

Heart Check

by Joan Shields



Trillions of cells come together to form a brain that rivals technology's latest computer. Brain and heart work side by side causing nerves, muscles, bone, veins and arteries to function so the body can perform simple and complex tasks. Of all God's creation, the human body is possibly His most miraculous. No evolution here, just the magnificent handiwork of Almighty God.

Most of us possess healthy minds and healthy bodies—blessings and gifts from God. But He expects us to properly care for them. God also gave each of us a spirit that depends on proper care as well. When physical body and spiritual body work together as they should, we can do marvelous things. But if either of them ails or any part fails to function, we have a problem. We begin to suffer. The same thing applies to the church. Each member is a vital part of the body of believers. When one member suffers, either physically or spiritually, then the church has a problem.

The ultimate signature of life itself resounds within the heart. That also holds true for the church. Before we can begin to strengthen our physical bodies or build the body of Christ, we need to determine our present heart condition. It's time for a heart check.



HEART CHECK

RECOGNIZE

BODY FITNESS GOAL: Before we can begin a regimen of spiritual fitness and growth, we must examine our lives and admit to spiritual problems.

CORE DEVELOPMENT: *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened"* (Matthew 7:7-8).

Summer's gone; autumn winds are blowing and it's time to pull out a favorite winter outfit. Just one problem—it's too tight. How could fabric shrink over the summer months?

Oh well, good excuse to go shopping, right? But shopping sends us on an emotional nose-dive because nothing in our old size fits. Everything is too small.

Recognize
we have
a problem.

Reality check: the favorite outfit didn't shrink; we got fluffier, packed on

some pounds, enjoyed one Big Mac too many. Whatever we want to call it, we have a problem.

Repeat those last four words: we have a problem. Whether we're dealing with a physical issue or a spiritual one, we cannot get the help we need until we recognize a problem. When we suspect a problem, that's the time to search it out and get totally honest with ourselves.

Drop the pride; stop the rationalization. God already knows. He just wants us to either own

up to the problem or ask Him to reveal what it is—to let us see things as He does.

Remember, Jesus promised, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7: 7-8.)

Just as the too-tight outfit revealed a physical problem (*extra pounds*), spiritual problems show themselves, too. Things like gossiping or flying off the handle may be obvious, there for the whole world to see. Other problems may be more subtle; we know something is just not right. No one else suspects a thing, but we know.

Maybe we see some rotten fruit in our lives. How do we determine what's rotten? Look at what's not. Galatians 5:22-23 states that "... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." If these spiritual traits are not growing in our lives, then chances are, we have a problem.

Body Builder

WARM UP: Read Psalm 139; Matthew 7:1-8.

STRENGTH TRAINING: If you suspect you've gained weight, what's the first thing you do?

- A. Jump for joy
- B. Cry for a week
- C. Buy new clothes
- D. Deny it

What if you suspect a spiritual problem? How do you know when or if you have one? Are they as easily discernible as physical ones?

What are some of the dangers if we delay facing problems—whether physical or spiritual?

If your closest Christian friend and role model began to display rotten fruit, what would you do? Would you talk to her?

MUSCLE TONING: Why are spiritual problems so much easier to discern in others than in ourselves or even our family members?

COOL DOWN: Focus on one problem the Holy Spirit is bringing to your attention or helping you recognize. Commit that need or situation to God in prayer, believing the promise of Matthew 7:7-8.



Use this space to record prayer concerns or matters of your heart.



HEART CHECK

IDENTIFY

BODY FITNESS GOAL: Identifying a Savior as our greatest need and accepting His gift of salvation are the first steps to spiritual wholeness, health and abundant life.

CORE DEVELOPMENT: *“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).*

Life as a healthy Christian involves a numerous and diverse combination of the spiritual and physical. But both claim starting points. Physical development begins at conception. At the moment of birth, that child must depend on some person to provide food and shelter. Still, it’s a starting point.

Identify
salvation as
our greatest
heart need.

