

FULLY ALIVE 30-DAY DEVOTIONAL



DISCOVERING GOD'S HEART
AND DESIGN FOR OUR HEALTH

DERYL W. DUER

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Day 1

Faith

The Fully Alive Life

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (John 10:10)

Today's Reflection:

God offers us *life*. Jesus says in John 10:10, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10 NIV). Not some “pie-in-the-sky” dream, not just life in eternity, but a fully-abundant life right here, right now.

Is that what you’re experiencing? Do you feel *fully* alive? I certainly didn’t when I was overweight and had high blood pressure, pre-diabetes and high LDL cholesterol. Like most people, I was living a life I was comfortable with simply because I didn’t know any different.

We’re missing out on God’s best for us.

Jesus wants you to experience life to the fullest—exceedingly abundantly more than you can ask for or even imagine (Eph. 3:20). This life beyond your wildest dreams can only flow out of your relationship with Him.

You love Jesus. You pray. You read your Bible. You go to church. Why then, are you not experiencing this abundant life? Why do you not feel fully alive?

There must be a piece missing.

That piece is your physical health. You are created in God’s image, which means you are triune in nature. You have a body, spirit and mind that are interconnected. If one suffers, the others also suffer. “All for one and one for all,” as the saying goes. Being fully alive—living the life that God intended for you—requires being complete in Him. It means being as healthy and physically fit as you can be.

God created you—knit you together in your mother’s womb. He knows you infinitely better than you even know yourself. As you start this journey, you must begin to trust that He has given you everything you need to build and maintain the health and wellness necessary to be fully alive. God did not put you on this earth to lead a mediocre life. You were not designed to sit on the sidelines, unable to enjoy the fullness of life. On the contrary, according to Ephesians 2:10, you were created anew in Christ Jesus to walk in greatness.

I also believe it is only fair that I warn you about the consequences of not taking care of your physical health. You see, before Jesus said that He came to give us life to the fullest, He warned us that we have an enemy—a thief whose sole mission is to steal from you, to kill you, and destroy you. I imagine you’ve already experienced some of that.

Today, and every day, you must choose. Your health is in your hands. As God said to the children of Israel before they entered the promised land: ““I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days” (Deuteronomy 30:19–20 NAS95).

Life Application:

- How has your lack of health hampered your ability to live fully alive as He intended?
- As you reflect today, thank God for the resources and means He has already placed in your life to help you live fully alive.
- Write out how your life will be fuller and more abundant when you reach your health goals. What are some things you will be able to do and accomplish with greater energy and health?

Day 2

Food

Glorious Food

“Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31 NAS95)

Today's Reflection:

How many times have you heard (or thought) things like, “Healthy food is boring,” or “Healthy food is bland.” Maybe one of the biggest reasons you’ve failed to stick to your health goals before was all of the boring, bland food you had to eat. What if I told you, that healthy food can be the most amazingly delicious food you’ve ever tasted.

Food is a gift from God. And like all of His gifts, it is one He intends for us to enjoy. Food is meant to be savored. Eating is something we should look forward to with eager anticipation.

In *The Screwtape Letters*, renowned author and Christian apologist C.S. Lewis presents a morally inverted universe that unveils the tactics of the unseen spiritual forces of darkness. Screwtape, a high-ranking demon is writing to offer advice to his novice demon nephew, Wormwood. Screwtape writes, “Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on the Enemy’s ground.” He goes on to say that the only thing they can do is to encourage humans to indulge in pleasures that are at best poor substitutes for what God intended. Pleasures that leave us unfulfilled and craving more.

Which is exactly what has happened when it comes to what we eat and drink. The enemy has hijacked our taste buds and tricked us into eating foods that destroy our bodies, drain our energy, and leaving us only craving more. And what’s worse, it’s really not even as enjoyable once you break the addiction.

God’s food is both healthy and delicious! God knew you would need to eat, and He wants you to enjoy it. And what did He provide for your food? The Bible tells us in the very first chapter of Genesis. God told Adam and Eve, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole

earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.” (Genesis 1:29 NIV11).

God’s original menu was entirely plant-based. Plants provide a great source of vitamins, minerals, proteins, healthy fats, and “phytochemicals,” which, by definition, are found only in plants (*phyto* means “plant” in Greek). Phytochemicals contain invaluable and biologically significant substances, such as antioxidants, that many believe reduce the risk of cancer, stroke, metabolic syndrome, and other illnesses. Even today, a healthy diet will consist primarily of natural, unprocessed, unrefined, and often raw plants.

Notice, I said, primarily. God would later allow for meat, but that’s a discussion for another day.

The detoxes and cleanses we periodically go through with our family and our clients are entirely plant-based. That’s on purpose. Your first goal is to break the addictions that the enemy has used to enslave you and begin healing your body. And as your body begins to heal, you will begin to notice that organic fruit has more flavor and sweetness than you ever knew. You will discover that simple steamed broccoli with just a drizzle of coconut oil and a pinch of Himalayan salt is really good and really filling.

You learn how to eat and drink to the glory of God.

Life Application:

- As you reflect today, thank God for the amazing plants He has given you to nourish and heal your body.
- What might happen to the way you experience and relate to food if you simply slow down, thank God for providing you with real food, and then taking the time to savor each bite? The first way we eat to the glory of God is by choosing foods that nourish and heal us. God provided these foods for because He loves you and He wants you to be fully alive. How does knowing this help you decide what to eat?
- And when you sit down to eat with family and friends, focus on enjoying the fellowship. You’ll find you enjoy the food even more.

Day 3

Fitness

Made to Move

For in him we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:28)

Today's Reflection:

It was David, the shepherd, warrior, king and poet, who praised God because He was “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14). The human body, with all its interconnected and interdependent systems, is an absolute marvel of biomechanical engineering. It is designed for action. We are made to move. Movement makes us happy. Movement makes us healthier. Sitting or lying around watching the world pass us by makes us depressed and sick.

If you are sick and tired of being sick and tired, you have got to get moving.

Dr. John J. Ratey, clinical associate professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School commented:

In today’s technology-driven, plasma-screened-in world, it’s easy to forget that we are born movers . . . because we’ve engineered movement right out of our lives. . . The sedentary character of modern life is a disruption of our nature and it poses one of the biggest threats to our continued survival. . . . we’re literally killing ourselves.ⁱ

The problem is we too often view exercise as something we dread, some unpleasant task that we must force ourselves to do. But do you really believe that God would design you to be a mover if He did not also design you to enjoy movement? Exercise was not meant to be punishment, but a reward.

Remember when you were a child and running and jumping and playing came naturally? Remember when sitting still was the punishment? Be

While we are in this first ten-day cleanse you should avoid strenuous exercise, however, you still need to move. Go for a walk this evening. Do some light Tai Chi or Yoga. Stretch. Whatever

you choose to do, use this time to reconnect with God. Thank Him for your body that is “fearfully and wonderfully made.”

Life Application:

- Think back on a time when you had fun engaging in physical activity. How did you feel? Could you enjoy that same activity today? Journal about your past experience and how you felt and think forward to something you would like to do in the future as your fitness improves.
- Meditate on Acts 17:28, “For in him we live and move and have our being.” Write down what comes to mind as you reflect on this truth.

Day 4

Focus

Renewing Your Mind

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2 NIV11)

Today's Reflection:

You become what you focus on. I know, that sounds silly, and there was a time when I would have written off a statement like that as new-age mumbo jumbo. But that is exactly what God tells us in His Word. Think about it, how many times does the Bible tell us to meditate (focus) on the things of God? I count at least 13 (Joshua 1:8; Psalms 1:2; 63:6; 77:6, 12; 119:15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 148; 143:5; 145:5). Philippians 4:8 says to “Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise” (NLT). The New American Standard translation tells us to “dwell on these things,” and the New King James says to “meditate” on them. That makes 14.

Call it what you want, but there is a principle—a law—that says we tend to become like what we mediate and focus on. Transformation begins in your mind. That’s why Paul, in writing to the church at Rome says, “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:1-2).

