

## Ministry Leaders and Physical Health

A question for ministry leaders: Does the condition of our bodies matter to the health of our ministries?

Paul instructed Timothy, in the context of avoiding foolish controversies, to “train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (1 Timothy 4:7b-8 ESV). Does that mean our physical condition should be of no concern to us? Of course not. That would be a misreading of Scripture. It would be like saying, “Since I’m reading my Bible there’s no need to brush my teeth” or “If I focus on sanctification then I can ignore my high blood pressure.”

Obviously “training” (Greek *gymnasia*) for godliness is most important because it matters in the present and for all eternity. But as Paul clearly states, training for bodily strength and discipline is “of some value” in this present life. The fact that being physically trained is a subordinate good to being spiritually trained does not mean that physical training is to be ignored. It means it is to be done in a way that supports spiritual health without becoming an idol. Think about that in light of the sports culture that competes with church participation and other aspects of training for godliness.

But I digress. Back to our question: Does the condition of our bodies matter to the health of our ministries? Yes! Your physical condition matters to the *durability* of your ministry – going the long haul and completing the course the Lord has marked out for you. It matters to the *robustness* of your ministry – having the energy to get’er done on a consistent basis. It matters to the *integrity* of your ministry – dealing with the stress, emotions, and moral traps. And it matters to the *quality* of your ministry – representing the Lord in a way that honors him as an embodied creature made in his image. Ministry leader, your body matters!

Unfortunately, we have developed some false mindsets about physical matters. Here are some I’ve observed (and occasionally used).

1) *I’m too busy.* (Right. What would we ever do without you?) Really, this is simply an excuse. You are either taking on more responsibilities than you should or, more likely, you don’t want to stop and address your physical wellbeing. Which means at some point your body will do the stopping for you. A more proactive approach is recommended.

2) *My church members won’t understand.* I get this. Your schedule is such as a ministry leader that the best time for you to exercise may be in the middle of the day, but some may interpret that as goofing off. If so, invite those people to accompany you on your next midnight visit to the ER to see a church member in crisis. Or have them come shadow you for your evening committee meetings, early morning discipleship breakfasts, and that all-weekend marathon wedding event. What I’m saying here is help your church members understand that 9-to-5 is not your life. Most of them love you and will get it.

3) *It's all in the Lord's hands anyway.* Well of course it is. But some of it he's chosen to delegate into your hands. If your diet of fried Twinkies and cheese puffs clogs your arteries, that's not God's fault. If your clothes keep shrinking, I don't think he will accept the blame. The sovereignty of God does not mean the absence of human responsibility.

4) *Lack of self-discipline is funny.* In church we use humor about laziness, gluttony, and procrastination to subtly make the case that these are unimportant matters. In other words, our jokes are "spin" to relieve ourselves of responsibility. I think we need to stop acting like this is funny.

5) *I'll get around to it.* This acknowledges that physical health is important while always putting off the actual scheduling of it. It is based on that mythical moment when "things settle down." It's a moment that never happens...but you'll get around to it.

6) *I don't have the resources.* This one does have some credence. Taking care of yourself costs money, and sometimes that money is hard to find in the family budget. But a good, vigorous walk doesn't cost much. A healthier diet will require some reallocation of the grocery budget, but it's doable with some planning. Don't take the easy out of "I don't have the money." Be proactive in managing the resources you do have. (And see below for an offer that can help in this regard.)

I acknowledge that some ministry leaders have physical challenges that can't be removed. Like Paul's "thorn in the flesh", these things must be entrusted to the Lord whose grace is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Our weaknesses are not his limitations, but opportunities for his power to be displayed. These "jars of clay" in which we presently live shall result in God's glory (2 Corinthians 4:7).

So here is the mindset I encourage you to adopt. "I can't control everything about my body, and those things which are out of my control I entrust to the Lord. But I *can* control some things – a lot, actually – and since the Lord has given me control over them I should exercise that control in a way that honors him, supports spiritual health, and helps me maximize my service to the Lord."

I believe that is the biblical mindset on physical health for all disciples. It is a mindset we ministry leaders should exemplify. Are you doing it? My purpose in posing that question is not so you'll do the Ironman triathlon or become a vegan. It is so you will take seriously your physical wellbeing and begin to make necessary changes.

We are coming to the end of one year and the beginning of a new one. It's a time when folks take stock of how they are doing and make course corrections. Is there some aspect of your physical health you want to address in 2020? If so, there's a **\$500 scholarship** from the association's Minister Care fund waiting for the **first five** BBA pastors or church ministry staff who apply. Email me at [robby@bluebonnetbaptist.org](mailto:robby@bluebonnetbaptist.org), tell me what your plan is to improve your physical health, and the check will be on the way. Use it for gym fees, co-pays or deductibles, consultation with a dietician or a cooking class, a personal trainer, new yoga pants (well, not all of you) or whatever you want as long as it improves your physical wellbeing. May your holiness *and* health be strengthened in 2020!