

STRONG FOR YOUR TASKS



Stewardship:
The Intersection of
Health and Holiness

Cody Wieler

Strong For Your Tasks

Stewardship: The Intersection of
Health and Holiness

Cody Wieler

By Cody Wieler (www.codywieler.com)

Copyright © 2020 Cody Wieler

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the author except for the use of brief quotations in a book review. The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this book via the internet or via any other means without the permission of the author is illegal and punishable by law.

Please purchase only authorized electronic editions of this book. Don't participate in or encourage electronic piracy of copyrighted materials.

This book contains general education health-related information and is intended for healthy adults age 18 and over.

This book is solely for information and educational purposes and does not constitute medical advice. Please consult a medical or health professional before you begin any exercise, nutrition, or supplementation program if you have questions about your health.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV ® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version ®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from THE HOLY

BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked CSB have been taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Stewardship: More Than Weight Loss	6
Chapter 2: A Biblical Case For Stewardship	14
Chapter 3: A Practical Case For Stewardship	21
Chapter 4: A People Set Apart	26
Chapter 5: Strong Enough	39
Chapter 6: Rest	47
Chapter 7: Broken World, Broken Body	55
Chapter 8: Your Body. Your Tasks. Your Stewardship	60
Chapter 9: Conclusion	65
Verses Used	69
About the Author	71

Introduction

If you've ever wondered, "Does God care about my body?", this book is for you. If you've ever stepped on the scale and felt the added weight of guilt and shame, keep reading. If you've ever obsessed over calories, perfect gym attendance, and six-pack abs, welcome. Through the pages of *Strong For Your Tasks*, my goal is that you will be encouraged to steward your body for the glory of God, not simply motivated to jump on another diet or another new exercise plan.

There is no shortage of books and blog posts on the topics of diet and exercise. A quick Amazon search will yield tens of thousands of books. Narrow your search to "Christian health" and you'll still find thousands of results. So why add my voice to the noise? Simple: I'm not.

Strong For Your Tasks is not a book about how to diet and exercise. *Strong For Your Tasks* is about acknowledging that our bodies belong to God (1 Corinthians 6:19) and responding to what He has done for us by stewarding our bodies for His glory. Your body was given to you by God to be used for purposes that glorify Him: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). Your body is a gift from God to be used as a tool to help accomplish these tasks, or good works. One of the main reasons you were given a body is to use it in the worship of God and the spreading of the hope of the Gospel. Our end goal in stewardship is always *His* glory, not ours.

Strong For Your Tasks is not a Bible study. I want you to have your Bible open with you as you read, but know that this is not a deep, theological, exegetical dive into food and exercise. The Bible does talk about food, but gives very little diet and exercise advice. My goal is not to proof-text and decontextualize verses in order to make the Bible say something it never intended to say. I'm not going to create a diet out of some descriptive verses and tell you that *this* is the key to all of your fitness goals. Instead, I want to show you what the Bible says, to look for principles that could be helpful and then to encourage you to ask the necessary questions to begin stewarding your unique body to be strong for your unique tasks.

Before we go any further, I need you to do me a favor. I need you to put your tribalism aside and be willing to read this with an open mind. If you are reading this and looking for me to support your current diet or the latest workout trend, you will find yourself very disappointed – because I won't. I won't give you lots of black and white rules for eating and exercising because there is no one-size-fits-all solution. This book won't give you science-based-metabolic-insert *fitness word here*-type workouts. Remember, we are looking at biblical principles to help *you* steward *your* body. I'm *not* saying the intention of each of the verses I will use is addressing your eating and exercise – they're not. But when we look at what was written on the topics, when we consider our position in Christ, and when we maintain a healthy dose of reality, we can formulate some guiding principles that can give hope to even the most chronic of dieters.

I also need to warn you that this book could feel personal. We live in a world where we are told many stories about our identity. Stating a simple fact that holding extra weight is unhealthy is often received as an attack on a person's character and being.

While I will try to write gently, I won't tell you that you can be healthy at any size, big or small (because you can't). I won't tell you that if you follow these simple steps your battle will be over in 90 days (because it won't), and I won't tell you just to love and accept yourself the way you are (because love and acceptance are not found within yourself, they are found only in Christ.)

What I will tell you is that regardless of your size, you can honor God with your eating and exercise, and that this journey may be difficult but that you don't have to do it alone. I'll also remind you that you were made in the image of God and that God loves you and that there is "now no condemnation for those who are in Christ" (Romans 8:1). Your journey may not result in pounds lost, but breaking free from societal and self-imposed rules is worth far more.

Strong For Your Tasks is not a how-to book about weight loss. You may need to lose weight, gain weight, or think a whole lot less about your weight in order to steward your unique body well. The numbers on the scale do not define health. It's a mistake to think that just because someone isn't overweight they are healthy. Some of the worst relationships with food and exercise belong to high level athletes and bodybuilders – the same people society would laud for their health and fitness. While losing weight might be your act of stewardship, I also recognize that there are individuals who are struggling despite not having weight to lose. I have never been obese; however, my relationship with food and exercise was one that I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy.

Finally, if you are skeptical about how this could apply to you based on your age, disability, or current fitness levels, I would encourage you to skip ahead to Chapter 7: *Broken World. Broken Body*. If you're dealing with some sort of disability, feel that years of poor choices have disqualified you from ever being "healthy",

or that age is a limiting factor, that chapter may serve as an invitation to continue reading the rest of the book.

At the end of each chapter, you will find a section called “Personal Training”. This section is to help you reflect on your current level of stewardship and if there are ways in which you can improve upon it. I encourage you to use the space beneath the questions (or a notebook) to write down your answers. Sometimes what seems totally logical in our head makes zero sense when it gets out onto the page.

I am excited to see how God will use this book to open your eyes to stewardship. You may never be healthy, but you can be healthier. You may never be strong, but you can be stronger. Anyone can steward their body and you too can be strong for your tasks.

Personal Training

- How does knowing your body belongs to God change how you take care of it?
- What stories are you believing about your body and/or health? (ie. I'm too fat, I'm too broken, health doesn't matter, I need to look a certain way, etc.)
- What is one thing you hope to learn by reading *Strong For Your Tasks*?

Chapter 1

Stewardship: More than Weight Loss

Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A. That I am not my own, but belong— body and soul, in life and in death— to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood and has set me free from all the power of the devil.

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 1

Five billion, five-hundred million. That's "about" how many search results Google came up with for the term "weight loss" in all of 1.19 seconds.

We live in a society that is obsessed with weight loss. When most people think of getting healthier, their minds automatically go to weight loss, restrictive diets, and long hours of boring cardio. It makes sense for a number of reasons. Most people who are actively looking to improve their health are probably carrying some extra pounds. Secondly, people who are viewed as healthy tend to be muscular with low levels of body fat. Finally, companies spend hundreds of millions of dollars each year to lead you to believe that for you to matter you need to look a certain way, and wouldn't you know it, they have a product to help!

While our society places high value on weight loss, God does not. There is not a single verse in the Bible calling Christians to lose weight. In fact, the only time when a diet and its effects on body composition is mentioned is with Daniel, and he became “fatter in flesh” (Daniel 1:15). However, Daniel’s diet was not prescriptive; it was Daniel’s way of seeking to honor God by not defiling his body with the king’s food (1:8).

Because God doesn’t value weight loss, I didn’t want to write another book on the topic – Remember, this is *not* a weight loss book. Not everyone who is in a poor relationship with eating and exercise needs to lose weight. While some gym-goers’ habits of healthy eating and regular exercise spawn from a genuine desire to be healthier, I would guess that most attend their daily “worship” sessions as a means to gain good standing in the eyes of others. From the outside, most people wouldn’t notice anything wrong—after all, if you looked like a bodybuilder or fitness guru all your problems would just disappear, right? My heart goes out to this group because this has largely been my journey. Binge eating and punishing workouts were a regular part of my routine. I didn’t need to lose weight, but my struggle with pursuing “perfection” was eating away at me. While I looked fit, I was far from healthy.

Instead of focusing on weight loss, I want to present stewardship as a biblical, personal, adaptable, and enjoyable approach to your health and fitness. Stewardship simply means to take care of something. One of our roles as Christians is to steward (take care of) our bodies.

We need to recognize the line between stewardship and idolatry can become very thin. Stewardship does not mean that we are obsessing over our bodies. We are not slaves to the gym and “health foods”. We are not called to six-pack abs and personal

bests. Instead, stewardship means doing what we can to honor God with our bodies while acknowledging that we live in a fallen world with bodies and desires that are affected by the curse of sin and death. There will be seasons where your health is beyond your direct control. There will be times where you feel you are doing everything “right” and you still get sick and worn down. It’s in those moments that you need to remember two things: First, your health is a grace-given gift that we must never take for granted. Secondly, His grace is sufficient for you (2 Corinthians 12:9) and God can use those tough times for His glory and your good (Romans 8:28).

Fully to embrace stewardship as our goal will require changing the way that we view health and fitness. Tossing aside traditional standards of success such as weight, measurements, and strength isn’t going to be easy. As Paul writes in Romans 12:2, we are to be transformed by the renewal of our minds. Our journey to transformation begins in changing the way we think about our health and fitness. Only then can we fully understand that God’s good, pleasing and perfect will is *not* low body fat and big muscles.

