



HEALTHY FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Balancing Body, Mind, and Spirit

by Debra Evans

On the day my granddaughter Abigail was born, I clearly remember seeing her image for the first time on an ultrasound screen when my daughter, Joanna, was in labor, just 12 hours before the baby's arrival. As an experienced childbirth educator, I knew the stark black and white image revealed a cause for concern. Though the pregnancy had proceeded smoothly, it was evident that Abigail would be born with a serious birth defect.

As I stood at Joanna's side in the birthing room, we cried tears of joy together as this precious little one joined the family circle for the first time, greeted by her parents and grandmother, listening to our prayers and praises. The doctor's exam quickly revealed that Abigail had spina bifida, a condition resulting from the backbone's failure to completely enclose the spinal cord during the fourth week of prenatal development. We were told that she would need an operation at a nearby children's hospital the following day to close the opening.

Within six hours, Abigail was taken in a special incubator to a pediatric intensive care unit; within 24 hours, she was quietly recovering from the surgery under the watchful eyes of my son-in-law, his mother, and several nurses as I sat with Joanna 20 minutes away in her maternity room. During Abigail's three-week hospital stay, it was as if we had entered a period of intensive spiritual study as we struggled to come to grips with God's role in and His plan for this situation. Each moment seemed to bring new lessons as we sat in the ICU's brightly lit "schoolroom"; as we waited to hear the pediatric neurosurgeon's report following a second surgery to relieve fluid build-up in Abigail's brain; as we said our prayers before attempting to get some much-needed sleep during our nights away from the hospital. Time after time, God's grace was made real to us — through a friend's hug, a verse from the Bible, a gentle prayer, a warm meal. And at the center of it all, a small child continually drew us closer to God's heart, causing us to turn our eyes toward heaven's help and His comfort.

For reasons only He understands, God chose to bring Abigail into the world with a physically challenged body. She does not walk and talk in the same way that most other children her age walk and talk; she has found her own ways of walking and talking. Like other 3-year-olds, she feels at home with herself and does not appear to think about whether anything is "wrong" with her body. To Abigail, everything seems quite right with the world as long as she gets enough food, sleep, attention, and plenty of love.

When I watch my granddaughter working very hard with every ounce of her energy to develop a new physical skill, I sometimes get a lump in my throat. Tears occasionally well up in my eyes involuntarily. As far as I can tell, the emotion I feel seems to be a kind of awe at Abigail's courage, her ability to accept herself and her situation without complaint. She seems to echo the words written so long ago in the Bible: "*Yet, O Lord, You are our Father,*" wrote the prophet Isaiah. "*We are the clay, You are the potter; we are all the work of Your hand*" (Isaiah 64:8).

We are all the work of Your hand: Abigail. Me. You. We are all in the process of “being made.” Like clay on the potter’s wheel, we are constantly being shaped and molded as our lives conform to the Master’s hands. Like Abigail, we can simply yield our lives to God, placing our worries about our bodies in the Lord’s loving care. One day, we will find that He has transformed us into a flawless masterpiece fit to spend eternity in His glorious presence. Until then, the common sense choices we make about caring for our bodies in an imperfect world vividly demonstrate our thankful acceptance of the here-and-now gift of God’s life within us.

With God’s help, we can choose not to abuse our bodies with food, dieting, exercise (too much or too little), cosmetic surgery, sex, alcohol, drugs, or tobacco. The belief that we are loved and accepted by God encourages us to develop sensible lifestyle habits that conform to our Creator’s design for our lives. Plus, understanding that our bodies ultimately belong to God enables us to care for ourselves with an attitude of thanksgiving rather than of pride — and to avoid feeling shame when we don’t “measure up” to other peoples’ expectations of us. Living a healthy lifestyle becomes a **positive** response to life because the more we live in accordance with what is good for the body, the better we feel.

As our Creator, God has a lot to say about how we view ourselves. His Word, the Bible, invites us to think about our own bodies with the same dignity and joy that are evident in the account of His creation of the first man and woman as recorded in the first book of the Bible, Genesis. When we contemplate what this means to us, we have ample cause to celebrate who we are and where we are heading.