Notice that Paul goes on to say that you renew your mind so that you can then test and approve what God’s will is. Your old way of thinking has gotten you to where you are. The only way to live out God’s best for you is to begin to change how you think. In order to renew your mind, you’re going to have to let go of a few things. You’ve got to trade out “stinking thinking” and bad attitudes to make room for what God wants to teach you.

Life Application:

- 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”
- Identify thought patterns that may be hindering you from being your best. Are there lies or half-truths you’ve allowed yourself to believe? Ask God to renew your mind through His Truth.
- Like a computer, you get out what you put into you mind. What are you programming your mind with that needs to be replaced with things that honor God?
- “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” In other words, you get what you focus on. Spend some time today thinking about the week ahead out into the rest of your life. Begin writing down things you want in your life and ask God to begin to renew your mind so you can move towards them.

Day 5

Fellowship

Better Together

“Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed.” (Ecclesiastes 4:9 NLT-SE)

Today's Reflection:

God intended for us to live in community, just as He does within the Trinity. Jesus prays for us to be one just as He is one with the Father (John 17:21). We see a wonderful picture of this in the New Testament Church. Luke, the physician and author of both Luke and Acts, tells us “All the believers were united in heart and mind” (Acts 4:32 NLT). There was a very special bond going on there. It went beyond just getting together for a meal or to socialize.

The New Testament Greek word for this is *koinonia*. It is translated “fellowship.”

The truth is we *need* fellowship. That's right . . . it's not a *want*; it's a *need*. As God said, it's not good for us to be alone. He tells us:

“Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.” (Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 NLT)

When you are alone, you are more vulnerable. But you find strength and encouragement in a fellowship. By working together, everybody in the group succeeds.

Life Application:

- What are some areas you could use some strength and encouragement in?
- If you are resistant to receiving help or support from others, what might be the root of that? Ask God to show you why and ask Him to open your heart to receive help from others.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” (NIV11). What are some ways you can encourage someone else today?

Day 6

Faith

Baby Steps

“Give us today our daily bread.” (Matthew 6:11)

Today's Reflection:

Sometimes Hollywood gets it right. The 1991 movie, *What About Bob?*, profoundly challenging patient Bob (Bill Murray) Is having his initial therapy session with Dr. Leo Marvin (Richard Dreyfus). Dr. Marvin hands Bob a copy of his new book, *Baby Steps*.

Marvin: It means setting small, reasonable goals for yourself. One day at a time, one tiny step at a time—do-able, accomplishable goals.

Bob: Baby steps.

Marvin: When you leave this office, don't think about everything you have to do to get out of the building, just deal with getting out of the room. When you reach the hall, just deal with the hall. And so forth. Baby steps.

This idea of taking baby steps to achieving success in life is actually biblical. Jesus teaches us to ask God to give us our *daily* bread. Not our *weekly* bread, or *monthly* bread. *Daily* bread. When the children of Israel were wandering in the desert those forty years, God gave them manna daily. They gathered just enough for each day, because it would spoil by the next morning.

God wants you to trust Him to provide for your needs one day at a time. You don't need to worry about tomorrow, or the next day, or the day after that. You don't need to fret over what you did yesterday. Trust God for today.

Jesus said, “So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.” (Matthew 6:34 NLT-SE)

If you have a lot of weight to lose, or your goal seems like it's a long way off, don't worry. Just focus on the next step. Focus on what you need to do today. Keep doing the right thing, one day at a time, and before you know it, you've surpassed your goals.

Life Application:

- How is it helpful to focus on baby steps? Why do you think God wants you to trust Him one day at a time?
- Make a list of all of your concerns related to your journey to becoming healthier and more fully alive. Now cut out everything except those things you need to deal with today.

Day 7

Food

Deep Cleaning

“Because we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And let us work toward complete holiness because we fear God.” (2 Corinthians 7:1 NLT-SE)

Today's Reflection:

Addiction is a vicious cycle, and food addiction is no different. We eat bad foods because we crave them, yet we crave bad foods because we eat them. We have to break the addiction cycle. We have to tear down the strongholds that the enemy has established in our lives and against our health.

When it comes to breaking food addictions, I usually recommend starting off with a detoxing cleanse. In my opinion, it's better to quit cold turkey—make a clean break from what is enslaving you. Think about it, if you were dealing with any other addiction, like a drug addiction, that's exactly what you would do. You don't wean yourself off of heroin, it won't work. And sugar is eight times more addictive than heroin.

Starting off with a detoxing cleanse not only helps your break free from your food addictions, it also begins to heal your body from the inside out. You also have faster results, which motivates you to keep going. You start feeling better, you have more energy, you notice the inflammation going down, you notice your clothes fitting better. You're happier and healthier. Which means, people around you start to notice.

Think back over the past week and thank God for all of the positive changes you are already noticing. Thank Him for helping you to make a clean break from the habits that destroy your body. And continue pressing on towards your upward calling in Christ.

Life Application:

- What unhealthy foods do you find yourself craving? Why do you think you crave those foods?
- Pray and ask God to bless your food to nourish your body. Have you ever considered asking God to help you make food choices that nourish your body?
- How do you need to change how you think about food so that your health is more important than convenience or familiarity?

Day 8

Fitness

Movement is Medicine

“Physical training is good.” (1 Timothy 4:8 NLT-SE)

Today's Reflection:

The Apostle Paul was advocating the benefits of physical exercise nearly 2000 years ago. Four hundred years earlier, Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, wrote, “All parts of the body which have a function, if used in moderation and exercised in labors in which each is accustomed, become thereby healthy, well developed and age more slowly, but if unused they become liable to disease, defective in growth and age quickly.ⁱⁱ

Physical training was known to be beneficial in cultures that were much more active than we are. Back then, if you wanted to get somewhere, you walked. There were no power tools or labor-saving devices.

Dr. Colin Shaw of Cambridge University said, “Even our most highly trained athletes pale in comparison to these ancestors of ours. We’re certainly weaker than we used to be.”

The decline in physical activity over the past 2000 years has led to osteoporosis, decrease in fitness, obesity, and myriad other problems and diseases.

Hippocrates was right. Movement is medicine just like food is. Combined, they are exponentially more powerful. Regular exercise helps us to fight off disease and the effects of aging. And it helps us live longer. In his book, *The Exercise Cure: A Doctor’s All-Natural, No-Pill Prescription for Better Health and Longer Life*, Dr. Jordan Metzl, stated unequivocally, “The miracle medicine that works across every disease state is called exercise. . . . Science has shown again and again, across all manner of diseases, maladies, and health risks, that exercise can prevent, improve, or outright cure your symptoms.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The good news is that you can start reaping the benefits of being more active from the moment you begin. Dr. Metzl went on to say:

Exercise is honest, inexpensive, all-natural medicine. It's also the easiest, cheapest, and fastest way to a happy life. When formerly sedentary people start moving regularly, miraculous things happen— just as miraculous as any treatment or procedure or drug I've ever seen or prescribed in my medical career.^{iv}

As a former couch potato, I can attest to the incredible benefits of physical activity. You've got to move it, or you will lose it—your health, your functionality, your physique, your freedom, your ability to fully enjoy life—your life itself.

So get moving.

Life Application:

- Meditate on Paul's statement that physical exercise is good. Combined with the scientific evidence that movement is medicine, how does these truths change your view of exercise?
- Have you been making excuses to avoid exercise? Ask God to give you the desire to move and the ability to follow through (Phil 2:13).

Day 9

Focus

Where Do You Want To Be?

“Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained,”
(Proverbs 29:18 NAS95)

Today's Reflection:

There is a fun little dialogue in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* when Alice comes to a fork in the road and is trying to decide which way to go. It is at this point that she meets the Cheshire Cat, so she asks him for advice—she asks him which way she should go from there. The Cat tells her it depends on where she wants to get to. When Alice responds that she doesn't care, the Cat wisely responds that in that case it really doesn't matter which way she goes. Alice tries to explain herself by saying that she just wants to get *somewhere*, to which the Cat responds, “Oh, you're sure to do that if only you walk long enough.”

