

## The Day Before: How to Use this Guide

Your life is your journey. You have mountaintops you want to summit: your mission, dreams, and goals God has given you a unique life to experience and live. By the very fact that it is *your* journey, you have to blaze your own trail. However, you don't have to walk without guidance. God will teach you the steps to take, just as He showed the Israelites their path to the Promised Land. In Joshua 3:4 God told the Israelites to follow the ark of the covenant, "that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed this way before" (NKJV).

Whether you are beginning a healthy lifestyle for the first time (having "not passed this way before") or the fifth time, or overcoming a harmful habit, this devotional book will give you direction. It will help you move from goal to goal along your journey of health. It is a compass to help you find *your* path and fulfill *your* potential.

To use this book as your personal compass, I encourage you to study and practice Week One first. Week One's information will prepare you to succeed. Then review your goals, which you will be listing today. After Week One, you can read this book day-by-day or jump around to different days. Your steps could be any of the following:

- **Do you have a highest priority?** Study the section that guides you to that goal.
- **Do you enjoy challenges?** Look at your rockiest mountain and determine to climb it. Study the section you find most difficult until you experience progress.
- **Do you need a quick win?** To give you momentum, start with a section – a path – that is easier for you.
- **Do you want to go step-by-step?** Journey straight through this devotional.

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you how you need to study and what you need to apply. He will help you and "accomplish what concerns" you (Psalm 138:8 NASB).

Each day is designed as follows:

- **Scripture:** read and reflect
- **My Thoughts:** consider what the scripture means to you. You can write your thoughts before and/or after you read the discussion.
- **Discussion:** learn about the topic
- **Your Challenge:** take action or ponder a thought to move you along your path
- **Scripture for Further Study:** look up verses for further reading. Sometimes these scriptures are about the "spiritual" side of a "practical" matter. For instance, many of the scriptures about water represent the Holy Spirit in you.

Please note that the Discussion section is not an exhaustive study of each topic. Devotions introduce an inspirational idea, help you to understand what the Bible says about that issue, and pique your hunger to study both Scripture and reputable health resources. As an example, on Day 10 we study strength training. That discussion teaches you what God's Word says about strength training and it encourages you to

learn what types of strength training would be good for you. The appendix includes a resource for practical application.

Now that you understand how to follow along with this devotional, let's lace-up your walking shoes and begin your journey!

Here is your first challenge: Define some of your goals. (You can write them at the end of this introduction.)

**Goals need to be specific.** For example, if you want to eat more vegetables, how many servings do you want to average? If you desire to sleep more, how many hours of rest will you get each night? If you need to exercise more, how far will you walk each week? One important goal I encourage you to make is to read the Bible each day. Knowing God's Word will encourage you and give you the right perspective as you become healthier. To help you determine the details of your goals, choose both "outcome" goals and "behavior" goals.

**An outcome goal** is the result you want. **A behavior goal** is an action you take to achieve the result. For example, an outcome goal would be to lower your blood pressure to below 120/80. A behavior goal would be to walk three miles each day. You are in direct control of your behavior goals. You are not in direct control of your outcome goals, especially the exact timeframe in which you accomplish them. However, reaching for a challenging outcome makes changing behaviors more exciting!

**Goals need to have a reason why.** Think about the purpose of your goals. If you want to get stronger, ask yourself *why?* What are the benefits to your life once you are stronger? If you want to have more energy, ask yourself *why?* What are the benefits to your life once you are more energetic?

Your answers may vary: work without pain, set an example for your children, be physically able to play with your grandchildren, be alive to see your great-grandchildren, think more clearly at work, have energy at the end of the day to enjoy family time, or any other personal reasons. Think through your answers. When you have them, go ahead and record them here.



Complete this commitment statement:

I am going to study God's Word each day at \_\_\_\_\_ o'clock.

Congratulations! You have set your goals. You've asked God to help you achieve those goals. You have prioritized time to invest in studying. The next step on your journey is to get a great night's sleep tonight (see *Day 22: From A(wake) to Zzz*). We are going to start finding *your* path tomorrow!

## Day 1: Is It God's Will ... or Is It Selfish?

*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NASB)*

*For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened. 2 Corinthians 8:13 (NKJV)*

*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Philippians 2:3-4 (NASB)*

My Thoughts:

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Let's start with a concern you may have. "By taking time to exercise or relax or (fill in the blank), am I following God's will ... or am I being selfish?" This subconscious and nagging question often stops people from making lifestyle change. It is a cannot-win-trap for many of my clients. If they do not take time to take care of themselves, they feel they are not being good stewards of the body God entrusted to them (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). If they do take time to take care of themselves, by doing something pleasurable and relaxing, they feel they are being selfish. They think they should spend that time working or serving others.

Let's address this concern by examining today's scriptures.

**Your body is not your own.** You were bought with a price and are a steward of your body, your time and your resources. God bought you with the sacrifice and blood of His Son, Jesus. Therefore, you are to glorify God and reflect Him in every area of your life, including the way you treat your body. Taking care of your temple helps you to be more productive and enjoy the life God gave you. According to 1 Timothy 6:17, enjoying your life is also God's will.