In stewarding your body, your weight could go up, down or stay the same – and that’s okay. We want our eyes to turn off of the scale, off of the weights, off of the mirror and instead to “gaze upon the beauty of the Lord” (Psalm 27:4).

Stewardship is showing the world that while our current body will eventually pass away, our hope is in our Savior, Jesus Christ, who will one day give us our resurrected bodies. We also recognize that while we wait for the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23), our actions are not without consequences. When we are stewarding our body, we’re not operating from a place of fear. Stewardship acknowledges that no kale smoothie, essential

oil, or detox tea will save us.

When we are stewarding our bodies, our ultimate pursuit is not the approval of others but rather recognizing that we are approved by God, not by anything that we have done, but through Jesus. And that by grace, through faith we are welcomed as sons and daughters. There might be times when others acknowledge your results. Your job is to use that as an opportunity to share about the work God has done in your life; to share about the transformation of your heart and mind.

Your Good Body

One of the major heresies arising in the early church was Gnosticism. Gnosticism, from the Greek, *gnōsis*, meaning “having knowledge” or “to know”, put special emphasis on the mind and obtaining special knowledge. Gnostics believed that they could obtain salvation through having mystical revelations that were made known to them rather than to common people. Gnostics were not simply high-level Bible scholars, but viewed their revelations as extra-biblical. As a result of them elevating knowledge and the mind, they viewed the physical body as evil and believed it was holding the mind captive. This line of thinking led some to asceticism, abstaining from any physical pleasure, or to antinomianism, the idea that because the body is less valuable than the mind you can do anything you want to it (including gluttony, promiscuity, and abuse) without consequence.

It’s interesting how, even after thousands of years, we can still find ourselves as functional gnostics. On one hand, we can believe that in order to be healthy we must deny ourselves all physical pleasure. We set ourselves up with diets that vilify certain foods while simultaneously performing workouts designed to punish our body. Maybe you’re part of, or wanting to be in, the “fit” crowd

and meticulously weigh, count, and obsess over everything that goes into your body. While there are certain foods we may choose to abstain from, we shouldn't reject foods out of a self-inflicted form of punishment, man-made morality, or an attitude of superiority.

How many times have you heard a family member, co-worker, or yourself complaining about your new diet? "I would *love* to have a donut but can't;" "All I can think about is how tasty carbs would be;" or "I can barely walk after leg day.?" People borderline abuse their bodies through workouts their bodies are ill prepared for in order to reach their goals quicker than ever. They restrict their diet so much that it starts to consume their thoughts.

One of the biggest reasons we can fall into antinomianism is because our experience with the aestheticism side has been so brutal. As a physical education teacher, I have lots of people telling me it must be easy because I can just make the kids do push-ups if they aren't listening. However, I would never make kids do push-ups as a form of punishment. Exercise is not a punishment. I try to instill in all of my students that idea. I tell them if their body is able to do exercise that they shouldn't waste it. Countless people have associated exercise with punishment. They believe that their lack of discipline has made them a bad person that must be punished by doing exercises that they don't like and eating foods that they don't enjoy. This couldn't be further from the truth.

We can also find ourselves in functional antinomianism when we have found comfort in food and inactive pastimes, and have allowed the physical effects of such choices to add up. The sins of gluttony and laziness (which we often keep as pet-sins) may have taken up residence in our hearts. Then, we may decide that changing our relationship with food and exercise is too hard, if

not impossible, and accept that this is the way things are going to be.

Maybe the health of your body is near the very bottom of your priorities. You may not feel that you are indulging in the sins of gluttony and laziness, but apathy towards your health has become your way of life and the effects of this thinking are starting to have negative consequences.

You might be doing good things that are still causing you to neglect stewarding your body. There are countless pastors who are faithfully studying the word of God and teaching it to their congregations who have allowed years of potlucks, coffees, and Bible study snacks to equal lots of extra pounds that have led to poor health. Sometimes good, godly pursuits will result in poor stewardship. We can often think that the choice is either/or, instead of realizing that our spiritual and physical health are not mutually exclusive. You can and should continue to pursue your other God-honoring priorities, while also looking to steward your body better.

Our bodies are not bad. Remember, when God gave people a body, not only did He call it good, He called it “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Jesus had a human body while He was on earth and He also maintained a human body when He was resurrected and ascended to Heaven. We also know that there will be a day when our bodies are resurrected and we will spend eternity in our resurrected body.

The final way we can function as gnostics is in our constant pursuit of special knowledge. How many people jump from workout to workout, diet to diet, or supplement to supplement thinking they have *finally* found the secret to a better body. To follow a simple, moderate plan is fine for an average person, but

they need something more advanced, complicated and confusing. Sound familiar? It hurts my heart every time I hear someone spouting off misinformation about their new extreme diet, intense workout or detox tea, treating it as if it is somehow better than practicing moderation.

Stewardship stands in the gap between aestheticism and antinomianism by saying, “your body is a good gift from God, therefore take care of it!” while at the same time saying, “God has given us the good gift of delicious food. Enjoy it in a way that brings glory to Him.” Stewardship is about enjoying food and exercise in such a way that we are not turning to it for satisfaction; rather we are enjoying it because we have found satisfaction in the One who truly satisfies. Stewardship is a balancing act of caring without idolizing and enjoyment without hedonism.

Personal Training

- How would pursuing stewardship of your body vs traditional goals (weight loss, muscle gain, measurements, etc.) change your life?
- Do you tend towards denying pleasure or pursuing pleasure? In what ways?
- In what ways are you currently stewarding your body well? In what ways are you not stewarding your body well?
- Do you spend too much time and attention on “healthy” pursuits? Neglecting the things God has commanded you to do? Placing your worth in your physical appearance?
- Are you keeping a pet-sin of gluttony or laziness? Are you loving food more than The Giver of food? Is comfort your idol?
- Has the stewardship of your body simply fallen off of your radar? Is it something you desire to give more attention to but don’t know where to start?

Chapter 2

A Biblical Case for Stewardship

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

Psalm 24:1-2

Where most “Christian” diets fall flat is they either take a few verses out of context and use them as proof texts, or they take descriptive passages and turn them into prescriptive plans. If I make diet and exercise out to be more than the Bible says it is, it can lead people to believe that they are sinning when they fail to comply with my arbitrary standards.

Stewardship is different. With stewardship, we recognize that the Bible isn't a book about diet and exercise, but it does provide principles pointing to stewarding our bodies. Our whole journey towards stewardship and health is based on principles. We are never guaranteed health through lifting weights and eating vegetables. However, we know that if we do these things consistently, we are more likely to become healthier.

For example, I've seen people (my former self included) take 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 which says, “do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a

price. So glorify God in your body,” and make it all about their physical health. Paul did not have green smoothies and workout plans in mind when he was writing this to the church in Corinth. Paul is writing to the Corinthians about fleeing sexual immorality. The verse isn’t at all about what they were eating or drinking; *however*, it does give us a principle that can guide our health journey.

We know that our bodies are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (see also Romans 8:11). 1 Corinthians 6 also tells us that our bodies belong to God. Finally, Paul exhorts the Corinthian Christians to glorify God in their bodies. We can see that God doesn’t want us to be reckless with our bodies. Paul tells Christians to “present their bodies as living sacrifices” as an act of worship (Romans 12:1). How we treat our bodies is not without consequence, both spiritually and physically. So even though Paul was addressing the Corinthians about sexual immorality specifically, we can still glean the principle that because our bodies are a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit we should not defile them with sin, whether that is sexual immorality or gluttony.

When God was giving instructions for the tabernacle, the place where He dwelled among His people in the Old Testament, He was very specific (Exodus 25-30, 35-40). He wanted His dwelling place to be to His exact specifications. Nothing was overlooked and nothing was done haphazardly. At the same time, the purpose of the tabernacle was not to be the object of worship. While the tabernacle would have been an amazing sight to behold, its purpose was to be a place where God could dwell among His people (Exodus 25:8). If *we* are now the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, we need to make sure that we are stewarding our bodies, while at the same time not pursuing vanity as our end goal. Our bodies were not meant to be the object of worship, but

rather to house the One we are to worship.

Many fitness pursuits make vanity the end goal. However, if our goal is to flaunt our body rather than to demonstrate Christ-likeness, we've totally missed the point. As D.L. Moody said, "Our greatest fear should not be of failure, but of succeeding at something that doesn't really matter." What a shame it would be to biohack our way to optimal health, but fail to secure eternal life. Health is a good thing to desire, but it should not become a god that we worship.

Our bodies should be kept healthy so that we are able to take God's love to all nations, baptizing and making disciples, teaching them everything Christ has commanded (Matthew 28:19-20). Instead, we often use exercise to fuel our pride. Our end goal is less about praising him and more about earning the praise of others. We want others to think we're special. We want people to want to be us. We want people to find us desirable. To sum it up, we want to lead others into sin. We want to be the object of their jealousy, lust, and worship. We want them to covet our body. It doesn't take more than a few seconds on social media to see this at work: Scantly-clad individuals showing off all of their hard work and dedication, screaming for the validation of faceless strangers; People who feel the need to expose themselves for the approval of others.