In his unique way, the Cheshire Cat was telling Alice that before you can know which path to take, you need to know where you want to go.

Proverbs 29:18 tells us, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (KJV). Although the King James Version is probably the version we hear quoted most, I love the way newer translations put it: “Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained” (NAS95).

Instead of saying “where there is no vision,” some translations read, “where there is no revelation” (NIV) or “When people do not accept divine guidance” (NLT).

The idea is that apart from understanding God's vision for what He wants to do in your life, you “cast off restraint,” and “run wild.” Without God's vision, you become undisciplined and unfocused. You do whatever feels good at the moment. But the result is a slow death—you perish.

You have to know where we are going and how to get there because life is a continuous series of crossroads. According to multiple internet sources, an adult makes about 35,000 remotely conscious decisions a day. That sounds outlandish, right? But there it is. And then you have to

consider that researchers at Cornell University found that we make 226.7 decisions every day related to food alone.^v And each one of these decisions leads us off in a different direction.

Each choice comes at the sacrifice of the other choice. Some decisions make a relatively small difference, while some make a big difference. But all of them change the trajectory of our life in one way or another. Even the smallest decisions matter because they compound. They work together over the course of a day, a week, a year, a decade, which means the long-term effect is exponential.

If you don't have a clear picture of where you are going, how can you make the right choice in the moment? Our God-given vision provides a plan so that we can make the right choices as we face various situations.

Life Application:

- Get alone in a quiet place with your journal and block out some time. When you are ready, write down where you are in each of these areas: Health, Physical Activity, Home Cooking, Home Environment, Spirituality, Relationships (with your spouse or significant other, children, parents, friends (top 5), coworkers - write each one out individually), Social Life, Joy, Hobbies, Creativity, Finances, Career, and Education
- It may help to begin by thinking about what you *don't* want, and then reverse it to discover what you do want.

Day 10

Fellowship

Pay It Forward

All praise to the God and Father of our Master, Jesus the Messiah! Father of all mercy! God of all healing counsel! He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 MSG)

Today's Reflection:

Congratulations! You've made it to day 10!. I know that you are already experiencing amazing results. You have begun the process of breaking addictions. You have more energy. You're noticing that you're in a better mood. Inflammation and swelling have gone down. Your joints are moving more freely. You've likely lost weight. Your clothes fit better. Bottom line—you're healthier and happier.

Now it's time to start paying it forward. I suspect you already have.

Our nation is facing a health crisis. The obesity epidemic claims a million or more lives every year through heart disease, strokes, cancer, diabetes, and other complications. Millions more are being robbed of quality of life. God wants to bring healing to a sick and dying world, and He always works through His people to accomplish His will. We have been called. You have been called. Will you answer the call?

The people around you are noticing the changes you are going through. You've probably been asked what you're doing. You know people who need to improve their health. Help them.

Jesus said, "Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." (John 13:35 NLT-SE). Loving others means we help them. "Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer

is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path” (Galatians 6:1 NLT-SE).

Imagine if every follower of Christ was healthy and strong enough to serve in missions and ministries? What if we weren’t having to spend so much time and money on doctors and medications for illnesses we could have prevented in the first place? What if we funneled those resources into the Kingdom?

What about those around you who don’t yet know your Savior? Sharing your story about how the Lord is helping you improve your health and how much He loves them and wants to help them may just be the opening you’ve been praying for to share the Gospel with them.

Imagine the impact you can have on the world by just helping one person at a time!

If you’re not sure how to begin, reach out to me. I would love to help you help others.

Life Application:

- Who do you know who needs help with their health? Start writing out a list of names. Begin by praying for each person on your list, individually. Ask God to open their hearts and to give you the words to speak. Speak life.
- Remember the words of Mother Theresa, “Never worry about numbers. Help one person at a time, and always start with the person nearest you.” Ask God to show you who to begin with.
- Share your story, and invite them to join you on this journey.

Day 11

Faith

God's Power At Work

"For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him." (Philippians 2:13 NLT-SE)

Today's Reflection:

Have you struggled to change your health habits in the past? Have you gone on diet after diet—losing weight only to gain it back? Have you promised yourself you will start going to the gym or walking every day only to fall back into your old habits? You may have resigned yourself to believing that you can't change.

Perhaps you've said to yourself, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." I don't know where that saying came from, but it's a lie—at least when it comes to humans. Left to your own strength and ability, this is true, but I remind you again that Jesus says, "What is impossible with man is possible with God!" (Luke 18:27 ESV).

Now, even though it is the power of God that works in us, He will not work in us without our cooperation. Think of it like a light switch in your house: God supplies the power and the resources for change, but you must decide and act. If you don't walk over and flip the switch, the light will stay off. You have to change the bulb from time to time. Paul put it like this: "Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him" (Philippians 2:12-13 NLT).

Notice he said both "work hard" (a command for us to do our part to the best of our ability) and "God is working in you" (evidence that He is involved in the process). Both are necessary for change and growth.

Life Application:

- How will believing that God will give you both the desire and the power to do what pleases Him change your mindset and your health?
- When have you seen God's power at work in you giving you the desire and the power to make healthy choices? Write these memories down and continue to add to them you continue to see God at work in your health.

Day 12

Food

God's Food

"Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food." (Genesis 1:29 NIV11)

Today's Reflection:

God knew that humans would need food for nourishment. It is a gift from Him. But the original instruction regarding what we should eat was entirely plant-based. Plants provide a great source of vitamins, minerals, proteins, healthy fats, and “phytochemicals,” which, by definition, are found only in plants (*phyto* means “plant” in Greek). Phytochemicals contain invaluable and biologically significant substances, such as antioxidants, that many believe reduce the risk of cancer, stroke, metabolic syndrome, and other illnesses. Even today, a healthy diet will consist primarily of natural, unprocessed, unrefined, and often raw plants.

In his book, *Food Rules*, author Michael Pollan wrote:

After spending a couple years researching nutrition for my last book, *In Defense of Food*, I realized that the answer to the supposedly incredibly complicated question of what we should eat wasn't so complicated after all, and in fact could be boiled down to just seven words: *Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants*

God intended for our food choices to be simple, and Michael Pollan summed it up nicely for us. Eat food, meaning *real* food. Food that is whole and natural. Food that once was alive and, therefore, has life in it. Food that your great-grandparents would recognize as food.

Not too much. That one's pretty self-explanatory. Don't overeat. Don't be a glutton. But don't worry—you're much less likely to overeat when you're eating real food. It's the processed foods that were engineered to trick your body into overeating that are the problem. For example, have you ever binged until you were sick on apples or broccoli or kale? Probably not.

Mostly plants. Again, self-explanatory. When God created Adam and Eve, the food He gave them to eat consisted entirely of plants. That's the original design of our bodies. So even though God extended our diets beyond plants, we still tend to perform better with a primarily plant-based diet.

Life Application:

- How does knowing that God, who created your body, designed it to thrive on mostly on plants change your attitude towards vegetables and fruits?
- Think about Michael Pollan's advice and talk about it with your family and friends, "*Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.*"

Day 13

Fitness

Move For Your Mind

“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:2 NIV11)

Today's Reflection:

We've already talked about this verse before, but today, we are going to look at it from a new perspective. We generally think about Romans 12:2 in terms of changing how you think, and that's important. But there is another way to renew your mind—and this one may surprise you.

We need to move for *our mind*. Yes, you heard right, exercise is good for your brain. In the introduction of his book *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*, Dr. John J. Ratey said:

We all know that exercise makes us feel better, but most of us have no idea why. We assume it's because we're burning off stress or reducing muscle tension or boosting endorphins, and we leave it at that. But the real reason we feel so good when we get our blood pumping is that it makes the brain function at its best, and in my view, this benefit of physical activity is far more important—and fascinating—than what it does for the body. Building muscles and conditioning the heart and lungs are essentially side effects. I often tell my patients that the point of exercise is to build and condition the brain.^{vi}

There is a direct link between physical activity and our mental ability, thoughts, and emotions. Exercise increases the amount of a chemical called BDNF in your brain. Dr. Ratey calls it “Miracle Grow for your brain,” and says, “it improves the function of neurons, encourages their growth, and strengthens and protects them against the natural process of cell death. And . . . BDNF is a crucial biological link between thought, emotions, and movement.”^{vii}

Exercise also improves how fast you learn, and how well you retain what you've learned. It also helps protect you from the effects of aging on the brain, including Alzheimer's and dementia.