SEEING OURSELVES FROM A NEW PERSPECTIVE

“Know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us, and we are His;” (Psalm 100:3).

“Assorted Seeds — 9¢ per packet” read the large-print advertisement.

What a great deal! At that price I immediately figured out that I could completely surround my house with flowers for \$1.54, including tax. All it would take is enough time to get the gardens planted and the arrival of warm weather to start them growing.

Two weeks later I had already mentally plotted out at least five different flower bed arrangements containing fourteen flower varieties. Spring rapidly approached as I attempted to memorize the length of time required for asters to germinate in Nebraska (14 days) and the height to which snapdragons grow (2 1/2 feet). Dreams of nasturtium and daisies danced in my head, brightening winter’s remaining days with sunny thoughts about April. Once, I even imagined I smelled peat moss.

One particularly pleasant morning I opened several of the seed packets and peeked inside. How strange, I thought, that a tiny brown speck can turn into a fluffy tuft of alyssum or an ivory-and-black-striped sliver change into a 3-foot-tall marigold. This transformation would be hard to believe without proof that it could happen.

Just looking at a picture on the cover of a seed package or reading a few sentences of planting instructions would not be enough to convince a skeptic that the seeds inside could grow into lovely, bright-colored flowers. Like most people, however, I did not doubt that the seeds I had bought would produce the results I desired. For as long as I could remember, I had watched plants grow from seeds. From Grandma’s backyard garden to my college biology class, I had learned this lesson well.

During my prayer time that morning, I began thinking about those packets of seeds. I pictured a seed springing to life after it had been carefully planted in the ground, awakening from its temporarily dormant state after exposure to warm earth and water. A slender green shoot pressed its way out into the surrounding soil; the life of the flower had begun.

This process, called germination, heralds the beginning of a brand-new creation. Eventually the seed itself dies as the life within manifests itself as a stalk, roots, leaves, and finally a flower. A gardener's success, measured by the abundance of brilliant blossoms above ground, must be preceded by nurturing these earlier phases of development beneath the soil's surface.

As I contemplated this, I began to understand something that had always puzzled me: the Bible says that Jesus spoke a lot about being "born again." He said that if anyone believed that He was the Son of God, that person would be a "new person," in fact, become, like Him, a "child of God." The followers of Jesus said the same thing: that it really is possible to become "a brand new person inside" at the moment Christ enters your life through faith, even though the process will not be completed until after physical death. That's what the seeds helped me understand: It is as if a kind of germination occurred when, through faith, I received Jesus as my Lord and Savior; I actually became a new creation then and there. (Checking in my dictionary, I discovered one of the meanings of the word **germinate** is "to create; to cause to come into existence.")

I thought about this for some time, seeing once more why the days I am walking through now are just the beginning of my life in Jesus. I am still being transformed daily into the person my Lord has designed me to be.

Then it hit me, all at once, as I considered the difference between the seed and the flower: **the person I will one day be is as different from who I am now, as a full-grown flower is different from its original seed.** The life I am living here is being lived in a shadowland as I heed God's call to keep pressing toward higher ground.

This realization began to reshape my outlook from the inside out. Living in a culture that exalts expensive worldly goods and ideal body shapes tends to make me forget the fleeting nature of my surroundings. But when I pause to consider who I am and where I am going, God challenges me to ask myself what really matters in light of eternity. My weight? What kind of car I drive? How much money I will earn this year? Which lipstick color I choose to wear? (At times, I chuckle at the thought of a garden full of seeds taking pride in their temporary husks and dark dwelling places. I suppose it is no different from how we must appear to angels appointed to watch over each earthbound creature who has yet to partake of heaven's radiant glories.)

OK — so much for seeds and flowers. How does this apply to us today, here and now?