We should never try to be a stumbling block for our neighbor, and we also need to avoid the trap of coveting our neighbor's body: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, **or anything that is your neighbor's**" (Exodus 20:17).

It can be easy to scroll mindlessly through pages of half-naked

fitness influencers, picking out your goal body. Or to find your mind wishing you had the physique of your coworker, that guy at the gym, or the waitress that just brought you your meal. You need to be careful to guard your heart from coveting. As Proverbs says, “Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life” (4:23). What may seem like a good activity for gaining motivation can often lead your heart astray. It puts the emphasis solely on the outward appearance. And while you are coveting, you are also minimizing Image Bearers down to their physical attractiveness. This flies in the face of the character of God laid out in 1 Samuel 16:7: “But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” When we judge people’s physical appearance and use them as our measuring stick, we sin.

Jesus’ invitation to follow Him begins with denying oneself (Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23). Paul also talks a lot about putting our flesh to death (Romans 6:6, Romans 8:13, Galatians 2:20, Galatians 5, Colossians 3:5). Denying your sinful nature and desires is key when it comes to stewarding your body. This journey will not be easy – if it were, everyone would be doing it already. There will be times you will be tempted to give into old desires of gluttony, over-restriction, laziness, or self-worship. In those moments you must remember that to follow Christ you must put to death your “flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24).

Discipline

Another biblical principle we can draw from is discipline. As the great philosopher Inigo Montoya once said, “You keep using that word, I do not think it means what you think it means.” When

many think of discipline, the first image their brain typically conjures up has to do with punishment. While that might be an aspect of discipline, I think a richer definition of the word is to train, correct, or, as the root of the word would suggest, disciple.

As a parent, I am called to love my children. One of the ways I do this is to discipline them. When I see sinful behaviors being revealed, I need to intervene on their behalf. I need not only to stop the behavior, but I also need to direct them going forward. My goal isn't to send them to their room to allow them to sit in guilt, hoping that it will crush them to the point of obedience, but rather I want them to realize that life is full of joy when we're walking in obedience to Christ. The same is true with disciplining our bodies. Our goal should never be to punish ourselves for overeating, but rather to call out sin in our lives and help ourselves recognize that oftentimes abundance comes through abstinence.

If you've grown up in the church, you've likely heard of spiritual disciplines. Acts such as reading your Bible, prayer, fasting, etc. are all ways we discipline ourselves, not as punishment, but as ways to train ourselves in godliness. These acts might not always be enjoyable at the time, but through consistency we will begin to see the return on investment. With these various disciplines, it is unlikely that one single event will change your life forever; however, by putting in the time, day after day, year after year, you will see each of those small deposits adding up, preparing you for the day when you eventually need to make a withdrawal. You will also see that the disciplines themselves will become a joy and delight.

When you are disciplining your body, you shouldn't view it as punishment for poor behaviors. You should be training it so that it is better able to be used as an instrument of worship. Working

out because you hate yourself is far less enjoyable than working out because you love God and want to honor Him with your body. Just like the spiritual disciplines, one salad or one workout won't make you instantly healthy, but if you are consistent in disciplining your body, you will eventually see the fruit that it bears.

Discipline in one area of life encourages discipline in other areas. Spiritual disciplines and physical disciplines work together. Your physical body and spiritual health are not completely separate.

While no discipline is pleasant, "later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11). Discipline isn't about avoiding pleasure, but rather about pursuing freedom. As pastor JT English said, "Discipline brings freedom, not slavery."¹

¹ English, JT, co-host. "Knowing Faith" #28 - Lightning Round: Q&A (Podcast). December 26, 2018. <https://apple.co/33KJsoh>

Personal Training

- Is there something you are pursuing that doesn't matter?
- In what areas do you need to practice denying your sinful desires?
- How does viewing discipline as “disciplining” or training rather than punishment change the way you treat/think about your body?
- How might discipline bring freedom in your life?
- Have you been careless about where you find your “inspiration” for fitness? Has covetousness, judgmental thoughts, or lust been able to flourish? How can you better guard your heart?

Chapter 3

A Practical Case for Stewardship

Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it.

Deuteronomy 10:14

Our lives as Christians are more than just theology. There is a practical working out of our faith (Philippians 2:12-18). These works are not necessary for salvation, but rather are the natural outflowing of a transformed life.

When it comes to stewardship, the following are some practical reasons why it is the standard of health you should strive to attain:

Personal

As much as the idea of stewardship is applicable to everyone, it is very personal when put into practice. While the goal of stewardship is the same, how that is lived out will be different for everyone. For some, this is the point in the book where you start freaking out. You want to know exactly what to do, when to do it, and for how long to do it. You want the meal plan and the macros for everything you need to eat. Others will breathe a huge sigh of relief that you no longer have to try and keep up with that 20-

something trainer at the gym putting you through their favorite workouts and diet.

When you are working on stewarding *your* body, know that there is no objective standard of stewardship. You don't need to obtain certain levels of strength. You don't need to achieve low levels of body fat or scale weight. Some people may look at you and scoff at how "out of shape" you are. Stewardship is about humbly and quietly taking care of your body in a way that allows you to love God and love people to your full ability.

Proverbs 31:17 (NIV) says, "She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks." Notice how it doesn't specify *how* strong she is, but she is simply strong for *her* tasks. She is strong to take care of her family and business. No mention of her weight. No mention of her waist size. All we know is that she is a fruitful woman who is strong enough to do *her* tasks.

Because stewardship is so personal, it also makes it attainable. You don't need to be as strong as me. I don't need to be as strong as you. Each one of us has our own unique tasks that will require various amounts of strength and health. If you are able bodied and strong, maybe your tasks involve helping your neighbor when they're moving. Or, maybe your level of strength and ability currently allows for you to lie in your bed, interceding for your friends and family. Neither of these tasks is more or less meaningful. While both require different levels of strength, both are ways through which we can fulfill the command to love God and love people (Matthew 22:36-40).

Adaptable

As your life changes, stewardship will change along with you. Stewardship isn't about sitting down for an evening, making a

plan, and following it for the rest of your life. Stewardship is about constantly considering how to glorify God with your body in various seasons.

I remember talking to a woman once who was gung ho to get in the best shape of her life. She was ready to run, lift weights, eat salads, and do all the other stuff a fit person does. The big problem? She was three weeks postpartum. In this season, stewarding her body should have included rest and recovery, not high-intensity intervals.

When we are stewarding our bodies, our health and fitness is more like a dial than like a switch. Instead of on-or-off, all-in or all-out, stewardship promotes more or less. For example, there will be times when things are running smoothly and you are able to get to the gym, plan and prep all of your food, and healthy choices come very easy. There will be other seasons where everything hits the fan and your only goal is to survive. Instead of having the all-or-nothing attitude and giving yourself permission to make every unhealthy choice you desire, think of it as turning the dial down a bit and making as many healthy choices as you can, knowing that it won't be perfect. In the midst of the chaos, maybe you can only workout once in a week instead of your usual four times – that's okay! You might not eat vegetables at each meal, but that doesn't mean you have to resort to eating exclusively candy and donuts. Your stewardship will adapt with you, and there is no problem with lowering your expectations for seasons or occasions.

After the birth of each of my children, I've had to battle against the all-or-nothing mindset. While I still try to find ways to get my workouts in, the extra snacks, casseroles, and baking dropped off by caring friends and family, not to mention the new "sleep" schedule make eating well very difficult and the temptation to

throw stewardship aside becomes strong. In these moments I've reminded myself that things don't have to be as they once were, nor will they always be like this. My stewardship can adapt with the different seasons. I don't have to eat in an ideal way. I may add some body fat while losing some strength. That's okay. My call as a husband and father is not to be the strongest man on the block, but to love God and lay down my life for my family. When seasons change, my stewardship can change right along with it.

Enjoyable

Finally, stewardship can be enjoyable. If you don't enjoy how you eat or exercise, you probably won't do it for very long. While there will be some rough patches as you begin to break old habits to form new ones, you should be able to enjoy the lifelong process of stewardship.

Stewardship is a lifelong pursuit. You need to recognize that life is going to happen along the way. Instead of proclaiming that you will never eat sugar again, maybe you look to eat a little bit less for the next couple of days. By trying to do too much, too soon, you run the risk of burning out and going back to your old, familiar way of life. Even a small amount of change is going to be hard for most people. Because stewardship doesn't have a finish line, and there is no race to get there.

Personal Training

- What are your tasks in this season? How could better stewardship of your health help you accomplish these tasks more effectively?
- Looking ahead to the future, how could stewarding your body now help you attain those future goals?
- How do you feel that your current health and fitness has hurt your ability to perform your tasks? Or, how do you feel that your current pursuit of health has distracted you from the tasks God has called you to?
- How could you implement the “dial” thinking into the stewardship of your health instead of falling prey to the all-or-nothing approach?