In the words of Dr. Ratey, “Exercise is the single most powerful tool you have to optimize your brain function.”^{viii}

Life Application:

- You may not care about your physical appearance, but you should care about your brain health. Ask God to help you renew your mind through exercise.
- Make a list of all the ways exercise improves your mind. Start with these few I’ve listed and then do a little research on your own to find even more. Highlight the ones that matter most to you.

Day 14

Focus

WHY-Power

“Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.” (2 Corinthians 4:1 NIV11)

Today's Reflection:

How do you keep from losing heart? What's the secret to staying on track even when you fall down? This verse lets us in on how the Apostle Paul was able to overcome seemingly impossible odds and obstacles. Paul understood the secret of “WHY.”

The ministry given to him by God was his WHY. He writes a few verse later, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.” (2 Corinthians 4:7–10 NIV11).

For Paul, the Gospel is the prize that keeps him going. It is his WHY.

So how does this relate to reaching your health goals?

Asking why allows you to discover where—or even if—your goal fits into the context of your vision for your life. It's a very simple question, but most people never ask it—and that's why they fail. Living an optimal God-honoring, healthy lifestyle is not easy. Nothing about the Christian walk is. Habits cannot be broken; they must be replaced by new ones. That requires working through an uncomfortable period. As Dr. Denis Waitley said, “Habits are like submarines. They run silent and deep. They also are like comfortable beds, in that they're easy to get into, but difficult to get out of.”^{ix}

You've probably heard it said that it takes 21 days to form a habit; and while that may be true, it sometimes takes months or even years to make the new habit permanent. Think about it, you've been you for a long time. You're not just adding something new—you're breaking down

strongholds in your life. This is going to be hard. The sooner you wrap your mind around that, the better. Willpower alone won't last long enough for you to power through.

I love how Darren Hardy puts it, "Assuming willpower is what you need to change your habits is akin to trying to keep a hungry grizzly bear out of your picnic basket by covering it with a napkin. To fight the bear of your bad habits, you need something stronger."^x

Your actions are determined by deeply-held core values and beliefs—by what matters most to you. You may be able to make temporary changes, but you will always revert back to your old habits unless you can connect your new habits to those core beliefs and to the vision you have for our life. It's not enough to want to be healthy and fit. You've got to know why it matters to you.

You've got to have what Darren Hardy calls "why-power."^{xi} The power of your why is what gets you through the daily grind, the temptations of that slice of pizza or cake, the mornings where you don't feel like getting out of bed and working out, the days when you feel overwhelmed and just want to sit in front of the TV and eat a pint of ice cream.

What's your why?

Life Application:

- Write down your health goals. With that written, it's time to start digging deep. Ask yourself, "Why is it important to _____?" Write your answer down. Now repeat this step five times. Each new answer will reveal a deeper, more meaningful layer of your why.
- Ask God to help you connect your health goals to what He wants to accomplish in your life—the ministry He has given you.

Day 15

Fellowship

Encourage One Another

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,” (Hebrews 10:24 NIV11)

Today's Reflection:

The phrase “one another” occurs 100 times in the New Testament, and 59 of those are exhortations to the Church concerning interpersonal relationships. We are told to love one another (20 times), to bear with one another, to carry one another’s burdens, to encourage one another, to serve one another, to instruct one another, to forgive one another. In this verse, we are told to “consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”

Notice the author is not saying here for us to love each other and do good deeds, although we should do those things. Rather, the exhortation is to focus on helping others to become more loving, and spur others on to do good deeds. The idea of spurring on is more than just an encouraging word, it carries the idea of giving someone an incentive, even if it involves a little prodding and poking. Think about spurring a horse on.

Why is Paul telling us to “spur one another on toward love and good deeds” instead of just telling us to love and do good deeds? Perhaps because we all need to be pushed a little. We all need a little help from our friends. It’s also a reminder that it’s not enough for us to be loving and do good things, we also need to spur others on to love and good deeds.

Now, to really get the full impact of what is really being said, we need dig a little deeper—back to the original Greek. The author uses “consider” one other time in the letter—in Hebrews 13:1—where we are told to “consider Jesus,” or more accurately, “consider attentively Jesus.” The idea there being to look at Him, focus on Him, study Him, meditate on Him.

For you grammarians, Jesus is the direct object of the verb “consider.” Consider what? Consider Jesus. Guess what, the grammar in Hebrews 10:24 is exactly the same—the direct object of

“consider” is “one another.” Literally, “consider attentively one another.” But that gets rather awkward in translation. “Consider attentively one another toward the stimulating to love and good deeds.”

It’s a subtle nuance, perhaps, but a profound one. We are to proactively look for ways to encourage each other, let our mind be focused on finding ways to spur each other on toward love and good deeds.

Add to that the fact that “one another” in Greek is in the genitive plural tense. The genitive case is the Greek equivalent of our possessive case because it often identifies one noun as possessing another noun.^{xii} The idea is that we belong to one another.

We are to actively look for ways to encourage one another because we belong to each other. I love how Piper put it, I urge you to hear God’s word in Hebrews 10:24. When you get up in the morning, Consider — think about, ponder, deliberate, meditate, mull over — other people, with this conscious goal: what can I do today so that they will be stirred up to love and to good deeds?^{xiii}

Make the aim of your life to consider others — study them, know them, figure them out — to the end that you stimulate them to love and good deeds.

Life Application:

- Begin each day asking God who you can spur on to love and good deeds. Who can you encourage to glorify God in their body? Make a list.
- Get together with other believers for the specific purpose of encouraging each other to look for ways to better glorify God in what you eat and drink, and everything you do.

Day 16

Faith

More Than Conquerors

“But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37 NAS95)

Today's Reflection:

Let's face it, sometimes we feel more like failures than conquerors. That's because we rely on our own strength when true and lasting change is not possible apart from the power of God in Christ. Willpower alone is never enough—not long term. Sure, we can make small changes. We can even make big changes temporarily. But anything done in our own strength won't last.

Maybe you've experienced this in your life. How many diets have you been on only to gain the weight back? Have you ever made a resolution to start working out and join a gym on January 1? If you're like most people, you go every day for a few weeks and then you miss a workout or two. That stretches to three or four, and the next thing you know you haven't worked up a sweat in weeks—maybe even months or years.

But before we start condemning ourselves too harshly, remember that we are in good company. We can agree with Paul that there is a war within us: “I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway” (Rom 7:18–19 NLT).

Every time I read this passage, my heart cries out, *That's me! That's me!* “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24 ESV) And just as despair begins to well up in my heart, I cry out with the great Apostle, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin” (Rom 7:25 ESV).

And it gets better!

Paul began one of the greatest chapters in the Bible with these words: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,” (Romans 8:1 NIV11).

I love how Paul explained our brokenness, our life in the Spirit, and how the Father, Son and Spirit work in our lives to bring about certain victory. He reasoned, “What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31 NIV11). As if that wasn’t hope enough, he let loose a flurry of rhetorical questions:

“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” (Romans 8:32–34 NIV11)

No, we are not alone in our battles. What is impossible in our own strength we accomplish through His: “But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37 NAS95)

Amen!!! Is it any wonder that this is one of the most beloved chapters in all of Scripture? What a picture it paints of the depths of the Father’s love for us—and the power that He works in us through the sacrifice of Christ and intercession of the Holy Spirit!

Are you trying to change your habits in your own strength, or are you allowing God to work through you?

