifice fit for the Master’s work, then let’s get started, but first, let me ease your mind a bit.

Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength. (Nehemiah 8:10)

Whoa! Did you catch that? Eat the fat. Drink the sweet. Fats and sweets? That’s bad stuff, right? Not necessarily. What I’m going to share with you in this book has nothing to do with fad diets or severe calorie restriction. The trouble with fad diets is that they do not work and typically result in a vicious cycle of fatigue and discouragement. You start the diet with anticipation and excitement. For the first few weeks, the pounds drop off, and you gain momentum. Then, one day, your progress hits a brick wall. For the next week or so, despite your efforts, the scale refuses to budge, and before you know it, you’ve given up and gone back to your default eating habits. That is, until you’ve gained back all the weight that you had lost and then some. At that point, you realize you need to do something, and you begin the process all over again, only to be met with the same results. Let’s face it, it’s nearly impossible to maintain that type of program long-term. And that’s what we need—a long-term solution. Remember, this isn’t a quick fix. We’re in this for the long haul, and that means making real changes that will last.

So, the first thing I want you to do is throw some words out of your vocabulary beginning with “diet.” When we think “diet,” we think of a short-term torture that we go through from time to time to lose weight. In order to achieve good health, we don’t need to “diet.” We need to change our relationship with food. You should also do away with concepts like “low fat,” “low carb,” and other such nonsense. It is not healthy to cut out food groups because our bodies need a proper balance, and we can’t achieve that if we’re cutting out life-giving nutrients that our bodies require. True nutrition is about eating the right foods in the proper proportions. That’s it! It really is that simple, and in the next few chapters, I’ll share with you how I have regained my health, lost weight, lowered my blood pressure, relieved emotional symptoms and much more while enjoying delicious, wholesome foods like ice cream, fried food and more. Yep, you read that right. Interested? Good!

Before we get to that, however, I want to make a couple more comments. This journey will require you to put aside all preconceived notions of how to eat right. This process is ultimately not about losing weight or shedding fat, though if done correctly, those things will follow suit. But, we cannot make the number on the scale our end goal. It’s not about weight; it’s about health. That being said, I want you to limit your time on the scale to once a week.

Yep, that's it. There is no need to torture yourself every day by checking to see how much you've lost. Weight fluctuates based on water, salt intake and many other factors, so weighing yourself daily is a certain path to disappointment.

Personally, I use Saturday mornings to track my progress. First thing, I step on the scale and see where I am. No judgment. This is for information purposes only. Next, I measure my waist, one inch above my belly button. Lastly, I check my blood pressure. I keep a log of each of these figures so that I can view my progress over a period of time. Some weeks, the results are encouraging. Some weeks, not so much. But that's not the point. The biggest factor is how I am feeling overall. So, if you feel you must see numbers, please limit it to once each week and don't be disappointed if you don't see drastic changes.

Most fad diets bring about radical changes in a short amount of time. The problem is those changes are not sustainable, which is why people yo-yo so much in their weight. On the flip side, when we adopt healthy eating habits, the weight loss and changes in our physical features are slow but steady. That's what we want! That's the process that enabled me to make it through the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays while continuing to lose weight. So, if you don't see big changes right away, don't get discouraged. Good things take time.

DISCLAIMER

Before I go any further, I am required to state that I am not a doctor, nutritionist, health coach or anything like that. I have no certifications or formal training to teach people how to eat and exercise, and that is not my ultimate goal. What I want to do is share with you what I've done (and am doing) to pursue my health goals and encourage you to make the changes necessary to improve your health. I urge you to consult your own physician or dietary specialist if you have questions or concerns.

Now, that we have all the legalities out of the way, let's talk about excuses.

EXCUSES

We, as humans, are skilled at coming up with excuses. Reading in the book of Genesis, we see how easily justifications for our poor decisions slip right off the tongue. When God confronted Adam and Eve about eating the forbidden fruit, Adam's response was, "Eve made me do it!" Seriously? But, alas, Eve's response wasn't any better. "The serpent tricked me!" Yes, it would appear that from the very beginning, we are prone to make excuses for poor behavior.

When it comes to taking care of our health, things are no different. I've heard them all. In fact, I've probably said them all. So, let's just go ahead and get these nasty little critters out of the way, shall we?

Excuse #1 - I would eat right, but it's too expensive.

I used this one for years, and being on a single income, I felt it was justified. But it's not. While I cannot necessarily afford to buy all organic foods, I can still use my money wisely and afford healthy food. An apple costs less than a candy bar. Water is cheaper than soda. We can afford it if we really want to. Plus, there are wonderful stores like Aldi and food surplus stores that carry high-quality foods at seriously discounted prices. Try it and see. Eating right is not as expensive as we think.

Excuse #2 - I would exercise, but I don't have the time.

The truth is we don't have the time NOT to exercise. Just a few minutes of motion floods our bodies with feel-good chemicals that are vital for boosting mood, improving focus and a whole host of other benefits. Ten minutes of exercise can produce thirty minutes or more of productivity.

Excuse #3 - I can't eat right because it's too complicated and takes too much time.

Been there, done that. But here's the thing—it doesn't have to be complicated. How difficult is it to grab an apple? Eating properly doesn't mean we have to become gourmet chefs (because if it did, I would be in BIG trouble). Keep it simple, and I'll tell you how in just a bit.

Excuse #4 - I can't exercise because I have injuries or I'm too tired.

Join the club! I think everyone these days is tired and has some form of injury or illness, but we can't use that as an excuse to lie around the house all day. We need to get moving, and believe it or not, exercise is exactly what we need to gain more energy and help our injuries. Our bodies weren't made to be sedentary. We've got to move it, move it!!!

Let's face it, we could spend all day listing the reasons why we can't eat right and exercise, but honestly, they don't hold water, do they? It's not that we can't but rather that we won't. So, let's change that thought pattern right now. We can do this because we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength (Philippians 4:13). This is something He wants for us. He desires for us to care for our bodies, so don't you think He'll give us the strength, motivation and passion to do just that? Of course He will. So, let's see where we need to begin.