**Your time and money are for both you and others.** In a letter Paul wrote to the Galatians, he exhorts them to serve others, which includes giving their time (Galatians 5:13). He penned a separate letter to the local church in Corinth in which he encourages them to provide money to those in need in Jerusalem. However, in the middle of spurring the people to give monetarily, Paul shares a principle of balance in 2 Corinthians 8:13. I believe we can also apply this principle of balance to our time. Here is the principle: we should not give our money or our time to a point of burden for us, including defaulting on our debts, forgoing our responsibilities, or neglecting our health, so that others can have it easy.

**Your balance is not selfish.** Philippians 2:3-4 is a wonderfully balanced instruction that commands us not to be selfish. What is selfishness? According to the *Spirit Filled Life Bible* commentary, “selfish ambition” is a phrase that “regressed from denoting honorable work to suggesting dishonorable intrigue ... [it] later described a person who was concerned only with his own welfare, a person susceptible to being bribed, an ambitious, self-willed person seeking opportunities for promotion. From there it became electioneering, a partisan factious spirit that would resort to any method for winning followers.”<sup>1</sup> Prioritizing time for a walk, cooking a healthy meal, or relaxing for an evening just somehow does not fall under the above description, does it?

Philippians 2:4 includes an important phrase: “Not merely ... but also.” What does that mean? If I said, “Our vacation was *not merely* fun, *but* it was *also* relaxing” then I am saying it was *both* fun *and* relaxing. Right? Philippians 2:4 includes looking out *both* for your own interests *and* for the interests of others. Since you are studying this devotional book, I assume your health is one of your own interests.

Your Challenge:

What steps will you take to look out *both* for your interests and for the interest of others?

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1. Hayford, Jack and Dick Mills (1991). *The Spirit Filled Life Bible*. Word Wealth p. 1802. Nashville, TN: HarperCollins Christian.



## Day 8: Is Exercise Essential to Godly Living?

*For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. 1 Timothy 4:8 (NKJV)*

*Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. Proverbs 31:10 (NKJV)*

*She girds herself with strength [spiritual, mental, and physical fitness for her God-given task] and makes her arms strong and firm. Proverbs 31:17 (AMP)*

My Thoughts:

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Hmmm. So is the Holy Spirit, through Paul, saying exercise is not important? Once we examine these scriptures and history, you will be able to answer that question.

According to 1 Timothy 4:8, bodily exercise is profitable, though *not as much as* training for godliness. In Proverbs chapter 31, verses 10 and 17 together teach that physical exercise is *part of* godliness. How can exercise both be *part of* godliness and be *less beneficial than* godliness? To reconcile these two ideas, we must understand “exercise” as Paul’s readers did 2000 years ago.

Athletes practiced for the Olympic Games, which were held from 776 B.C. to 393 A.D. Roman Gladiators also physically trained for their deadly competitions. In 1 Timothy 4:8, we see that the Greek word “gymnasia” is translated “exercise” or “training.” Its root word, “gumnazo,” means training “for the games.” Athletic events were so central to Greek culture, metaphorically and physically, most cities had a gymnasium at their center. Paul’s travels would have made him familiar with athletes disciplining their bodies for competition. His readers would have understood the imagery he used in his writings and called it “exercise.”

We have similar training today. If you have watched a Strongman Competition, our modern-day Olympics, or a local swim meet, you have seen the profitable outcomes of the athletes’ hard work. However, we don’t usually equate their extraordinary workouts with simple “exercise;” we call it “athletic training.”

As another comparison, physical labor comprised a major component of life in biblical times. Everyday activities required and built stamina. If you lived in Paul’s day, you would have regularly walked from Bethany to Jerusalem and back to Bethany. You’d have logged about four miles roundtrip (John 11:18) and simply said, “I went to town.” When you walk four miles today, what do you say? “I exercised.”

We have established two ideas:

1. We differ from Paul's contemporaries in our definition of "exercise."
2. Paul is comparing "athletic training" (not "exercise") with training for godliness.

With this history under our belt, we can now answer today's title question, "Is exercise essential to godly living?" Yes. Allow me to explain.

Proverbs 31 gives us a picture of a virtuous, excellent, godly woman who kept her body fit for her tasks. If you recall from *Day Seven: You're Worth It!*, that includes looking out for her interests, as well as the interests of others. How does this translate to you and me, and what does it have to do with godliness?

Regular physical activity enables us to manage our homes, run our businesses, take care of ourselves, and minister to others. Being physically fit allows us to mow our yards, keep up with our kids, clean an elderly friend's home, or serve at a soup kitchen. Doing our best to stay healthy allows us to glorify God fully, for all of our lives. Exercise is essential to godly living.

Your Challenge:

Begin confessing, "I profit in all things. I strive for godliness, including physical well-being."