Chapter 4

A People Set Apart

“For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground. For I am the Lord who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”

Leviticus 11:44-45

You’ve likely skipped... I mean thoroughly read through the book of Leviticus during your Bible-reading plan at some point in your life. After God miraculously sets His people free from Pharaoh (Exodus 1-14), you find a large group of people wandering around in the desert. After 400 years in an Egyptian culture, God’s people found themselves without any identity of their own. While God had gotten the Israelites out of Egypt, He was now working on getting Egypt out of the Israelites. Coming from a polytheistic culture, YHWH—the God of the Bible—would have been one god among many other gods.

In the book of Exodus, God gives the Law to Moses to establish a covenant with His chosen people (Exodus 19:5-6). The primary purpose of the law, whether they realized it then or not, was to

show the people their inability to live a pure life (Romans 3:19-20, 7:7) and to show them their need for a Savior. Another purpose was to make God's people holy or set apart from the neighboring nations. One of the ways God did that was through their diet.

Read Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14:3-21.

God gives some specific commands regarding the Israelite's diet by identifying clean (eat these) and unclean (avoid these) foods.

Lots of God's laws make sense to us. Commands of don't murder (Exodus 20:13), don't beat your servant (Exodus 21), and don't sleep with your family members (Leviticus 18) seem like common sense. Yet in the midst of this God cares about what His people are eating.

Why?

The answer is found at the end of Leviticus 11: *"For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy... For I am the Lord who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy"* (44-45), and echoed in Deuteronomy 14:21: *"For you are a people holy to the Lord your God."*

The reason God gives these commands is to have his people be holy, or set apart, from the nations around them. By abstaining from certain foods, His people were bringing glory to the God of Israel. Even in the Old Testament, God was showing people to eat and drink to the glory of God.

There are some people who think, as Christians, we should still be following a Kosher diet and eating in the same way that God commanded the Israelites. While a detailed discussion on "to

Kosher, or not to Kosher” goes beyond the scope of this book, I believe that New Testament believers are free from the food restrictions laid out to the Israelites.

During the Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15, the apostles and some elders met together to discuss which parts of the law Gentile-believers needed to follow. They settled on four points (Acts 15:29): abstain from eating what has been sacrificed to idols, from eating blood, from eating what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. Notably, three of the four guidelines are related to food.

Instead of worrying about Kosher food rules, we want to realize that eating habits can set us apart from the world around us. One way we can do this is by focusing more on *how* we eat versus *what* we eat. What if we ate our food with thanksgiving to God instead of mindlessly shoveling down everything in sight? What if we denied ourselves that second piece of cake, not because we can't eat it, but because we are already satisfied? What if we ate in a way that fueled our body to “go into the world making disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded” (Matthew 28:19-20), instead of restricting our intake as much as possible as a means of punishing or perfecting our body? What if you had freedom from counting calories and obsessing over every bit of food that passed your lips? The world would stop and notice.

Food Morality

As humans, we are constantly trying to show our worth to those around us. We desire to prove ourselves to be righteous in the judging eyes of others. We want to be worthy of their admiration and worship. We want to be like God.

At the same time, we are also trying to justify ourselves before our condemning conscience. Unless we have seared our nagging conscience, we all know that we are sinners. We all know that we fall short. And, we will try all matters of things to justify ourselves and quiet that pesky conscience.

Because the law of God shows us how far short we fall from His standard of goodness, we are often tempted to create our own standard of goodness. Our diet allows us to create false standards of righteousness. We replace “thou shall not murder” with “thou shall not eat burgers” and “keep the Sabbath holy” with “eat organic produce only.” When we give ourselves diet rules, we create a standard that allows us to feel superior to those around us. It can be tempting to say that foods are good or bad. The problem is that we’re adding moral standards to amoral objects. Ice cream is not morally bad or evil, nor does it make you such by consuming it (Matthew 15:11). We can very quickly become legalistic in our eating and exercising, thinking that anyone who does not live up to *our* standards is somehow lesser.

These arbitrary standards are also the source of tremendous amounts of guilt. The standards that we set are often far higher than they need to be. Abstaining from meat does *not* make you morally superior to other people. Yes, Adam and Eve ate only plants in the garden, but God also gave Noah permission to eat animals (Genesis 9:1-3), not to mention that Jesus, as a Jew, would have observed the Passover, eating meat. Your choice to abstain does *not* make you righteous before God.

Paul writes in Romans 14:1-13, “As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the

one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. *The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.* For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written,

'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.'

So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother" (italics mine).

Paul is calling for unity between the Jews and Gentiles. He is saying that these outward actions do not add to what Christ has done for you. Whether you choose to eat or abstain from certain foods is a matter of conscience. Give thanks to God in your eating and do not pass judgment on others. Whether you are of stronger

or weaker conscience, be gracious with your fellow believers who hold different convictions of conscience. When our diet and exercise plans become a stumbling block to unity amongst believers, we need to repent.

Read Matthew 23:1-36.

Jesus, addressing a group of people, starts to call out the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. The Pharisees, simply put, were “Rule Followers.” They were checklist-guys. They had their lists of things to do and sought favor from God by their lineage and by following the letter of the Law. Beyond simply striving to follow all of God’s commands, the Pharisees added their own traditions to the commands of God. They were holding others to a standard that God never commanded and were setting their own standard for righteousness.

“Jesus said to them, ‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness’” (Matthew 23:27-28).

While the Pharisees were checking off the boxes by their external actions, they were sinning in secret, and it was putting their souls at risk.

Too often our pursuit of health can turn us into Foodie Pharisees. We create standards that match our version of what healthy looks like and then apply that standard to others. When they fail, we assume the moral high ground.

Like a Pharisee, it’s far easier to appear healthy than it is to be healthy. I have no problem ordering a salad at a restaurant under

the watchful eyes of friends and family. The problem comes when I get home and inhale 3000 calories of unnecessary food. I become a white-washed tomb, appearing healthy while being full of gluttonous hypocrisy.

As Paul writes, “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose” (Galatians 2:15-21).

You are not justified by the works of The Law—especially your own law. Hitting your macros perfectly, achieving optimal vegetable intake, and avoiding processed food does not improve your standing before God. If righteousness were attainable through our diet, then Christ died for no purpose.

Free To, Free From

In the same breath, you need to hear what I’m *not* saying. I am not saying that all food is healthy for you. There is a major difference between morally good/bad and healthy/unhealthy. Paul also wrote, “‘Everything is permissible,’ but not everything

is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible,’ but not everything builds up” (1 Corinthians 6:12, CSB). He would later echo that by writing, “‘I have the right to do anything,’ you say—but not everything is beneficial. ‘I have the right to do anything’—but not everything is constructive...Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, ‘The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it’” (1 Corinthians 10:23, 25-26).

In these passages, Paul is addressing the issue of Christian freedom. What *can* Christians do and what *should* Christians do? We could look at this principle and say, “We are free to eat any food we want, but not every food is going to make me healthier.” You are free to eat cookies, but we also need to realize that they likely won’t provide our body with lots of nutrition.

As Christians, we have freedom in Christ. When it comes to our eating and exercise, we are *free to* eat foods we want to eat and exercise how we want to exercise. Before you go and rip open that bag of chips you’ve been avoiding, realize that not everyone is free to do these things. We must also make sure that we are free from the trap of sin that our eating or exercise choices may bring.

There are some people who, by exercising their freedom in Christ to eat all things, will actually be gratifying their flesh. You might have foods known as *trigger foods*. These are foods that when you start to eat them, you won’t stop until you have eaten them all. When self-control (a fruit of the Spirit) goes out the window, you are acknowledging that you are no longer free, as you are showing that you are still enslaved to your sinful nature. This realization needn’t be met with a feeling of condemnation, but rather an awareness of your current place in your sanctification. God is transforming you into the image of Christ, one degree at a time (2 Corinthians 3:18). Repent of your lack of self-control and gratification of gluttony, and receive the

forgiveness of Christ. There may come a day when you are no longer enslaved by your fleshly desire to eat all the things, but until then, placing boundaries around the foods you eat is wise. As Paul wrote, “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13). You are *free to* eat cookies, but are you *free from* cookies? If one cookie triggers you to eat ten, you are not *free from* nor are you *free to*.

This is part of the balancing act that makes stewardship so personal. One person can enjoy a single slice of pizza, while that same slice of pizza will trigger a binge to end all binges in someone else. For those people, their stewardship is different. That doesn't mean you can never enjoy some of these foods. However, it may mean that you abstain for a time from foods that lead you to sin. If Jesus taught you to tear out your eye that caused you to sin (Matthew 5:29), it's safe to assume He would support avoiding cookies that lead to gluttony and hedonism for a while.

Sola Nutrimentum

The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century used five key points in opposing Roman Catholic theology: *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), *Sola Fide* (Faith alone), *Sola Gratia* (Grace alone), *Solus Christus* (Christ alone), and *Soli Deo Gloria* (to the glory of God alone).

For most of us, when we think of food, we might fall into the belief system of *Sola Nutrimentum* or, nourishment alone. You've likely heard the saying, “food is fuel.” This statement is very true; we do need food to fuel our bodies. Some will take this a step further and talk about how you wouldn't put regular unleaded fuel into a sports car, so why would you put “junk” into your body? Yes, food is fuel. We need energy to move and function.