Life Application:

- Write down some of your past failures or setbacks you have experienced on your journey to become fully alive. Don’t elaborate—keep them short. Now, write “NO CONDEMNATION” next to each failure. Pray through your list and thank God that you are forgiven and made new.
- Write down your goals for improving your health. Write “OVERWHELMINGLY CONQUERED” next to each goal. Pray through your list and thank God that He has already given you the victory in Christ.

Day 17

Food

Deceptive Food

“Do not desire his delicacies, For it is deceptive food.”
(Proverbs 23:3 NAS95)

Today's Reflection:

In Proverbs 23, Solomon advised: “When you sit down to eat with a ruler, observe carefully what is before you, and put a knife to your throat if you are given to appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food” (Proverbs 23:1–3 ESV).

How are we to interpret these verses in order to apply them to our life today? There are those who see this as a warning about being wary of the agenda of important people who may try to manipulate you through fancy dinners. And certainly, wining and dining is a powerful tool used for persuasion by lobbyists, politicians, and salespeople. It is good advice to not allow opulence and luxuries to cloud your judgment.

These verses are also an exhortation about how to behave yourself around those in positions of power. But it is more than that. Solomon calls the delicacies of the ruler “deceptive food” not just because of the intent of the ruler’s heart, but because they are harmful to the body.

John Gill, in his Commentary on the Whole Bible, published back in 1768, said, “Take special notice of the food and drink set upon the table, and consider well which may be most proper and safe to eat and drink . . . it is a piece of wisdom to make use of that which is most conducive to health, and less ensnaring.”^{xiv}

We see an example of this interpretation in the story of Daniel and his friends who chose not to defile themselves with the royal food and wine (Daniel 1:8).

The point? Keep your appetite in check and avoid “deceptive food,” even if it means putting a knife to your throat—a reminder perhaps that if you indulge yourself, you are slitting your own throat.^{xv} Perhaps you’ve heard the saying that many people dig their own graves with their teeth.

One of the things you are learning in your journey towards greater health is that lasting change requires you to develop a higher level of discernment when it comes to food. You have to learn to sort out truth from lies.

Just because a food is labeled as “healthy” doesn’t make it so, particularly if it comes in a box or can. Learn how to read labels to determine whether or not the claim on the front of the box is deceptive. God’s food doesn’t need a label—He provided it to us in nature.

Life Application:

- What are some ways you and your family can begin to discern “deceptive food” from real food? Ask God to give you wisdom when making food choices.
- Flip the script in your head. Instead of looking at delicacies as treats, see them for what they are—deceptive foods, foods that will slowly poison you. Celebrate the fact that your eyes are being opened and that you are free to make healthy choices that make you feel more alive instead of being deceived into indulging in foods that rob you of health.

Day 18

Fitness

No Pain, No Gain

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,” (James 1:2 NIV11)

Today's Reflection:

Wait, what did James just say? Did he really say we should consider it pure joy to face difficulties? Isn't joy found in avoiding trials, not going through them?

If the goal of your life is comfort and mediocrity, that might be true, but true joy is never found in mediocrity. God's goal is to transform you into the image of His Son, and that requires change. Change is always hard because we only change under adversity.

Look again at what James wrote in his first chapter: “Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.” (James 1:2–4 NLT-SE).

Only by facing adversity and embracing the pain of going through trials can we grow and mature. It is the only path to completion and perfection.

Similarly, Paul wrote, “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” (2 Corinthians 4:17 NASB). We are not promised an easy life, on the contrary, we are promised trials. Not because God is trying to harm us, but because He loves us and is trying to perfect us. Jesus faced the greatest trial of all.

The author of Hebrews wrote, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1–2 NIV). Lack of fitness hobbles us and slows

us down. We are easily entangled by the sins of gluttony and sloth. But Hebrews challenges us to look to Jesus as our example. He endured the horrors of the cross because of His love for us, because what it purchased was worth it to Him.

So what does this have to do with fitness?

If you want to live better and longer—if you want to be fully alive—it's going to take work. Everyday you do things that require you to use your muscles. You need strength, you need mobility, you need balance, you need endurance. The more fit you are, the easier your life becomes. Sitting, standing, walking, reaching, twisting, bending, stretching, pushing, pulling, and carrying things all become easier.

When you push your body beyond its comfort zone you improve your fitness. I'm not saying to hurt yourself or to sacrifice proper form, but you should at least break a sweat. You should know the next day that you worked out.

Work to increase your strength, speed, endurance and mobility just a little bit each day. Just a slight increase every day makes a huge difference in the long run.

You make your workouts hard to make your life easier and better. And remember, your only competition is you.

Life Application:

- What excuses have you allowed yourself to avoid exercise? What are some daily activities that would be easier if you were more fit?
- Like yesterday, flip the script in your head, this time when it comes to exercise. Instead of looking at something you *have* to do, think of it as something you *get* to do. Celebrate the fact that you have a body that works. Thank God that you can move. Make a list of all the ways being more fit will make your life easier. Make a list of all the ways your life will be harder if your fitness continues to decline. Now choose. Hard workouts now, or hard life later.

Day 19

Focus

Onward and Upward

*“Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:13b–14
NAS95)*

Today's Reflection:

Have you made a few mistakes in your past when it comes to your health? I know I have.

The good news is those past mistakes are in the past. Maybe you even messed up today. Don't worry about it—there's nothing you can do about them at this point anyway. So, “fuhgeddaboudit.” It's time to press on.

You're not perfect. Congratulations, you're human! So was the Apostle Paul. A verse earlier he wrote, “Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on” (Philippians 3:12 NAS95). We will never obtain perfection this side of heaven, so don't obsess about what you can't achieve. When you focus on past mistakes and your imperfections, you tend to start beating yourself up.

At the same time, you can't use your imperfection as an excuse. Look again at what Paul says here, “Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:12–14 NAS95).

Paul's ultimate goal is perfection, something he has not yet attained, and will never attain in his own strength. So he forgets what lies behind. Yesterday's failures don't count. Neither do

yesterday's victories. The past is past and so he reaches, he strains forward to what lies ahead. He presses onward to the goal. The goal is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

There is no time to wallow in past failures. As the song goes, "I don't have time to maintain these regrets . . . when I think about the way He loves me."

There is no time to rest on our laurels—to be satisfied with our past success and regard further effort as unnecessary.

Your health, like your spiritual walk, is a day-to-day thing. There is no finish line. There is no end goal. There is always a "what's next." There is always the challenge of being the best possible version of yourself every day.

As one of my mentors, Tony Horton said, "Each day you eat better, that day you are healthier, that day you are less prone to disease. Each day you exercise, that day you are more fit, that day you are less prone to injury and illness."

Remember the story of the tortoise and the hare—the tortoise won because he pressed on continuously; the hare lost because he let past success go to his head. So keep pressing onward and upward!

Life Application:

- Have you allowed past failures to keep you from giving your best effort? Have you ever allowed success to make you complacent? Discuss these.
- Develop a "tortoise" mindset of taking small steps repeatedly every day. Ask God to give you a "holy dissatisfaction" so that your constant goal is to be a little bit better version of yourself for His glory.

Day 20

Fellowship

Contagious Habits

“Become wise by walking with the wise; hang out with fools and watch your life fall to pieces.” (Proverbs 13:20 MSG)

Today's Reflection:

Did your parents or grandparents ever say things like, “You are who you hang out with?” Mine did. All the time. It turns out they were right. One of the biggest factors in determining how successful you will be in any area of your life is the people you spend the most time with—your fellowship. Success coach and speaker Jim Rohn has been credited with saying, “You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.” You will have the average of their relationships, their health, their income, and their attitudes.

Look around you, is that true? Probably so. That’s because you tend to become like the people you hang out with the most. This wisdom has been around for millennia. “Become wise by walking with the wise; hang out with fools and watch your life fall to pieces” (Proverbs 13:20 MSG). And, “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals’” (1 Corinthians 15:33 ESV).

How does this affect our health? It turns out that our friends have a massive influence on our health. According to a *The New England Journal of Medicine* (NEJM) study, your chances of becoming obese increase by 57% if you have a close friend who becomes obese.^{xvi} That’s because your friends habits tend to become your habits. Habits are contagious.