If our lives here are **just the beginning** of our transformed lives in Jesus, why do we choose to live according to this world's standards of beauty and success instead of Jesus' teachings concerning beauty and success in the eternal kingdom — the kingdom of heaven? The Lord bids us to follow Him in newness of life, leaving behind an identity wrapped up in accumulating things that will not last. As we read the words of the Savior, there is no mistaking His homeward call. His Word provides us specific instructions that nurture and hasten our development. And, as we keep on growing until we meet Him face to face, we find real comfort in keeping our destination — the persons we will one day become in His holy presence — continually in focus.

I don't know about you, but when I forget to keep eternity in view, I end up acting as if this germinal phase is it. I lose track of God's priorities for my life and tend to start sprouting in potentially disastrous directions. But when I heed the Lord's reminder to set my mind "... *on things above, not on earthly things* ..." (Colossians 3:2), **WATCH OUT!**

When I realize I'm an offshoot of my risen Savior, reaching single-mindedly toward heaven:

- *God's Word takes on new meaning*, affecting every area of my life as I revel in — and rest upon — its life-giving truth.
- *Loving others liberates me* from the self-enclosed spaces of my immediate surroundings.
- *Serving Jesus sustains my convictions* about what is most important this side of heaven.

Living now within my true element, I continue to grow at a steady pace, inching toward that day when I will rise up in resurrection from an earthly grave. Yes, I am a new creation, waiting to burst forth in full bloom under the mighty hand of God. **Keep me growing closer to You each day, Lord; I want to be with You always.**

*“I delight greatly in the Lord;
My soul rejoices in my God.
For He has clothed me with
garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe
of righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like
a priest, and as a bride adorns herself
with her jewels.
For as the soil makes the sprout
come up and a garden causes seeds
to grow,
So the Sovereign Lord will make
righteousness and praise
spring up before all nations”*

(Isaiah 61:10-11).

*A brand new person...
growing from the inside out!
I am not the same anymore:
a new life has begun!
Even on days when I tend to
forget this,
Jesus lives!
I can trust the Lord to accomplish
His purposes for me;
I can rest in the assurance
His love brings to my heart —
My Creator will be absolutely
faithful in completing the task
He has begun.
From seed to shoot to flowering
plant, this life within me will one
day bloom in brightness,
bursting forth in God's presence
with radiant joy.
From the inside out,
this growing life I live
has already begun.*

GOD'S GOOD CREATION

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Do you ever have days when it is easy to doubt that you are being changed from the inside out? Have you ever struggled to accept your one-of-a-kind combination of personality traits and physical characteristics — the way God has uniquely created your spirit, heart, mind, and body? Is it sometimes difficult for you to accept the fact that you really are a brand-new person on the inside regardless of how you happen to be feeling about yourself and your body at the present moment?

In his book, *Love Yourself: Self-Acceptance and Depression* (InterVarsity Press, 1976), Pastor Walter Trobisch described a group counseling session with a young woman caught in a particularly painful identity struggle:

“She was a beautiful Scandinavian girl. Long blonde hair fell over her shoulders. Gracefully she sat down in the armchair offered to her and looked at us with deep and vivid blue eyes. ...

“As we discussed her problems, we came back again and again to one basic issue which seemed to be at the root of all others. It was the problem we least expected when she entered the room: she could not love herself. In fact, she hated herself to such a degree that she was only a step away from putting an end to her life.

“To point out to her the apparent gifts she had — her success as a student, the favorable impression she had made on us by her outward appearance — seemed to be of no avail. She refused to acknowledge anything good about herself. She was afraid that any self-appreciation she might express would mean giving in to the temptation of pride, and to be proud meant to be rejected by God. She had grown up in a tight-laced religious family and had learned that self-depreciation was Christian and self-rejection was the only way to find acceptance by God.”

Although self-depreciation often comes to us disguised as humility, its devastating effects betray its capacity for creating spiritual, emotional, and physical harm. In it we find the roots for conditions such as depression, suicidal thoughts, eating disorders (including anorexia, bulimia, compulsive eating, and chronic dieting), self-hatred, viewing oneself as a victim, substance abuse, and self-neglect.