However, food is not *only* fuel and you are not a sports car. While that saying sounds nice and may even provide a moment of inspiration, it oversimplifies things. A sports car does not deal with emotions, nor is it overly social. It doesn't have a job, responsibilities, stress or need to sleep because, well, it's not alive. It is not an Image Bearing human. You are. You are not a machine. Different areas of your life do not function in isolation. While food does fuel your body, that is not the only purpose of it.

The first thing to realize is that food is a gift: "And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.' And God said, 'Behold, **I have given you** every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food'" (Genesis 1:28-29, emphasis mine).

Food is a gift, so we need to be sure that we are receiving it with thanksgiving. In Paul's first letter to Timothy (4:3b-4), he tells Timothy that some "require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. **For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving**, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer" (emphasis mine).

A disproportionate amount of my good memories involve ice cream. If there were a food that a health guru would tell you to avoid, it would be ice cream: high sugar, high fat, dairy, and gluten (because you can't have ice cream without cookie dough chunks). Outside of calcium and trace protein, there is nothing "healthy" about ice cream. However, the look on my kids' faces when they get their ice cream cone is totally worth it. Using ice cream as a

way for our family to bond is a way that we choose to exercise our Christian freedom from strict dietary laws.

When we receive foods with thanksgiving, our hearts are being stirred up for God. As we partake in good food with good people, we are reminded of God's goodness. This means that I don't allow my dietary preferences to stand in the way of Christian fellowship or fellowship with unbelievers. If the offerings at church potluck aren't part of my normal diet, I don't make a scene or fuss, but rather enjoy what is available because of the freedom I have through Christ. If offering hospitality to my neighbors involves eating processed hotdogs with gluten-rich buns, I do so with joy and thankfulness.

Food serves as a great way to bring people together. As a teacher, one of my goals is to get to know my students beyond just their report card marks. I know that each individual in my class is an Image Bearer of their Creator and must be valued. One of the ways that I strive to get to know them is through Pizza Tuesday. Each Tuesday, I bring pizza for a small group of students and we spend the lunch hour together eating pizza and talking. There are no requirements other than show up and eat pizza. While we eat, we talk. I am well aware that there are healthier things in the world than pizza. However, I don't think there would be the same eagerness and excitement for *Celery Tuesday*. Food can be an incredible aid to building relationships.

Another value that food offers is pleasure. Has it ever dawned on you that God didn't *have* to make food taste good? Instead, as an act of grace towards humanity, He made food for us to enjoy. When the hungry Israelites were wandering around the wilderness (Exodus 16), they began complaining to Moses, "Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for

you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (3-4) Then God provided for their dietary needs. Not only did God provide meat and bread, but the bread tasted “like wafers made with honey” (16:31) He didn’t just give them a multi-vitamin and an acai bowl, He gave them food that tasted good!

God has given us food to eat and we are free to eat it. You don’t need to eat only vegetables, but you can. You don’t only need to eat Kosher, but you can. You don’t need to cut out carbs, but you can. We want to be evaluating how eating certain foods affect our ability to perform the tasks God has called us to, not making the foods we eat a matter of right or wrong.

When assessing how you steward your eating, remember that there isn’t an absolute right or wrong way to steward your body. If eating gluten, dairy, or nuts affects your ability to perform your tasks, stewardship might mean cutting them out. While some diets may be healthier than others, there isn’t a perfect diet that everyone should follow.

Personal Training

- What sort of food rules have you tried? How have those worked for you?
- Have you passed judgment on others for their dietary choices?
- Has food become a standard of morality for you? How so?
- Are there certain foods you are not free to eat because you are not free from eating them?
- How could you increase thankfulness for the foods you eat?

Chapter 5

Strong Enough

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

Mark 12:30

When it comes to physical exercise, the Bible does not have a lot to say. There isn't a single verse that gives prescriptive exercise advice. Many people will point to 1 Timothy 4:8 to show the importance of exercise, but again, we need to see what is actually being said. Paul says to Timothy, "for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." Paul isn't saying, "Timothy, you need to work out, bro!". Paul is saying, "Timothy, you know how important it is to take care of your physical body. Physical training benefits you for this momentary life, how much *more* should you care about your soul? Pursue godliness above all else." Paul is using the importance of physical training to emphasize the greater importance of godliness. With that being said, there are a few verses that can give us guiding principles to help us rightly think about how we

should work out.

Genesis 2:15 says, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work and keep it.” This tells us a few things: First, physical labor is good for us. God, pre-Fall, tells Adam to work. Secondly, it tells us that our human bodies are *designed* to work. This verse isn’t talking about going to the gym and lifting weights. It was talking about physical labor – Adam was the first farmer.

The first way you can honor God with your body is by being as active as you are able. Our bodies were not designed to sit around all day doing nothing. Our everyday lives have become far more sedentary than any generation before us. Even in an attempt to be active, I find it very difficult to get 4,000, let alone 10,000 steps in every day. This includes walking to and from work *and* teaching PE. For most people, to get the same benefits of the work given to Adam, they will need to incorporate some sort of resistance training into their days. This doesn’t have to be a lot, but you should look to incorporate whatever activity your body allows for each day. Your body was created to move and work, and moving it as much as you are able will benefit your health immensely.

Another passage that talks about physical labor is Proverbs 31:10-31. This “excellent wife” is a hard worker. She makes food (15), gardens (16), spins yarn (19), helps the poor (20), sews (21-22, 24), and does not give into idleness (27). She is able to do all of these things because she is strong (17, 25). Notice how her strength is not for the sake of strength, but it is to help her in *her* tasks. She is stewarding her body. This praise-worthy woman is not lauded for her tiny waist, body-fat percentage, or ketogenic diet, but rather for her stewardship. She is using the strength God has provided to accomplish the tasks He has called her to do. We

would do well to follow her example and use our bodies to fulfill the good works God has prepared in advance for us. Like I said earlier, you do not need to be as physically strong as me and I do not need to be as strong as you. We should all work to build and maintain a level of physical strength and fitness to accomplish the tasks that God has laid before us.

The Ditches

The ditches on both sides of the path to physical stewardship are steep. On one side, there is the ditch of neglect. If you find yourself in the ditch of neglect, it could be for a number of reasons. Many people who don't exercise avoid it because of poor experiences with it. Whether it was a coach or teacher who used exercise as punishment or a trainer or exercise program that pushed them too hard too fast, a poor first impression with exercise has led many to avoid it.

This view of exercise is strengthened every time they attempt to start working out again. In order to get the maximum amount of change in the shortest time possible, they feel the need to crank the intensity *way* up. This confirms their presuppositions that working out isn't fun – it hurts.

Alongside this group in the neglect ditch is another sub-group of people who simply don't care. While they believe, in theory, that working out would benefit them, they simply haven't made the time or effort to start. This group isn't necessarily overweight or lazy, nor are they necessarily anti-workout, it's just something they aren't overly concerned with.

The other workout ditch is the ditch of obsession. People in this ditch put an overemphasis on their physical training. The thought of missing a workout induces anxiety. This obsession goes beyond simply an enjoyment of exercise and has become a

dependence on it. These people *need* to exercise. Many other more important pursuits take a back seat to the gym. The first thing that is scheduled each week is their workout time and all other events are fit in around it, and often, it's time with God that finds itself on the chopping block first. People who are obsessed with working out have many motivations behind their actions. For some, they are unsatisfied with their current physique, either feeling "too fat" or "too skinny" and are desiring to create a "better" version of themselves. Others may be using the gym as an escape from a reality that is far from perfect. Regardless of what the reasons are, their workouts have begun to control their lives.

Within this group, we must also remember that just because someone goes to the gym often does not mean that they are obsessed. We cannot judge someone else's heart or motives. Perhaps, in the same way that you watch sports, read, bake, etc. this person's hobby is working out. Some people enjoy physical activity and the gym is a great way to be active. Physical activity, like food, is a good gift from God to be enjoyed. Some may also need to be in great physical condition in order to accomplish the tasks God has given them. We should not condemn the Navy Seal as "obsessed with working out" if his job requires him to be in peak physical shape.

The final group is a group of ditch hoppers. These are the people who, in an attempt to improve their health, insist on jumping over the path of stewardship, swinging the pendulum of motivation wildly from ditch to ditch. They follow up seasons of neglect with intense bouts of obsession. Their all-or-nothing approach bounces them from ditch to ditch. A simple, moderate approach doesn't get them the results fast enough, so they jump over to the ditch of obsession. When motivation dips from lack of

results or their body's inability to take such brutal workouts, they jump back to neglect. They get caught in the cycle and struggle to get out.

The unglamorous solution for all of these groups is the same: steward *your* body. If you haven't been active and you feel that some more activity would be good stewardship, do it. It doesn't mean you need to start training to set personal bests in the gym, but maybe you incorporate some intentional, low-to-moderate physical activity a couple of times each week. If you find that the gym is causing you to miss out on more important things, it might mean taking a big breath and dialing things back a bit.

The same principal of *free to, free from* applies to working out. You are *free to* work out every day, but if your motivation for such frequent workouts is vanity, you are not *free from* working out. The flip-side is true as well – you are *free to* relax and enjoy leisure activities, but are you *free from* enjoying those same activities, or have you given in to laziness and the idol of comfort?