The good news you can harness this power of social influence for good as well. Smoking- and alcohol-cessation programs and weight-loss interventions that provide peer support are far more successful than those that do not. You are an influencer.

Now that you are on your journey to improve your health and make God-honoring choices, your friends will also be influenced, especially the ones closest to you—your fellowship. You will

find the strength and the support to become healthier together. And your influence will extend to all of your friends, and your friends' friends, and even their friends.

Friends helping friends. That's how you end the trend of obesity and disease. That's how you create a revolution. Are you ready? Let's go!

Life Application:

- How have your closest relationships affected your health habits? Where are you being influenced? Where are you being an influence?
- Ask God for wisdom in choosing whom you allow in your inner circle. Are there relationships you need to pull back from or break off because they are pulling you down? Who do you need to develop new relationships with that will strengthen you?
- Think of ways you can begin to influence the habits of those around you. Write down your ideas.

Day 21

Faith

Avoiding Traps

“Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the Lord.” (Proverbs 23:17 NIV11)

Today's Reflection:

If sin didn't look like fun, we wouldn't be tempted. I'll take it a step further—sin is fun, at least in the moment. It is sweet on the lips, but bitter in the belly.

Eve would not have been tempted to eat of the forbidden fruit had she not believed she would be better off eating it. She looked and saw that the tree was beautiful, and its fruit looked delicious and besides that she wanted the wisdom it would give her. And so it was—until it wasn't. The decision of Adam and Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit brought an unimaginable curse down on them, the world, and all future generations.

It wasn't Eve's desire for food that got her into trouble. It wasn't even her desire for wisdom. Both of those are good things. They are God-given desires. Remember what C.S. Lewis reminded us in *The Screwtape Letters*, “Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on [God's] ground.” All our enemy can do is tempt us to indulge in pleasures in ways that God did not intend and which are less satisfying, and ultimately lead to destruction and death.

In this verse, Solomon is cautioning his son to avoid the trap of sinful lifestyles. We have a tendency to only see the fun that sinners are having. Solomon has lived long enough to see and experience what happens to you when you indulge in sinful behaviors over several years or even decades. The young (and sometimes the old) often lack this insight. You see people living in sexual abandon (v 27), materialism (vv 4-5), gluttony or drunkenness (vv 1-3), or dishonest gain (vv 10-11), or whatever, and see only the pleasures and immediate gratification. It is tempting to envy them in their indulgent lifestyle.

But trust me on this, one day they will pay for their folly. More importantly, trust God on this one.

“Don’t be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit. So let’s not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up.” (Galatians 6:7–9 NLT-SE)

The solution is to “always be zealous for the fear of the Lord,” for, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” (Proverbs 9:10 NIV11).

Life Application:

- Do you find yourself envious of those who indulge in unhealthy habits or are you able to see that their momentary pleasure will cost them far more than they realize? What are some ways you can prepare and protect yourself when tempted?
- Do you sometimes get tired of always doing the right thing? What are some ways you can remind yourself that the right decision is the most satisfying decision, even in the moment?
- Rejoice at the harvest of blessing God is preparing for you as you continue in your zeal for Him.

Day 22

Food

Planning To Win

“Please test us for ten days on a diet of vegetables and water,” Daniel said. “At the end of the ten days, see how we look compared to the other young men who are eating the king’s food. Then make your decision in light of what you see.” The attendant agreed to Daniel’s suggestion and tested them for ten days.

At the end of the ten days, Daniel and his three friends looked healthier and better nourished than the young men who had been eating the food assigned by the king. So after that, the attendant fed them only vegetables instead of the food and wine provided for the others.” (Daniel 1:12–16 NLT-SE)

Today's Reflection:

One of the best ways to stay on track with your diet is to plan ahead. That's true of any temptation. In *The Art of War*, military strategist Sun Tzu said, “Every battle is won or lost before it is fought.” Proper planning is crucial to success. You have to make plans to avoid temptation as much as possible and make a firm decision before you are faced with it.

Such was the case with Daniel and his friends. They had a plan. They knew exactly what their decision would be before they were faced with temptation. We read back in verse 8, “Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king’s choice food or with the wine which he drank” (Daniel 1:8 NAS95).

Daniel and his friends did not just eat whatever was placed before them. They exercised self-control, because for them there was no other option. Rather than defile themselves with the king’s

choice food and wine, that asked to be tested on a diet of vegetables and water. And they were proven right.

When you plan ahead, you are planning to win. You plan meals and pack snacks ahead of time so that you aren't faced with a "food-crisis." Instead of a mid-afternoon food coma brought on by a lunch of burgers and fries, you can stay energized and focused with the healthy food you brought with you. Not only will you be healthier and more satisfied, you'll also save money.

So plan to win. Because if you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.

Life Application:

- Take a moment and write down 3 or 4 things you can do to plan and prepare ahead of time to avoid a food crisis.
- How does planning ahead help you stay on track with your healthy food choices?
- In what ways does planning ahead improve your attitude about healthy eating?
- Pray and ask God to give you the wisdom and strength of Daniel and his friends.

Day 23

Fitness

Go For The Gold

“Don’t you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should.” (1 Corinthians 9:24–27 NLT-SE)

Today's Reflection:

Paul’s use of Olympic athletes as an example of how to live the Christian life was genius. They prepare their entire lives for one moment. They get one shot at a gold medal. One. So when they run, they run to win—and there is only one winner. They run hard. They give absolutely everything they have. Everything. There are no do-overs. This is it.

Unlike the modern Olympic Games where gold, silver and bronze medals are awarded to the first three places respectively, in the ancient games, only the winner received the crown. There was no second place award – winning was everything!

Paul’s goal is to “win” in life—to go for the gold with everything he has. Therefore, he said “Run in such a way that you may win.” Just a verse prior to this, Paul says, “I do all this for the sake of the gospel,” (1 Corinthians 9:23 NIV11). His goal was to glorify God in every aspect of his life: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31 NIV11).

Paul told us to give nothing less than our best. He says, “So I run with purpose in every step.” (v 26a). Because we run to bring honor and glory to Christ, we should run with passion, purpose, and intensity. Not lazy or listless or lethargic or mindless. Run to win—which is why we exercise control in all things (9:25).

He then says, “I box in such a way, as not beating the air” (v. 26b NAS95). In other words, when he throws a punch, it connects, he’s not just shadowboxing. He connects with his flesh and beats it into submission.

The point is not to go out and join a running club or boxing gym. But whatever you do, give it your best. Go for the gold. Paul said, “I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should.” (1 Corinthians 9:27 NLT-SE).

When you discipline your body and train it to do what it should, you are glorifying God in your body (6:20). You are being the best possible version of yourself. I love what John Piper said:

Today, my main motive for exercise is purity and productivity. By purity, I mean being a more loving person (as Jesus said, “love your neighbor,” Matthew 22:39). By productivity, I mean getting a lot done (as Paul said, “abounding in the work of the Lord,” 1 Corinthians 15:58).

Underneath most of my besetting sins is despondency. I am less prone to such melancholy when I hammer my body three times a week. The reason could be endorphins. Could be ego. Whichever, it’s cheaper than Prozac or psychotherapy. I’m simply happier. And I sleep better. I have more energy.

Most of that energy goes into the Bible and preaching and people. And the fruit from that is, I hope, edification. Which means I exercise to be a more loving person and a better pastor.^{xvii}

You have one life to live for Jesus—one shot at the gold. Don’t waste it. Discipline your body through exercise so that you can live better, longer. And do it all to the glory of God.

Life Application:

- How will improving your fitness (strength, endurance, mobility, balance, etc.) improve your quality of life and productivity?
- Exercise has been shown to improve mood. How would being in a better mood improve your quality of life and productivity?
- Ask God to help you learn to train your body to go for the gold—being your best for His glory.

Day 24

Focus

Develop An Attitude of Gratitude

“Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 NLT-SE)

Today's Reflection:

I saw a meme a few years ago that said, “What if you woke up today with only the things you thanked God for yesterday?” This simple, yet piercing question forced me to stop and think. Am I truly grateful for all of the amazing gifts God has given me, or do I too often focus on what I don’t have?