Christians, we’d better make sure we are Christians. Being a good person doesn’t cut it. Going to church doesn’t count. Selling what we have and giving our money to the poor isn’t good enough. We will never be good enough on our own. We need a Savior.

As sinners, the Holy Spirit begins to draw us to Christ. He shows us that we are sinners in need of a Savior, and He leads us to Jesus. He can do this through many ways—a friend’s testimony, a sermon, a song, or a mother’s prayer. For all of us, salvation is

our greatest need—an issue that must be settled before anything else. However, salvation is not the end all; it’s the beginning of a new way of life—a life that is fulfilling, satisfying, exciting, and so much more. It means never having to face life’s challenges alone.

What comfort in knowing that Jesus, our Savior, our Redeemer, our Big Brother is right there with us every step we take. We are following in His steps. He gave us a marvelous promise in John 10:10 when He said, “...I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

Salvation is the first step in that abundant life. Eternal life begins when we ask Jesus to forgive us for our sins. Again, we must be honest with ourselves. Perhaps we’ve gone to church all our lives. Perhaps we’ve taught Sunday school, sung in the choir or we could even be married to the pastor. Yet deep within, we know we have never really been saved. If so, it’s time to identify our need and be honest.

Body Builder

WARM UP: Read Romans 3:23;5:8; 6:23; 10:9, 10, 13.

STRENGTH TRAINING: The verses listed below are commonly known as the Romans Road to Salvation. Have you ever taken these words to heart and applied them to your life? If not, now is the best time to make this decision.

If you've already experienced salvation, reread the verses and renew your commitment to the Savior Who died for you. It never hurts to take another look at these verses and remember when you first believed.

Do you remember the time/place of your salvation? If so, write it here.

If someone has never read the Bible, how would you explain each of these verses? Use your own words.

Romans 3:23

Romans 5:8

Romans 6:23

Romans 10:9

Romans 10:10

Romans 10:13

MUSCLE TONING: If salvation is only the first step to living abundantly, what other steps should we take?

COOL DOWN: Does someone you know need to walk down this road to salvation? Take a moment now to pray for him or her; enlist friends to pray as well.



HEART CHECK

REASSESS

BODY FITNESS GOAL: Reassessing heart motives and habits as prompted by the Holy Spirit and in the context of a local church promotes lasting transformation.

CORE DEVELOPMENT: *"...Put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24).*

So, maybe we admit a weight problem; we identify our need to lose those 20 pounds. Now, we should determine why we put on the weight in the first place. And that may mean a total reassessment of the problem.

Reassess our
habits and
heart motives.

Did we gain the weight quickly? Or did it accrue from years of poor eating habits and lack of exercise? If so, losing 20 pounds may not do us much good. Unless we change our ways—develop new habits to replace the old—we'll eventually add the weight again.

The same principle applies in the spiritual realm. From the moment of our salvation, the Holy Spirit begins to mold and shape us into the image of Christ. We truly are a new creation. But soon the pressures of life begin their assault. Satan throws his darts and whispers his lies.

That's why spiritual formation is so important. How does this

happen? It comes through Bible study, prayer and fellowship with other Christians. A local church uplifts, educates, and guides new believers to reassess and replace sinful habits with those helpful for growing in Christ.

However, even seasoned Christians develop spiritual problems when they lose sight of Christ. Jobs require overtime. Children's sports, music lessons or school activities keep us on the go. Parents get sick or need caregiving. Suddenly, we find our lives over-stuffed. Something has to give.

Too often, we cut back on the very things offering us strength. Instead of getting up early to read the Bible or attend church, we sleep. After all, we're tired. Unhealthy habits take the place of wholesome ones. Eventually every area of our life suffers.

But then, we experience a God nudge. The Holy Spirit moves in our hearts and our lives gently drawing us back. If we resist, the nudges get stronger, because God loves us and wants His best for us.

Body Builder

WARM UP: Read Ephesians 4

STRENGTH TRAINING: Who assisted in your spiritual formation?