I have gone through many seasons where I have not been free from working out. Dragging myself out of bed early, day after day to try and sculpt my body to earn the approval of others wore me down and made me miserable to live with. While some may have used the terms, “dedicated” or “committed”, I would use a different one: “slave”. If the thought of taking a few days off of working out causes anxiety in you, you need to check your heart.

Workout as Worship

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). If we are to do *everything* to the glory of God, I imagine that would include exercise.

Working out as worship goes beyond blasting the latest *Shane*

and Shane album while you pump the weights. It's also more than evangelizing the entire gym (while those are both great things to do).

Worshipping through our workouts is about humbly going about our workout so that we can be prepared to go where God calls us to go, do what God calls us to do, and love who God calls us to love. Your workout becomes an act of worship when you are doing it for God's glory. When you limp into your workplace, complaining about how sore you are from leg-day, you are attempting to stroke your pride. In an attempt to earn approval from others, you make yourself the center of attention. Stewardship is not about making a big deal of ourselves or how much we can lift. When we are stewarding our bodies through exercise, we realize that we can go through a workout without posting about it on social media.

Using your workout as worship might not even include entering the gym at all. You might be in a season where manual labor is what is required to be strong for your tasks. While there are lots of benefits to lifting weights, they are certainly not required to steward your body. Just as different people enjoy different types of food, each person will enjoy different types of workouts (swimming, walking, lifting weights, etc.). Figure out which activity is best to help you stay strong for your tasks, while also being enjoyable so you stick with it.

But, you may be asking, "how often should I work out?" Just like eating, there is a spectrum everyone falls on. There is no magic number of times per week that you should be working out. Is your current level of activity appropriate for you to be strong for your tasks? Is your workout schedule taking away from more meaningful activities? You should re-evaluate. Is your rest between sets being counted in decades instead of minutes? Your

workout is most likely taking more time than is profitable. Identify your priorities in life and plan your schedule to match those priorities. Keeping your body moving should never be your top priority, yet neither should it fail to make it on the list, or your calendar.

I recently went through a season of being overactive. My motives were vain, and valuable family time was being sacrificed in the name of workouts. I was strongly convicted one morning while I was working out and looked and saw my family doing breakfast and morning Bible reading without me. I was totally embarrassed that I was neglecting my role of headship for a silly workout.

If you need to decrease your activity, try to find something productive to fill that time. I suggest giving it over to prayer and reading of your Bible, but it's really up to you. Another productive activity to pursue is more sleep. As laid out in the chapter on rest, physically resting is important to let your body heal. Along this line of thought, maybe taking a week or two off of working out completely is what your body and heart need to reset your priorities. It will be difficult, but can provide a lot of freedom. If your workout is taking priority over your time with God, you need to re-evaluate things.

Do you need to increase activity? If so, how much *can* (not should) you commit to doing each week? The ideal amount you want to do might not be the amount that you are able to do. Be realistic and start small. Don't worry about optimal right now. In fact, you may never work out the "optimal" amount. Figure out what you can afford to give and work it into your schedule.

Personal Training

- When it comes to working out, do you feel that good stewardship would mean doing more, less, or the same amount as you currently are?
- If you are just beginning, or restarting your physical activity, what are some different types of exercise you could try? What do you enjoy? What would help you become strong for your specific tasks?

Chapter 6

Rest

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Genesis 2:1-3

The last area we'll look at, but likely the most important one, is rest. Rest is important for a number of reasons. If you've spent any time around a tired toddler, you can testify to that. No amount of reason, *Peppa Pig*, or snacks can settle down your over-tired two-year old. When you think of it, we're not much different. When you are tired, you begin to do things that you wouldn't normally do. For many, if they are going to make a compromising decision, it will happen when they are lacking rest.

Sabbath

Another, and maybe more important reason why rest is so important is because somewhere between the commandments of "Have no other gods before Me" and "Do not covet" sits a command to rest.

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:8-11).

Now there are some people who would argue that the Ten Commandments are not for Christians today, but I want you to consider the following:

Firstly, which of the other nine commandments would we say were only for the Israelites? Are Christians allowed to violate any of the other nine because they were given specifically to Moses to give to the Israelites? We would say that it’s absurd to think Christians are no longer commanded not to murder or not to commit adultery. If we look at how Jesus viewed the ten commandments, He seems to take things *even further* (Matthew 5:21-30). Jesus is looking at the *spirit* of the law instead of the letter. If we look at the command to keep the Sabbath holy, we should be looking at the heart of it. Remember, God’s law is perfect. If the other nine lead to the flourishing of both individuals and nations, there might be something for us to gain from number four.

Many people have said that commandments two through ten are ways that we practically live out number one – that the rest of the list are ways that we keep ourselves from idolatry. When we dishonor our parents, we are idolizing self, when we covet we are idolizing stuff, when we commit adultery we are idolizing sex, etc. When we decide not to rest, we are committing the idolatry of productivity.

When we refuse to rest we are putting ourselves in the role of the one who holds all things together. In our pride, we think that if we were to take even a single day off of work everything would fall apart. We somehow think that God didn't anticipate our circumstances when He gave this commandment.

Notice how this commandment includes more than resting. After the initial command to remember the Sabbath, it says to work for six days. We are commanded to work hard for six days so that on the seventh we will be able to rest. This commandment applies to all people of all personality types. If you are a real go-getter and the thought of *only* working six days seems laughable, you've been commanded to rest. If you are more sloth-like in your approach to life, you've been commanded to work for six days, then rest.

There are also some who might be pushing back with, "But I thought we aren't under the Law?" and you would be correct. Also, notice how in the New Testament Jesus takes aim at the heart of the law:

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire" (Matthew 5:21-22).

As Christians, it's less that we *have* to rest, but rather that we *get* to rest. We serve a God who is fully in control even when we are at our most vulnerable. We trust that while we sleep He is still ruling over the cosmos. In the same way, as we take a Sabbath, He is holding together every detail of our lives.

Rest vs Leisure

When it comes to resting, we often confuse it with leisure. The command to sabbath isn't simply to have fun, but it is to give a day to the Lord. Leisure is a good thing – remember our goal is not to deny any physical pleasure. However, leisure can very quickly become laziness. Proverbs has a lot to say about being lazy: 6:6; 10:4-5,26; 12:24,27; 13:4; 14:23; 18:9; 19:15; 20:4,13; 24:30-34; 26:13-16.

Some people are very good at leisure. To sit down and binge watch a show, to spend hours on social media, or to lose yourself in a hobby comes very naturally to some people. But, this type of leisure is not the command to observe Sabbath, and it will not bring you true rest.

Growing up in a Christian household, my family and I were regular attendees of our church. Upon coming home we would often watch football and spend most of the day relaxing. This was really comfortable and I continued this rhythm well into my adulthood.

Last year, when my wife and I decided to move to a small town, we got connected to a local church instead of commuting back to our previous church. One of the things that threw me for a loop was that the church went *all day*. They started the service at 10:30, which was followed by coffee, which was followed by potluck lunch, which was followed by a Bible study. I remember my initial reaction was a little less than excited. *How could I possibly give an entire day to the Lord?* After a few weeks however, it became clear – this was a very good thing. Yes, I missed out on watching some football. Yes, there were times when I would rather be doing other things, but while my usual response to leaving church was exhaustion, in this new rhythm, I left feeling refreshed. Sundays were no longer just another day of leisure unto myself, but became something much more significant.

Our Sabbath day is supposed to be a day unto the Lord, not simply a day where we indulge all of our personal desires. That doesn't mean that we deny ourselves pleasure, but it means that we prepare our hearts for it and treat it seriously. We work hard in preparation for our day unto the Lord and make sure that our day of rest is oriented around Him. Christ is where we as Christians find our true rest. So, as we attend church, enjoy a delicious meal with friends and family, spend time in God's creation, or whatever we choose to do with the Sabbath, we find our pleasure in Him and thank Him for the earthly pleasures we may enjoy during our day of rest.

All that being said, we need to make sure that we are not passing judgment on others who view the Sabbath differently than us. In the book of Romans, Paul writes, "One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord" (14:5-6). Paul mentions two groups of people – some who esteem one day, some who esteem all days. Paul is saying that it is a matter of conscience.

Not everyone will sabbath like you – and that's okay. Remember, stewardship is very individual and how you steward your time and energy will look different than other people. Some people's Sabbath will involve being in church all day, others will not. We are all called to find our rest in Christ and honor the Lord, and beyond that, it is a matter of conscience.

As believers, our view should not be that we *have* to rest, but rather that we *get* to rest. While the rest of the world is toiling away, we can be set apart by how hard we work and how we put our trust not in our own efforts, but in a God who sustains us, even while we rest. While the world is pursuing meaningless vanity,

you can pursue a deeper relationship with God through resting.

Sleep

Rest is not just limited to the Sabbath, but also found in our sleep. There are very few things that are as humbling as sleeping. When we sleep, we are admitting that the world will continue to function without us being on guard. We are putting our trust in the hands of the Creator. We are acknowledging our limits—that we are not God. Part of being human means that you are limited. As the Psalmist says, “the lines have fallen for me in pleasant places” (Psalm 16:6). As long as you have a body, you are bound by certain limits that are beyond your control. You need to eat. You need to sleep. You are not God.