In order to succeed at this journey of health you are on, you’re going to have to develop the habit of thanking God for everything He has done and is doing in your life—you’ve got to develop an attitude of gratitude. Gratitude is arguably the healthiest human emotion, and it is absolutely essential to your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. And gratitude is an attitude, a habit, a way of seeing the world. Gratitude is a choice to focus on your blessings.

And that’s why developing an attitude of gratitude is essential to success in every area of life. Here’s how it works. Your mind is bombarded with millions of bits of information every second, so it filters out everything it is not actively looking for.

As a general rule, your mind looks for what is wrong, lacking or missing in your environment. Its primary job is to avoid danger and ensure your survival with threat-assessment emotions like fear, hesitation and suspicion. However, if you allow yourself to become preoccupied with these negative thoughts, they begin to dominate your mind and become your expectations. When you expect negative, you subconsciously begin to create negative in your life. The ultimate result: a lifetime of disappointing and unfulfilling experiences and outcomes.

However, you CAN stop the natural negative tendency of your mind by redirecting it towards abundance and what’s positively possible by focusing it on what you’re grateful for. Think about

all of the amazing blessings of God in your life. Or as the old hymn goes, “Count your blessings, name them one by one; Count your blessings see what God hath done.” When you do this, it will instantly begin to alter the trajectory of your life as your attitude and outlook on life shifts towards gratitude.

Regularly giving thanks to God not only helps you fully realize how He’s working in your life, it gives you a new perspective—your mind is renewed, your attitude is improved, and it will fill you with joy.

Have you ever noticed how two people who are facing the exact same circumstances can have completely opposite attitudes? How can one person be negative, dissatisfied and hopeless while the other is optimistic and full of joy! What’s the difference?

Gratitude is the difference. Gratitude is praising God for His promises and provision. It is living life with a heart of gratitude for who God is and what He has done and will do in you and through you. You also begin to trust in God’s power rather than your own. And that causes you to see everything in a different light.

Every good and perfect gift comes from God (James 1:17). You can choose to develop an attitude of gratitude and live each moment full of joy...*simply because God is good.*

Life Application:

- Gratitude is a choice. It can become a positive habit—but only with discipline. With continued exercise and practice, it will discover an abundance of life beyond what you can even ask for or imagine.
- Ask God to show you His blessings in every area of your life, even in the hard times. Write them down.
- Write down at least three blessings God has given you in each of these areas: health, relationships, home, work, finances, family, or whatever else you can think of.
- Start keeping a gratitude journal.

Day 25

Fellowship

Intentional Fellowship

“And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another,” (Hebrews 10:25 NLT-SE)

Today's Reflection:

We need each other. There's just no getting around it. We were designed for community—for fellowship. And as long as we're being honest, relationships sometimes get messy. Especially the ones that matter most. The enemy knows that you are stronger together, and easier to pick off when you are alone. I believe that is part of why the writer of Hebrews encourages us to not neglect meeting together, but to stay together and encourage each other.

So how do you go about finding a fellowship that will journey with you on your quest to a healthy, God-honoring life? God promises that He will always provide a way for us. It is His will for you to glorify Him in your body and in your choices. You can start by asking Him to bring the right people to you. I promise, He will answer. Look around your church or small group for people who are interested in getting healthier. Talk to your neighbors and co-workers.

You can find virtual groups online. Actually, even if you have a local fellowship, setting up an online group for your fellowship is a great way to stay connected consistently.

You've got to be intentional about this, but you will find people who will be there for you to support you in your goals. You may also need to distance yourself from those who are not supportive. Even if you only find one other person, that's enough. As Jesus promised, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” (Matthew 18:20 ESV).

Intentional fellowship is also deep. In the past, you may have found a workout buddy to meet you at the gym or to go with you to Weight Watchers, but that's barely scratching the surface. Have I mentioned that this is war? A really cool thing happens to people who have experienced combat

together. They develop a bond on a level that you just can't understand unless you've experienced it.

With your Fellowship at your side, you will find the strength to make the necessary lifestyle changes to put the Pillars of Food, Fitness and Focus in place. That's how you build a temple that will stand for a lifetime. And the best part is, with your fellowship, you will find joy in the journey. You will be able to do more together and serve more. You will be a mighty force to bring the Kingdom of God to earth.

[Life Application:](#)

- Have you found your fellowship to band together with on your health journey? If so, in what ways are you being intentional? If not, what is hindering you from being intentional?
- Commit to pray for your fellowship every day. Keep a list of their prayer requests and needs in your journal.

Day 26

Faith

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” (Psalms 139:13–14 NIV11)

Today's Reflection:

Regardless of how you see yourself, God sees you as remarkable and unique—you are one of a kind. Psalm 139:14 says, “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well” (NIV). Imagine the confidence of knowing *full well* that *you* are wonderfully made.

One of my life verses is Ephesians 2:10. It says, “For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago” (Ephesians 2:10 NLT).

The Greek word translated “masterpiece” (*pōiemā*) here is the word from which we get the English word “poem.” In a very real sense, as a child of God, you are His poem. The works of the world’s greatest poets cannot hold a candle to the grandeur God bestowed upon you.

God sees you as marvelous because He loves you. He loves you so much that He laid down His life for you. He loves you because you are His child. You are beautiful in the eyes of your Father and in the eyes of all those who love you.

God has also made you unique. There is no one else like you in the world. There never has been and there never will be. Your DNA is unique to you. Even identical twins have different genetic markers. You have different genes, different abilities, different nutritional needs, everything about you was designed by God for a purpose.

“God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen.” (1 Peter 4:10–11 NLT-SE)

Embrace your uniqueness as a gift from God. And when it comes to your health, learn the specific needs of your body. When you give your body the exact nutrition it needs, it will take care of itself. Just because a diet works for someone else, doesn’t mean it will work for you. When you move in ways you were created to move, you get the fitness level you were designed for. There is no “one size fits all” exercise program.

You be you, because you are fearfully and wonderfully made!

Life Application:

- Praise God that you are fearfully and wonderfully made. Thank Him for all of the ways he has made you different because that is what makes you special.
- Learn to fuel and train your body in ways it was designed for. Make sure you do what works for you.

Day 27

Food

Primary Food

“Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.” (John 4:34 NAS95)

Today's Reflection:

Usually when we talk about food, we are talking about the food on our plate, the food we need to nourish our bodies. And clearly this food is important. Poor eating habits wreak havoc on our lives.

But, as important as the food we eat is when it comes to improving our health, there are other “foods” that are just as important, perhaps even more important. This is the concept of “Primary Food” that I was taught at the Institute for Integrative Nutrition. Primary foods are nonfood sources of nourishment—things that feed us on a deeper level. The four main primary foods are our faith, relationships, career, recreational and physical activity. Other primary foods might include social life, joy, rest, creativity, and finances. Primary foods are the foods that make you feel fully alive.

That’s what Jesus is talking about here in John. Jesus says that His food his to accomplish the will of His Father. When tempted by the Devil to turn stones into bread, Jesus replied by quoting Deuteronomy 8:4, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4 NAS95).

These primary foods are important. Think about it, you could eat all of the broccoli and kale in the world, but if your relationships are out of balance, or your job is draining the life out of you, or you’re not allowing your body and mind to rest, your health is going to be affected.

So if you’re eating clean, natural, whole foods and you’re still feeling like something is “off,” it could be your primary foods.

Life Application:

- Take an honest evaluation of every aspect of your life. How is your walk with God—do you feel close or distant? How happy are you in your relationships? How fulfilled are you in your chosen career? Are you being active enough? Are you engaged in regular physical activity? How's your stress level? Are you getting enough rest?
- If you find that one or more of these areas are out of balance, take responsibility and start writing down ways you can improve in that area. Then take action.