Have you ever experienced a God nudge—a move of the Holy Spirit to draw you back into closer relationship with Him? Describe your experience. How did you know this was the Holy Spirit?

Reread Ephesians 4:21-32. Notice that this passage includes both heart motives and sinful habits we are to shed. List them below. Circle any that the Holy Spirit is gently nudging you to reassess.

Do you regularly read your Bible and spend quiet time with God? If yes, how would you rate your quiet time (scale of 1-10)?

If no, do you think this has hurt your relationship with God? What would it take to begin meeting with God each day?

Consider this scenario: Jan is a good friend you invited to church who recently accepted Jesus as her Savior. What steps could you take to help her grow in Christ?

If Jan continued reading books you believed were not edifying, what would you do? Should you do anything?

MUSCLE TONING: Why do believers spend so few moments with God? What takes up so much of our time?

COOL DOWN: Get out your calendar, planner, phone—whatever you use to track dates, events, or appointments. Now lay it before the Lord. Ask Him to help you reassess. Commit your times into His hand.



HEART CHECK

RESOLVE

BODY FITNESS GOAL: Righting heart issues and spiritual problems requires commitment to Christ and His body (the Church) and a resolve to action.

CORE DEVELOPMENT: *“Let your heart therefore be perfect with [wholly devoted to, fully committed to] the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day” (1 Kings 8:61).*

We’re now ready to explore options for physical conditioning and/or resolving a weight issue. We can go on a diet. Will we choose Atkins, South Beach, Grapefruit? We can exercise. Will we walk two miles a day, do Pilates or pop in the latest exer-

Resolve
to change
and grow.

cise video? All seem good, but none guarantee results. We can own all the exercise equipment money can buy, but until we use it, our muscles will never develop. Nothing will help us—until we commit ourselves to action.

And we will never grow as Christians until we resolve to do whatever God desires. We can own a hundred Bibles, but until we read them, we will never grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Churches may sit on every corner in town, but until we enter and participate in worship, they do us no good.

Exodus 17 records the remarkable actions of Aaron and Hur, who lent support to their leader. They literally held Moses’ arms in the air, so Israel could win the battle.

The body of Christ is a lot like that. We may need someone to hold up our arms today; we may provide support for someone else tomorrow. Hebrews 10:25 encourages believers to regularly meet together. We need the encouragement and support of each other.

For a husband and wife to enjoy a lasting relationship together, they must both be committed to the marriage and determined to make it work in the everyday. Our spiritual heart relationship requires the same.

Commitment (*to God, to Jesus Christ, to His Word, to prayer, to service, to one another*) coupled with resolve (*daily acting upon those commitments*)—that’s what it takes to grow as the body of Christ.

Let us know what you think of our new Bible study format. Email: treasure@wnac.org.
Or post your thoughts on our Facebook page: Women Nationally Active for Christ.

Body Builder

WARM UP: Read 2 Peter 1:1-8; 3:18; James 4:7-8

STRENGTH TRAINING: According to these passages, what are some ways we can draw closer to God? In what areas do you need commitment and resolve?

Are you committed to a closer walk with Him?

Consider this scenario: You have a wonderful coworker, Jean, who is a great person, very caring and loving. She says she is a Christian, but she never goes to church. She has never been baptized. Would you be concerned about Jean's spiritual condition? Why or why not?

MUSCLE TONING: Are commitment and resolve the same as loyalty? What factors contribute to the lack of commitment in our society as a whole today?

COOL DOWN: God longs to commune with us as He did with Adam and Eve before sin came into the world. Take time now to meet with Him. Pray expectantly, then silently wait before Him, listening—not for an audible voice, but for a sense of His presence and direction.

MEET THE WRITER: *Joan Shields lives in Jackson, Tennessee, where her husband Jimmy pastors Victory Free Will Baptist Church. This mother of three and grandmother of four enjoys reading, writing (music and prose) and working in the church.*