Lesson 13…How to Have a Quiet Time

Physical fitness has become increasingly important in our culture. As disciples of Jesus, we should take care of our bodies, for they are temples of the Holy Spirit (See 1 Cor. 6:19). However, we should also be spiritually fit so that we can have richer and more effective lives on earth and better prepare ourselves for heaven.

A primary factor in keeping physically and spiritually fit is motivation. We know what we should do; our problem is doing it. However, Isaiah makes clear that our spiritual strength shall be renewed when we wait upon God, that is, set aside time out of our busy schedules, and intentionally enter into God’s presence, listening to his Word, and being attentive to his will.

Spiritual fitness is not an accident. It is the result of a planned program of spiritual exercise, just as physical fitness results from following specific physical exercises. St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, even titled his major spiritual manual “The Spiritual Exercises” as a way of stressing the importance of a specific routine in drawing close to God and knowing his will.

FOR REFLECTION

The Rule of St. Benedict has the monks live a life centered on prayer, study and work. Benedict understood the importance of a balanced life.

In Lesson 2 we learned that a human being is made in the image of God and is a trinity like God. Each human being has a spirit, soul and body. To be spiritually fit, each part of a person’s being must grow in its relationship with God. By means of contacts with the physical world, the body is used to accomplish the will of God, while the mind needs to grow in knowledge and understanding of God (Eph. 1:17-18). One’s spirit then makes a person aware of God, helps him or her grow in the capacity to communicate with God, and guides the activities in the spiritual areas of life, such as holiness, goodness, love, etc. (John 4:24).

FOR REFLECTION

A human being is composed of three parts: spirit, soul and body. Each part needs to grow in relation to God.

Physical fitness depends upon a proper balance of three things: nourishment, rest, and exercise. Poor health can result from a shortage or an excess in any of these three.

In a similar way, there must be a balance in three spiritual areas: prayer, Bible study and service. No one or two of these ingredients will make a person spiritually fit. There must be a balance of all three.

• Prayer..........Spiritual Rest
• Bible Study……..Spiritual Nourishment
Prayer is spiritual breath and rest, while Bible study provides nourishment for spiritual strength. Service for God builds the spiritual muscles and progressively gives the strength to do more and more. As it is in the physical realm, these three things do little good if done in spurts or at random. Consistency is the name of the game.

FOR REFLECTION

Just as rest and diet without exercise leads to being fat, so prayer and Bible study without service leads to being spiritually fat. Just as exercise without diet and rest leads to being thin, so service without prayer and Bible study leads to being spiritually thin.

Jesus had a balanced devotional life. According to the gospels:

- He took time to be alone and prayed at night (Mt. 14:23) – Evening Prayer.
- He prayed before dawn (Mark 1:35) – Morning Prayer.
- He withdrew during the day from the crowds and hectic life to pray (Luke 5:16) – Sabbatical time.
- His life is a rhythm of prayer, activity, and prayer – it is never doing without praying.

Archbishop Thomas Cranmer understood the importance of a systematic regiment of daily prayer, which he wanted to expand from monks and clergy to all Christians. Thus, he gave us the Services of Morning and Evening Prayer in the Book of Common Prayer, which he hoped all people would use on a regular basis. Cranmer condensed the monastic daily office from seven times during the day to twice a day – morning and evening – basing himself on the practice of Jesus in the gospels and the practicality of busy people in the world attending to prayer.

The Daily Office – whether from the Book of Common Prayer or the Book of Alternative Services is an excellent discipline for Anglicans who have about 20 minutes in morning and 20 minutes in the evening for prayer time. If one uses the BCP lectionary, one will read the entire Old Testament and the New Testament twice during the year. The BAS lectionary is a two-year cycle: one reads the Old Testament once every two years and the New Testament every year. Both lectionaries, together with the daily offices in both books, are excellent means of establishing a regular, disciplined, systematic prayer life.

For those of us who are unable to say the Daily Office, a brief quiet time each day is not beyond our ability. There are three essentials to a profitable quiet time.

First, have an overall plan and stick with it.
Try to stick with your plan for a quiet time, but realize that for various reasons there will be times when you will have to miss it. Even quiet times given the highest priorities are sometimes missed because of unexpected circumstances and emergencies. When this happens, there is no reason to feel guilty. A person doesn’t quit his or her job because of
missing a day at work. Instead he or she resumes work the next day or as soon as possible. The same should be done with the daily quiet time.

The important thing is to develop a realistic plan of systematic, regular prayer time. We need consistency, or we will become discouraged.

- Know yourself.
- Know your schedule.
- Know your circumstances.
- Examine your commitment.

Second, have your quiet time the same time and place each day. When is your mind least cluttered with worry? When are you most relaxed? When are you most open and attentive to God? For most people, the best time is in the morning before we begin the demands of the day. This also is the least interrupted time of day when distractions are at a minimum. The Bible recommends this time of day for prayer (Psalm 5:3; Mark 1:35).

FOR REFLECTION
If you have a 10 minute quiet time, you would only need to get up ten minutes earlier. Some people feel more refreshed if they are dressed and have taken care of their personal physical needs.

To use the same place each day is as important as having the same time. Both are needed if you are to develop the habit. A quiet place is essential if you are to have a quiet time.

FOR REFLECTION
When you use the same place as quiet space for a quiet time, it becomes holy. When you sit in that place, you will more easily enter into the presence of God.

Third, plan your quiet time into segments. If you are a beginner at having a quiet time, ten minutes is a good length to start. For simplicity, let’s call our basic plan the “154 plan.” In this plan we will divide our ten minute quiet time into segments of 1 minute, 5 minutes, and 4 minutes.

The first segment of one minute would be used to prepare for the quiet time. Get all the physical things ready – Bible, pen, paper, or devotional guide (Forward Day by Day or some other resource) – and then get comfortable. Begin with a brief prayer. Psalm 119:18 offers a good example of an opening prayer: Ask the Lord to open our spiritual eyes so that we might see spiritual truth in his Word. Other opening sentences might be:

- Lord, open my lips. And my mouth will proclaim your praise.
- God, come to my assistance. Lord, make haste to help me.
- My help is in the name of the Lord. The maker of heaven and earth.
- God is my refuge and strength. A very present help in time of trouble.
The next five minutes should be used for devotional Bible study. In devotional Bible study, the Bible is read for inspiration and application. Do not stop to use a Bible dictionary or commentary; just read the Bible passage to find out what God has to say to you from reading the scripture itself.

Let the Bible speak to you. Read slowly and stop to reflect on a word or phrase or verse that captures your attention. Better to read a little than a lot – one passage is better than one chapter. You want the meaning of the text to take hold of your life, to become part of you, so that you assimilate it and then apply it to your life.

As you read and reflect on the Bible passage, ask:

- What does this passage mean? (Reflect on the text.)
- What does this passage mean to me? (Personalize the text.)
- How does this passage apply to my life? (Apply the text.)
- What am I going to do about it? (Act on the text.)

The last four minutes of your quiet time will be used in prayer. The elements of prayer used in Lesson 10 may be too long. If so, use this modified approach that goes by the acronym CATIP:

- Confession (Any sins that need to be forgiven.)
- Adoration (Praise and worship)
- Thanksgiving (Gratitude for God’s blessings in your life.)
- Intercession (Praying for the needs of others.)
- Petition (Praying for your own needs.)

If time allows, add Meditation to the list, which is a quiet waiting upon the Lord and contemplating his presence, power and majesty in your life.