Day 28

Fitness

The Best Exercise

“The joy of the Lord is your strength.” (Nehemiah 8:10 NIV11)

Today's Reflection:

They say it's the start that stops most people. It's one thing to know we should do something and a completely different thing to actually start doing it. Maybe it's uncertainty or not knowing how to start that has been holding you back. I get asked all of the time what the best exercise is. Easy. It's the one you will actually do.

You might laugh it off, but I'm serious. You might hate working out simply because you haven't found an activity you enjoy yet—or, more likely, you just forgot how much you enjoyed it. I bet if I asked five-year old you if you enjoyed running and playing, you'd smile and scream, "Yes!"

In your heart you know this to be true. God created your body to move—He created it to need physical exertion. Would a loving God make something your body requires boring, and grueling and uninspiring? Of course not!

As David wrote, “The Lord is my strength and shield. I trust him with all my heart. He helps me, and my heart is filled with joy. I burst out in songs of thanksgiving” (Psalms 28:7 NLT-SE).

Just as each of us has different dietary tastes and needs, each of us is drawn to different types of exercise. Maybe you prefer working out with weights or cardio or you love dance-based workouts. Maybe you enjoy martial arts. Perhaps you would enjoy tai chi or yoga. You may even be one of those crazy people who enjoys running. Maybe it's rock climbing or skating or biking or basketball or baseball. The options are unlimited. So, just find something that gets you moving and then get moving.

Fitness is addictive—in a good way. All of those feel-good chemicals like dopamine and serotonin released in your brain keep you coming back for more. You just have to start.

I can't promise that you will love it when you start, but I can promise you will feel better and have more joy when you do. And you will find an exercise that you love.

Just get off the couch! Be thankful for the amazing body God has given you. Think of exercise as something you *get* to do, rather than something you *have* to do. Focus on joy, because “the joy of the Lord is your strength.” When you do, you will soon find yourself wanting to do more and more as you begin to reap the benefits of movement.

Life Application:

- Ask God to show you what exercise you will enjoy. Then do it, even if it is awkward at first.
- As you are journaling today, write about a time you enjoyed being physically active as a kid and as an adult. How did you feel during those times? Find the joy in exercise.

Day 29

Focus

Accentuate The Positive

“And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.” (Philippians 4:8 NLT-SE)

Today's Reflection:

Where do your thoughts come from?

Have you ever wondered that? I have. Especially when I struggle to control them. Maybe you've had this experience—you're in the middle of reading a good book and suddenly realize you have no idea what you've read for the past 10 minutes because you're thinking about something in your own story that distracted you. Or, perhaps you're in the middle of prayer time and realize you're no longer talking to God but having an imaginary conversation with yourself or someone else about something that is preoccupying your mind.

Whether you realize it or not, your thought life is controlled by your emotions. If you want to know where those random thoughts come from, ask yourself what you are feeling in that moment—fear, confidence, anxiety, peace, grief, joy, sadness, excitement, discouragement, hope, desire, anticipation.

These emotions are all tied to your worldview—your deeply held beliefs about God, the world, and other people. They dictate your thought life.

The good news is that Paul offers us a way to control our emotions by controlling how we see the world. Paul knew that sinful, negative thoughts, or “stinking thinking,” is born out of functional beliefs that are false, dishonorable, unjust, impure, disgusting, and deplorable. The only way to displace specific sinful beliefs is with specific godly beliefs.

Therefore, Paul says, “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything

worthy of praise, dwell on these things” (Philippians 4:8 NAS95). This isn’t merely a suggestion, it is a positive command to fix our thoughts on positive things—not abstract concepts, but actual things. “Whatever is . . .”

That’s because meditating on a vague abstract concept like “truth” won’t help you when facing an obsessive thoughts like, “I need sugar!” But a truth like “glorify God in your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:20 NAS95), or “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31 NAS95) will help.

God’s desire for you is that you be fully alive. So when you are struggling with random, distracting, debilitating thoughts and emotions, He wants you to know that you don’t have to ride that train. Through His strength, you have the ability to take control by focusing your heart and mind on positive things. And the best place to start is His Word.

Life Application:

- Do you struggle with your thought life? What are some runaway thoughts you struggle to control? When you catch yourself entertaining these negative thoughts and emotions, work on replacing them with positive, God-honoring thoughts and emotions.
- David wrote, “Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.” (Psalms 119:11 NAS95). What are some Bible verses or stories that you can memorize to counteract sinful or negative thoughts?

Day 30

Fellowship

No Lone Rangers

“Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone;” (Genesis 2:18 NAS95)

Today's Reflection:

When it comes to this idea of the importance—the absolute necessity of having a fellowship of the heart to make it through life—you'll never find a more ardent and compelling synopsis than the John Eldredge's introduction to chapter 11 of *Waking the Dead*.

Once more, lend a mythic eye to your situation. Let your heart ponder this:

You awake to find yourself in the midst of a great and terrible war. It is, in fact, our most desperate hour. Your King and dearest Friend calls you forth. Awake, come fully alive, your good heart set free and blazing for him and for those yet to be rescued. You have a glory that is needed. You are given a quest, a mission that will take you deep into the heart of the kingdom of darkness, to break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron so that your people might be set free from their bleak prisons. He asks that you heal them. Of course, you will face many dangers; you will be hunted.

Would you try to do this alone?^{xviii}

Of course not! You have been chosen—set apart by God to carry out His mission on earth. Evil is hunting you. You dare not go it alone. You need a fellowship to walk with you and protect you, to help you through the trials and tribulations you must face. Even in the perfection of Eden, God knew it was not good for Adam to be alone (Genesis 2:18). How much more critical for us to have help in our fallen world.

It has always been the Enemy's strategy to divide and conquer—he isolates us and then takes us out, just like he did Adam and Eve.

All predators seek easy prey. They look for victims that are alone and vulnerable. Perhaps had Adam and Eve stood together against the Enemy, maybe...well, we'll never know.

Think about it, though. When are you most tempted? It's when you're alone, cut off from those who could protect you.

You know this from experience. The Scriptures are full of warnings. The truth of it rings true in the deepest places of your heart. You dare not go it alone. It is also the theme of every great story.

Think about the heroes in those stories, like Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*, or the children in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, or Jesus, who Himself had the Twelve. Imagine yourself surrounded by a small company of friends—your fellowship. They aren't perfect, but who is? They are, however, loyal and true, and they love you despite your flaws. And you love them. As a fellowship, you understand that we are at war, and that we are always in the fight. You also deeply understand that God's purpose for each of you is to make you fully alive—to conform you into the image of His Son. They fight for you, and you for them. Imagine you could have that kind of fellowship? Doesn't your heart yearn for that?

God intended for us to live in community, just as He does within the Trinity. Jesus prays for us to be one just as He is one with the Father (John 17:21). We see a beautiful picture of this in the New Testament Church. Luke, the physician and author of both Luke and Acts, tells us "All the believers were united in heart and mind" (Acts 4:32 NLT). There was an extraordinary bond going on there. It went beyond just getting together for a meal socializing. It's what the New Testament writers meant when they talked about church.

Our church understands this, which is why they encourage and equip us to go into our community to lead and participate in neighborhood small groups. Our small group is incredible! We sit close together in the worship services, hang out together, share meals, and pray together. We dig deeper into God's Word together, and we share our struggles and celebrate victories together. We also all happen to be committed to healthy living, so we share recipes. We get out and go to parks and on hikes together. Our children play together. We do life together.

The New Testament Greek word for this is *koinonia*. It is translated "fellowship."

The truth is we *need* fellowship. That's right . . . it's not a *want*; it's a *need*. As God said, it's not good for us to be alone.

Life Application:

- In The Message version of the Bible, James 3:17-18, reads: "Real wisdom, God's wisdom, begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others. It is gentle and reasonable,

overflowing with mercy and blessings, not hot one day and cold the next, not two-faced. You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoy its results only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honor.”

- Who do you know who is committed to you and helping you become more fully alive? What can you do to cultivate those relationships as you build your fellowship?
- With whom can you engage with to spur each other on in your commitment to faith, health and the next steps of your journey to become Fully Alive?
- Reach out to those people and create your fellowship.

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