## Day 15: Why Don't Diets work?

*So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths ...Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations – ‘Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,’ ... These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. Colossians 2:16, 20, 21, 23 (NKJV)*

My Thoughts:

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Does the Bible promote dieting? No. At least not in the way our modern world defines dieting. “You mean I can eat tons of junk food everyday?” No, not that either (but we’ll get to that when we talk about nutrition and stewardship of your body).

For now, it’s important to understand that the world teaches you to follow an external set of regulations in terms of what you eat – *a diet*. Depending on what new book or fad is being promoted, that set of regulations changes every month. Here’s the bottom line on diets: they don’t work.

While science and research continually update sound nutritional knowledge, the spin-off fads and extremes only cause confusion. That is a clue that diets are not of God because 1 Corinthians 14:33 teaches us that “God is not the author of confusion” (NKJV). If diets are not of God, then the likelihood of them working long-term is slim (pun intended).

Have you ever followed a rigid plan of “eat only this” and “don’t eat that” just to overeat every food you’ve banned? Have you *limited* the time of day you ate, *restricted* yourself to certain combinations of foods, or *counted* calories, only to constantly think about food? Did you then start eating when you weren’t even hungry?

Those “regulations” obviously are of “no value against the indulgence of the flesh.” In fact, Romans 7:4-6 says that those external regulations can actually stimulate the flesh. This is *one* reason why diets don’t work. (There are actually numerous physiological and psychological reasons, which you can study in the resources listed in the appendix.)

God does not leave you without guidance, however. He provides wisdom in how to nourish your body. We will discover that over the next few days.

A next-to-final thought: The type of dieting I have discussed today relates to weight loss, not restrictions for a medical condition. If you are on a medical diet for a medical

reason, please continue following the guidelines of your healthcare provider. Follow the principle of Proverbs 12:15: listen to wise counsel.

A final thought: dieting can lead to eating disorders. If you think you may have an eating disorder or have a concern about someone who may, please seek help from a mental health professional. Resources are listed in the appendix.

Your Challenge:

Begin confessing "I no longer look to external regulations. I will seek the Father, not the world's laws, for wisdom in my eating."



## Day 22: From A(wake) to Zzz

*Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for He gives to His beloved even in his sleep. Psalm 127: 1-2 (NASB)*

*Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so He gives His beloved sleep. Psalm 127:1-2 (NKJV)*

My Thoughts:

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An infant needs 14-15 hours of sleep. An adult needs around seven to eight hours of sleep. Contrary to popular opinion, sleep is not a luxury. We need sleep as much as air, water and food. Sleep not only makes life more enjoyable, it is critical to our health and success in life.

Here's how getting enough sleep will help you:

- Better concentration
- Greater memory and planning skills
- Improved weight management
- Creative problem solving, even while you sleep
- Toxins removed from brain and body
- Muscles and organs healed
- Slower aging of skin and brain
- Decreased risk of Alzheimer's Disease

Extreme sleep deprivation also is a safety issue. According to Dr. Charles Czeisler, faculty member at the Harvard Medical School, "We now know that 24 hours without sleep, or a week of sleeping four or five hours a night, induces an impairment equivalent to a blood alcohol level of 0.1%. We would never say, 'This person is a great worker – he's drunk all the time,' yet we continue to celebrate people who sacrifice sleep for work." <sup>1</sup>

So, what can you do to help get your zzz's?

1. **Accept that sleep is important to your success.** Athletes and top professionals are now prioritizing their sleep schedules as much as other healthy lifestyle habits.
2. **Know that God will take care of the issues which keep you up late and cause you to worry.** Compare the two translations of our scripture today. He wants to bless you *with* sleep and He wants to bring blessings to you *while* you

sleep. He cannot do that if you are trusting in yourself to solve problems at midnight. God stays awake to solve them for you.

### **3. Follow the basics of sleep hygiene.**

- Do not look at a TV, a computer, or a blue light device (smartphone, tablet, etc.) before bedtime. (Experiment with the time frame you need. I require at least an hour without screen light before falling asleep.)
- Get as much natural light during the day as possible. Work near a window or walk outside at lunchtime.
- Exercise regularly
- Add light-blocking window shades and set a cooler temperature in your bedroom
- Do not drink alcohol or eat a heavy meal before bed
- Set a regular sleep schedule of when to go to bed and when to wake, not varying by more than an hour on the weekend
- Meditate on a calming or encouraging Bible verse before you go to sleep. Read a story in the Old Testament.
- If you wake up in the middle of the night, know that that is often normal. Relax and read your Bible. When you get sleepy again, go back to bed.

If you follow these three steps, yet consistently have trouble with sleeping, seek professional help. Your health and success are worth it!

Your Challenge:

Find and read scriptures that comfort you before you go to sleep. When my mind or emotions struggle, I find these passages helpful: Isaiah 41:10; Psalm 37, 91, and 119; Philippians 4:4-9; and Hebrews 4.

1. Czeisler, Charles and Bronwyn Fryer. (October 2006). "Sleep Deficit: The Performance Killer, A Conversation with Harvard Medical School Professor Charles A. Czeisler," *Harvard Business Review*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Publishing. Used with permission.