If you are not getting quality sleep, your body will not function as it should. Not sleeping well can lead to a number of health problems including increased stress and appetite, low energy and motivation, and decreased mood. It’s easy for me to know when I’m not sleeping well – I will want to eat anything and everything. My cravings go through the roof. Not only do I crave more foods, but I also don’t care that I’m indulging in gluttony. By not sleeping, I am negatively impacting other areas of my life. I become less enjoyable to my wife and children, I become burdened by the weight of guilt from poor eating choices, and I am less ready, willing, and able to serve those in need.

Your sleep patterns have the ability to affect many areas of your life. I recently made the decision to shift some of my priorities to include more time in the Word. This shift meant a few other things had to happen as well. First, I needed to wake up earlier. This meant going to bed earlier. To do this, I utilized some apps to lock down my phone and computer after a certain time at night and made sure only my wife knew the password. You may

need to utilize some helps like these in order to get the sleep that your body needs in order to fulfill your tasks well.

When we evaluate our rest, it's important to look at it in a couple of ways. The first is asking; are you giving a day to the Lord? I get it, you're busy and you've got things to do. Do you really think that God didn't take busy schedules into consideration when commanding His people to do this?

The second way you need to look at rest is your sleep. Sleep is often viewed as an act of weakness. Instead, sleep should be seen as an act of humility. Sleep is submitting to our mortality, acknowledging that we are not God and our mortal bodies have limits that have been set. Many of us have some form of poor sleeping habits. Remember with stewardship, we're simply looking to do the best we can. There will be seasons when optimal sleep is not possible (welcome home new baby!). Stewarding your sleep will be specific to the individual and the season of life you are in. That might mean you need to sleep more. You might need to sleep less. Maybe you should leave your cell phone out of the bedroom.

Finally, we need to look at resting from workouts. For some, this one is no problem. Resting from a workout sounds great. For others, to take a day off of working out is enough to induce an anxiety attack. Remember that it's not sinful to exercise every day, but you need to check your motives. Are your workouts serving to punish yourself for poor stewardship? Are they solely in pursuit of vanity? If that's the case you may need to take a day of rest unto the Lord and re-tune your motivations.

Personal Training

- Are you prone to hyper-productivity or laziness?
- How would taking a day of rest unto the Lord affect your life in positive and/or negative ways? What changes would have to happen for this day of rest to take place?
- Does your investment of time reflect your priorities in life? What areas of low importance are stealing your time and attention?
- Schedule an “ideal” day, based on your current season of life (you can’t skip ahead to retirement or neglect your responsibilities to your family). What things do you include? What activities are you excluding? In what ways can you shift your calendar to make more of these types of days a reality?
- How would you rate your sleep out of 10? What is one small action you could take to improve it?

Chapter 7

Broken World, Broken Body

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Romans 8:19-23

If you find yourself less than able bodied, wondering how all of this applies to you, this section is for you. While most fitness programs would disqualify you based on limitations, stewardship offers you a chance to take some simple steps in the right direction.

Perhaps you were born with or have developed a disability that does not allow you to do as much physically. You may have a medical condition that does not allow for regular exercise or requires you to eat in a certain way which *does* impact your Christian fellowship. Your calling does not change: steward *your*

body. God was not surprised when the diagnosis came. He is not holding you to a standard beyond your ability. When you steward your body, you are looking at *your* body and *your* tasks.

Living in a post-Genesis 3 world means things are not as they were created to be, nor are they as they one day will be. We groan as we await the return of Jesus and the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:19-23). As Christians, we constantly need to be reminded that our hope is not in this body but in the one to come.

Your health is a gift, not a guarantee. Contrary to the ear tickling of some teachers, the Bible *does not* promise health on this side of Heaven. John's greeting to Gaius (3 John 1:2) does not mean that God intends everyone to be healthy. It's no different than me hoping that my friends and family are in good health. 3 John 1:2 is nothing more than a greeting. In fact, if you read on, John says, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (1:4). Beyond their health, John delights in brothers walking in the truth. Far greater than you experiencing earthly healing is that you can rejoice because your name is written in Heaven (Luke 10:20). Groups that promote the belief that we are promised health treat sickness as the worst thing that can happen to you. While sickness and suffering are never easy, we can trust Paul's words that the suffering we face in this lifetime is *nothing* compared to the glory that awaits us (Romans 8:18).

You may ask, "*But didn't Jesus take our sickness and illness in the atonement? Aren't we healed by his wounds as Isaiah said (Isaiah 53:5)?*" Yes, but praise the Lord He wasn't only talking about our physical bodies! If you look at the start of Isaiah 53:5, what are we being healed from? *Transgressions and iniquities*. Our *soul* is able to be healed through the life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. That is much better news

than simply saying we will not be sick anymore. If you are sick or disabled, by all means, pray that God would heal you. He can and He does heal in miraculous ways today. But, if He chooses that it is for your greater good and His glory that you are not healed this side of heaven, you still have hope.

I believe that one day, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore” (Revelation 21:4), but until then, we must trust that God has something greater for us than perfect physical health.

If you find yourself sick, part of your stewardship might mean being faithful to take your medication. While it might not be ideal or the way that you wanted things to go, that is the story of our post-fall world – things are not ideal and do not always go the way we want them to.

You may be asked to steward your disability in order to bring glory to God. Your stewardship will look different than your neighbor’s. You may not be able to lift weights or walk. There may be food groups that you *cannot* eat, and that’s okay. You now have a unique testimony that allows you to speak on matters others don’t. I can offer kind words and encouragement to cancer patients, but you can offer empathy and “I’ve been there too” kind of hope. If you’ve walked the journey before someone else, you can help them navigate it in a way that others never could. If your body is not functioning the way it is supposed to, don’t lose heart. Rather, do what you can with a heart of thankfulness to God who sustains you.

Maybe your limits are not because of disability but because of the natural wearing down of your body. If this is the case— steward *your* body. You don’t need to be as fit as you once were,

but you can still do certain things that can help you grow stronger for the tasks God is calling you to do. Our society is terrified of growing old. Our desire for the fountain of youth can clearly be seen in the amount of time and money people spend to feel and look young again. People are longing for the “good old days” when things didn’t ache and they too could lift heavy things. I hear a lot of, “Well when I was your age, I was in great shape too.” While this may be true, what’s equally true is that you are no longer the youth you once were and there’s nothing you can do about that. Instead of pining for what was, look at how you can steward your body now.

Personal Training

- Do you have physical limitations in this season of life? What are they? Have you been using them as an excuse not to steward your body well? Are you often crushed with false guilt over not being as able bodied as someone else?
- Have you been placing too much hope in your current earthly body? Have you been trying to perfect your health or body in a way that is actually distracting you from the things God has commanded you to do?
- How might you better steward your body given these circumstances?

Chapter 8

Your Body. Your Tasks. Your Stewardship.

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

Psalm 139:13-16

While some general principles will apply to most people, there will be some fine tuning involved for each individual.

As you look back over your answers to the questions in each chapter, you have started to create a stewardship plan. How you answered those questions will hopefully direct your next steps towards stewarding your body well.

All of the questions in the book are not one-and-done type of questions. When you feel that your eating and exercising are no longer bringing glory to God, re-ask those questions and change what stewardship looks like for you. It's easy to overestimate

what you need to do to steward *your* body, but often it is the small changes that can make the biggest long-term difference. Perhaps adding a few more servings of vegetables and a few less servings of dessert would be sufficient?

One Small Act of Stewardship

Avoid the temptation to go all-in. It can be very tempting to try and fix everything all at once. You may put this book down, highly motivated and ready to go. You are going to take back your health and conquer stewardship *today*. Instead, remember that stewardship is *not* a destination to reach as quickly as possible. Instead it is a journey that you are walking with the help of the Holy Spirit. Stewardship of your body is just a “zoomed in” area of your overall process of sanctification.

Before you try to do everything, do one thing for thirty days. That one thing may not even be the biggest area of concern for you (and I would suggest that you choose something that isn’t). Go back through your assessment questions and pick *one* thing you are pretty sure you can be successful with doing for the next thirty days and do it. Don’t get fancy or complicated. After thirty days, if you think you want to address something new, do it. If it seems like you are in a good spot, keep doing what you are doing.

To take that first step, ask yourself, “What is one small act of stewardship I could commit to for today?”

I don’t like long-term commitment to diets. Too many people overestimate what they are capable of and commit to diets for the rest of their life before even completing one day of it. If you’ve ever sworn off carbs for the rest of your life, I’m talking to you.

Instead of making this a life-long, six-month, or even thirty-day commitment, commit to doing it for one day, then another,

and another, and so on. Think of it as thirty one-day challenges instead of a thirty-day challenge. You may even need to break it down smaller into half-day challenges, or even meals. Instead of eating only vegetables for the rest of the week, or day, commit to eating *one* extra serving of vegetables at your next meal. Remember, there is no finish line, so there is no hurry to get there.

Our bodies are not isolated from the rest of life. We must also consider the stewardship of our money and time.

