



## FIT FOR WHAT?: THE SPIRITUAL HABIT OF PHYSICAL EXERCISE

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### A NEEDED REMINDER

You are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14). Your human body, your human brain, your human eyes bear the unmistakable marks of the universe’s master builder, master craftsman, master designer, who is God himself.

All of creation is declaring the wonder and glory of God.

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“Humans are the  
‘Swiss army knives’  
of motion”

– John Ratey, M.D.

### THE WONDER OF MOVEMENT

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“The miraculous  
nature of our bodies  
is intended to point  
us to God.”

#### Our Glorious Feet

Leonardo da Vinci considered the human foot, with its fantastic weight-suspension system comprising one quarter of all the bones in the human body, “a masterpiece of engineering and a work of art.” (Christopher McDougall, *Born to Run*, 156)

Irish physical therapist Gerard Hartmann, who works with many of the world’s finest distance runners, says,

Blueprint your feet, and you’ll find a marvel that engineers have been trying to match for centuries. Your foot’s centerpiece is the arch, the greatest weight-bearing design ever created. The beauty of any arch is the way it gets stronger under stress; the harder you push down, the tighter its parts mesh. . . . Buttressing the foot’s arch from all sides is a high-tensile web of twenty-six bones, thirty-three joints, twelve rubbery tendons, and eighteen muscles, all stretching and flexing like an earthquake-resistant suspension bridge.

“Movement is  
one vital aspect  
of our enduring  
human nature  
that our present  
age threatens to  
undermine.”

#### Our Wonderful Hands

Isaac Newton: “In the absence of any other proof, the thumb alone would convince me of God’s existence.”

## OUR SEDENTARY WORLD

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“Is there something subconscious in you that is calculating how you can move less?”

Steven Wedgworth:

Much of what we call “technology” does not actually help us to become more productive at our work but rather \*does our work for us\*. While claiming to help us become more efficient, this sort of technology actually trains us to do little or nothing at all.

### Move = Live

The first very chapter of the Bible notes how basic movement is to life: living creatures move (Genesis 1:21, 28; 7:21; 8:19; Leviticus 11:46; Ecclesiastes 4:15), and moving creatures live (Genesis 9:3).

At Mars Hill, the apostle Paul approvingly quotes Epimenides of Crete, who said, “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

### Three reasons why bodily movement is so important for Christians:

#### 1. To Image God

God created us “in His own image” (Genesis 1:27). We were made to reflect and display him, to be monuments to God’s strength and beauty, not stationary statues. Instead, we are living, breathing, speaking, working, moving images of God himself, representing him, going out into his created world to display his glory here and there, and there, and there. He thought it best that his imagers not be fixed to the ground, but have feet and legs and arms and hands, to move around and fill the whole earth with his glory.

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#### 2. To Jumpstart Joy

Five centuries before Christ, Hippocrates, the “father of medicine,” not only said, “Eating alone will not keep a man well; he also must take exercise,” but he also treated depression with a long walk. And if that didn’t seem to help right away, he advised taking another. “Walking is the best medicine.”

“During exercise, [the neurotransmitters and factors needed for mental health] push through the blood-brain barrier, a web of capillaries with tightly packed cells that screen out bulky intruders such as bacteria” (John Ratey, Spark, 51).

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“Movement alone will not create spiritual joy, but many Christians have found that it can help as a precious emotional boost.”

### 3. To Do Others Good

To call an active, able, healthy human body fit implies that the body is not an end in itself. It's not for just looking at in photos or on stages, but for doing something, moving, accomplishing tasks in the world. True fitness means our bodily ability serves other purposes. The body is fit to do something. The question is, Fit for what?

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Twice Paul uses a phrase that could be our rallying cry for a genuinely Christian call to fitness: "ready for every good work" (same phrase in Titus 3:1 and 2 Timothy 2:21).

We want to be ready. Ready to move and display God in his world. Ready with hands and arms, not too bulky and not too flabby, that can reach and lift and pull and push. Ready with feet and legs that feel life and energy in every step. Ready with minds and hearts and wills that would rather move than lounge, rather get up and go and have something to do than just sit there on a screen, rather move into the world and work to help people than calculate how we might move as little as humanly possible.

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## MOVE THE NEEDLE

What is your default posture on life and movement? Might some change of your default mindset serve your spiritual joy, the glory of God, and the good of others?

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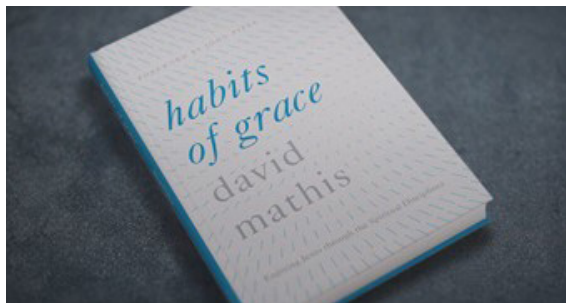
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Begin where you are, with small steps over the long haul. Maybe it's just tracking your steps, and setting a step goal for a while. Walk to get your heart rate up and push the neurotransmitters and factors your brain needs across the blood-brain barrier. Remember how good it feels after you've moved and expended yourself for motivation next time.

"You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

**"Exercise is an acquired pleasure. The joys of an activity reveal themselves slowly as the body and brain**

**adapt"** Kelly McGonigal, *The Joy of Movement* (43).



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