

BY DALE FLETCHER, M.S.

Faith and HEALTH connection

“Loving God ... A Spiritual Exercise for a Healthier Life”

When personal trainers prescribe exercises for their clients to improve their physical fitness level, they must have an understanding of the science behind the exercise prescription. They must have knowledge about the types of fuel that the body uses for energy and they must also know how the different muscle groups will respond to various exercises. This knowledge of the principles of physical fitness comes from attending instruction and reading books on how the body works. Similarly, to understand the “science” behind improving our spiritual health and how God desires to be loved, we must read the Bible, God’s instruction manual for our life.

What the Bible Says: When Jesus was asked what the most important commandment was, He replied, “The most important commandment is this: ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31) In reading the Bible to see what it says about this spiritual exercise it is apparent that one thing is for certain. We love God by obeying His commandments and His principles and the teachings of Jesus. Jesus tells us “If you love me, obey my commandments; Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me; All who love me will do what I say.” (John 14:15, 21, 23)

What the Research Says: There is much written in the research about the connection between love and health. Dr. Bernie Siegel, Yale physician and author of a best-selling book titled Love, Medicine and Miracles, has written “Unconditional love is the most powerful stimulant of the immune system. The truth is: love heals.” Dr. Jeff Levine, Ph.D. writes in his book God, Faith, and Health, Exploring the Spirituality-Healing Connection, “I found that dimensions of love—such as feeling love for or feeling loved by God or a higher power—was associated with greater self-esteem, higher levels of self efficacy or sense of mastery, less depression, less physical disability, and in greater self-rated health.”

What You Can Do: C. S. Lewis said that “a man’s spiritual health is exactly proportional to his love for God.” Keeping His commandments, obeying God, is a key way that you can love Him. The only way that you can know His principles, commandments and teachings is to become familiar with what the Bible says so it will benefit you to read and study it. If you are unfamiliar with the Bible, consider starting with the book of John as it will help you understand the character of God through what is written about the life and teachings of His son, Jesus.

*Physical exercise has some value,
but spiritual exercise is much more
important for it promises a reward
in both this life and the next*

—1 Timothy 4:8 NLT

Another way to love God is by the spiritual exercise of worshiping and praising Him. You can speak to Him out loud or in your prayers and tell Him how much you love Him. You can tell Him all the things you are grateful for as a way to acknowledge what He has done in your life and what He means to you. As you sing songs of worship in church, you are telling Him that you care about Him and love Him. Still a different way of worshipping God is behaving in a way that pleases Him and brings Him glory. When you act in a way that is in alignment with His principles, this is a form of worship.

Abiding in God’s presence, spending time with Him, is yet another way to love Him. How do you abide in God’s presence? For me, it’s when I am doing the following: reading the Bible, reading a book that helps me understand how to apply Biblical principles in my life, praying, thinking about spiritual things, working through a Bible study booklet, worshiping in church, writing articles about how He works in our lives, listening to Christian music, and watching Christian television programs. I love to run and often I will talk to God during my runs. For me, this can be a special time in God’s presence. The more we love God and are obeying His principles out of this love, the more we will want to spend time with Him and be in His presence. The more we are in His presence, the greater our joy and peace and the more power we will have, through the Holy Spirit, to make healthy choices and behavior change. This will impact on our health in a positive way.

It’s not surprising that the research would show a connection between love and health in that Jesus tells us that the greatest commandment is to love God. The emotion of love is the greatest emotion that we can have. More than any other emotion, love puts our body in a healthy state. When we love, the chemicals released in our body are generally at optimum levels. This happens because that’s the way God designed us to work. So when we love God and others, yes we’re following God’s greatest commandment, and it’s also perhaps the best thing we can do for our emotional and physical health.

Secrets of Living an **ABUNDANT LIFE**

*The secret of living is fruitbearing.
The secret of fruitbearing is abiding in God.
The secret of abiding is obeying God.
The secret of obeying is loving God.
The secret of loving is knowing God.*

Adapted from 5 Secrets of Living by Warren W. Wiersbe

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Dale Fletcher is a speaker and wellness coach who lives in Charlotte, NC. He writes and conducts workshops on the link between the Christian faith and health. Connect with Dale at www.faithandhealthconnection.org.