Money

My goal in talking about money is not to become the next Dave Ramsey; however, when looking at stewarding your health, you need to take the financial side into the equation. Stewarding your health should not be beyond what you can afford (unless you have extreme medical circumstances to account for), but it may mean tweaking some of your current spending habits. Your goal should not be to take out a second mortgage so that you can buy all grass-fed, organic groceries. If you can afford it, by all means go for it, but it is ultimately not worth the financial stress for the potential (and likely minimal) benefits.

When you're looking at your financial ability, ask yourself a few questions: 'Where is my money currently going?' Before you can make changes, you need to know where it is being spent. "What is the return on my investment?" Are you getting your money's worth in each of the areas you are spending?

If you cannot afford to follow certain diets or workout plans, don't. There are plenty of ways to improve your health without having to break the bank.

Time

One of the biggest reasons people give for not stewarding

their body is they feel they don't have time. In order to get to the bottom of this problem, ask the same questions as you did with your money: "Where is my time currently going?" Again, most people have some time-thieves in their days. These are things that take time without adding much value. "What is the return on my time investment?" What value do those activities actually bring you?

Maybe you can't (or simply don't want to) give an hour a day, three times a week to working out – you probably don't have to. Maybe it's ten minutes to start. Or maybe it's five-minutes, two times a day. It is one thing to be willing, and another thing to be able. Figure out what you are able to do and commit to making it happen.

Personal Training

- If you were stewarding your body well for *your* tasks, what would that look like in *this* season?
- What is your one small act of stewardship for today?
- Are there finances you could shift around to give yourself more of a health budget?
- Are there activities that you could cut out or shift around to give you more time for exercise, meal planning/prepping, etc.? Remember, before you schedule your workouts, put in your time with God.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

Proverbs 4:23

As we wrap things up, my hope is that you are feeling encouraged. I hope that you are feeling freedom from societal or self-imposed standards of health and fitness. Whether that means that you are finally going to take some steps towards taking care of your body, you are going to relax and re-focus your time and attention away from caring too much, or you are just feeling affirmed that you are not in fact crazy for your approach to fitness, I want you to be encouraged.

Guard Your Heart

When it comes to eating, exercising and all related categories, it's important to realize that very few of the choices that you make will in and of themselves have moral consequences.

There is nothing moral about fruits and veggies and nothing immoral about a bag of chips. Deadlifting, gardening, or playing video games are not a matter of right or wrong. However, in all of these things we need to guard our hearts. The "heart attitude"

behind kale can be equally as sinful as the one behind cookies.

Adam and Eve were not punished because they chose to eat *fruit*. They were punished because of their heart attitudes. They disobeyed what God had commanded.

The fine line of stewardship is difficult because we spend so much time wanting to be right, when there is no objective right.

One person will eat a single piece of candy and walk away as if nothing happened. Another person will allow that candy to drive them into a binge void of any form of self-control.

One person will go to the gym and feel great leaving, not feeling the need to check the mirror to see if they have finally arrived at their dream body, while another will constantly be checking to see if they finally measure up.

As you go on this journey, remember that our standard is not “right” or “wrong”, but rather holiness. God wants His people to be set apart. That is going to look different for each and every person.

The targets that many of us set for ourselves are at best unattainable and at worst unnecessary. I can guarantee you that having a perfect physique does not make you a better parent, spouse, friend, or disciple of Christ, and am almost certain that putting in the time and effort required to achieve that goal will hurt your relationships. At the same time, if you are physically fit, you should not feel guilty. Steward your fitness.

I hope that you have become aware of what stewardship of your health looks like for *you* in *this* season of life. You now have the tools and know the proper questions to evaluate your stewardship continually and to make changes as necessary.

You also need to know that changing your attitude towards health and fitness isn't likely going to happen overnight. This probably isn't going to be a 21, 30, or even 90-day fix. For some, your attitudes and behaviors have been present long before you can even remember. You may have deep wounds from words and actions from family and friends that will take years to heal. This isn't about becoming perfectly healthy. It's about gaining a proper perspective on your health. Your health is important, but it's not the most important.

If you are struggling with the sins of gluttony, laziness, idolatry, etc., you need to treat them as such. That starts with repentance. As 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Then, we need to remember the words of Paul: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:1-2).

As you confess your sins, remember that this battle is one that requires physical change as well. Simply confessing sins only to return willingly to past behaviors is not repentance. Take small, positive actions towards good stewardship. It's not about being perfect in your behaviors, it's about desiring to honor God with your body. When you mess up again –and you will — go back to God and ask Him to remind you that His "grace is sufficient for you, for [His] power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9a). As Paul goes on to write, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (12:9b-10).

Another step towards winning the battle is to find

accountability. James writes, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (James 5:16). If you are struggling, confess your sins and struggles to a fellow believer and ask them to pray for you. Poor stewardship is a physical problem with spiritual roots. Simply meal planning and buying a gym membership will not solve your heart issue.

Finally, I would also suggest silencing the noise. There are *hundreds of thousands* of fitness programs, channels, and feeds that you could subscribe to. Social media is full of “influencers” posting highlight reels of themselves living their best lives, letting you know that you could too, *if you do things their way*. While you may feel momentary motivation from them, it’s not worth it. Avoid fitness information and inspiration for a bit. Not only will this allow you freedom from comparison, it will help you to walk in purity by not viewing scantily clad models as you mindlessly scroll through pages of #fitspiration.

To put a bow on things, know this: you were made in the image of God, the Imago Dei. This means that you matter. All of your value and worth is not based on your strength, weight or good looks, but rather on the finished work of Christ. There is no level of fitness you could attain to make God love you more, and no amount of body fat that would make God love you less. Rest in that truth as you pursue stewarding your body for His glory.

Remember, you may never be healthy, but you can be healthier. You may never be strong, but you can be stronger. Anyone can steward their body and you too can be strong for your tasks.

Verses Used

Introduction

1 Corinthians 6:19, Ephesians 2:10

Chapter 1

Genesis 1:31, Psalm 27:4, Daniel 1:8, Daniel 1:15, Romans 8:23, Romans 8:28, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 12:9

Chapter 2

Exodus 20:17, Exodus 25-30, 35-40, Exodus 25:8, 1 Samuel 16:7, Psalm 24:1-2, Proverbs 4:23, Matthew 16:24, Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23, Romans 6:6, Romans 8:11, Romans 8:13, Romans 12:1, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Galatians 2:20, Galatians 5, Galatians 5:24, Colossians 3:5, Hebrews 12:11

Chapter 3

Deuteronomy 10:14, Proverbs 31:17, Matthew 22:36-40, Philippians 2:12-18

Chapter 4

Genesis 1:28-29, Genesis 9:1-3, Exodus 1-14, Exodus 16, Exodus 19:5-6, Exodus 20:13, Exodus 21, Leviticus 11, Leviticus 11:44-45, Leviticus 18, Deuteronomy 14:3-21, Matthew 5:29, Matthew 15:11, Matthew 28:19-20, Matthew 23:1-36, Matthew 23:27-28, Acts 15:29, Romans 3:19-20, Romans 7:7, Romans

14:1-13, 1 Corinthians 6:12, 1 Corinthians 10:23, 1 Corinthians 10:25-26, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Galatians 2:15-21, Galatians 5:13, 1 Timothy 4:3-4

Chapter 5

Genesis 2:15, Proverbs 31:10-31, Mark 12:30, 1 Corinthians 10:31, 1 Timothy 4:8

Chapter 6

Genesis 2:1-3, Exodus 20:8-11, Psalm 16:6, Proverbs 6:6; 10:4-5,26; 12:24,27; 13:4; 14:23; 18:9; 19:15; 20:4,13; 24:30-34; 26:13-16, Matthew 5:21-30, Romans 14:5-6

Chapter 7

Isaiah 53:5, Luke 10:20, Romans 8:18-23, 3 John 1:2-4, Revelation 21:4

Chapter 8

Psalm 139:13-16

Chapter 9

Proverbs 4:23, Romans 8:1-2, 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, James 5:16, 1 John 1:9

About the Author

Cody Wieler lives with his family in the small town of Rivers, Manitoba. He holds degrees from Brandon University in Physical Education Studies and Education and has been a Precision Nutrition Level 1 Coach since 2015. He writes at codywieler.com.

Bonuses

Thank you for reading *Strong For Your Tasks*. I hope you find it helpful, practical and inspiring as you pursue stewardship. To help you on your journey, I've put together several free resources, including:

- 10-months of Reasonable Workouts.
- Twenty meal plans for losing fat, gaining muscle or improving your health. These meal plans cover a variety of diets and methods for your eating pleasure.
- A list of some of my favorite tools and snacks.
- And more.

To get instant access to all of those free bonuses, go here now:

codywieler.com/bonus.

Also, if you have questions, or need help troubleshooting, shoot me an email at cody.wieler@gmail.com and I'll do my best to help.

A Special Favor

I have a small favor to ask.

Would you mind taking a minute to write a short review on Amazon? It doesn't need to be much, but I love getting feedback and reviews do that, as well as help to spread the message of stewardship to Christians everywhere.

To do this:

1) Open Amazon on your web browser of choice, search for "Strong For Your Tasks Cody Wieler", click the book and scroll down and click on "Write a customer review".

or

2) Visit codywieler.com/review, and you'll be taken to Amazon to leave a review.

Thanks again, and I look forward to reading your feedback.