As Dr. Trobisch pointed out, Christians are not exempt from encountering these feelings of shame even though we believe that Jesus died to win forgiveness for all our sin and all its far-ranging consequences. Many of us, like the young woman in the preceding story, struggle with feeling that we do not deserve God’s (or anyone else’s) favor and mercy. Thus, we may end up engaging in self-destructive lifestyles, behaviors, and activities that can cause spiritual, emotional, and physical disease — a state of ill-being that steals our energy and robs our rightful sense of joy in being beloved and forgiven creations of God. But is this really the way God wants us to live?

No, it’s not.

As we marvel at what it means to be re-born into the kingdom of God and to be “brand new” through Christ, something amazing starts to happen: we begin to accept the extent of God’s goodness toward us and grow in our ability to receive, care for, and use the gifts our Father has given to us, including our minds and bodies.

Can you believe today that God loves you with an everlasting love and that He is calling you to accept and appreciate the gifts He has given you for His glory? Perhaps you can. But if you cannot, **please do not despair**. Instead, ask Jesus to help you surrender your shame to Him. Trust Him with your innermost fears. Pray for God’s guidance. Commit your **spirit, soul, mind, heart, and body** to the Lord’s safekeeping.

SEEKING A BALANCE

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17).

In the book of Psalms, we find a wealth of timeless truth to draw upon as we look to our Creator for strength, healing, and hope. Consider this cry of exaltation:

*“Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Where can I flee from Your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, You are there;
if I make my bed in the depths,
You are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there Your hand will guide me,
Your right hand will hold me fast.*

*“If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will
hide me and the light become
night around me,’ even the darkness
will not be dark to You; the night
will shine like the day for darkness
is as light to You.*

*“For You created my inmost being;
You knit me together in my
mother’s womb.
I praise You because I am fearfully
and wonderfully made;
Your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
“My frame was not hidden from You
when I was made in the secret place.
When I was woven together in the
depths of the earth,
Your eyes saw my unformed body.
All the days ordained for me
were written in Your book
before one of them came to be”
(Psalm 139:7-16).*

When I read this reassuring passage, it is as if I hear the Lord say to me: *“You are a living testimony to My creative handiwork. There is no one else like you anywhere in My creation. You are a lovable, one-of-a-kind woman with lasting personal worth — unique in the universe, complete in Christ, headed for heaven. I have always known you and loved you, from the first moment of your existence. Nothing can separate you from My steadfast love.”*

Knowing who we are in Christ allows us to accept ourselves from God’s point of view instead of thinking we have to somehow measure ourselves against current cultural standards of health and happiness. As Christians, we find our true identity in a point **beyond** ourselves; we base our confidence upon what Jesus has accomplished on our behalf, not upon our own accomplishments. But because we have yet to fully discard the old nature contained in our flesh — which remains part of us until we go to meet the Lord — realizing who we are and where we are headed requires our focused attention. Since we live in shadowy surroundings, it is only natural that we at times lose sight of heavenly realities.

Even so, we can learn a balanced way of caring for and about ourselves and our bodies that considers enduring scriptural truth as well as scientifically proven wellness strategies. Just as we must avoid placing our self-worth in our abilities, looks, and accomplishments, so must we avoid basing our self-acceptance on another extreme: that is, seeing ourselves as worthless, incompetent, and unlovable men and women that can never physically, emotionally, intellectually, and/or spiritually “measure up.”

TENTS, TEMPLES, AND JARS OF CLAY

“... You are not your own, you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19b, 20).

“In the absence of any other proof, the thumb alone would convince me of God’s existence,” noted Isaac Newton.

Have you, like this famous physicist, ever contemplated the ways in which God’s wisdom is reflected in the wonder of your design? Do you appreciate and accept your physical beauty and praise God for the wonder of your body’s intricate design, head to toe, inside and outside, seen and unseen?

I have never been able to remain silent about the amazement I feel about God's handiwork, the human body. I am continually amazed by its manifold intricacies, need for ongoing balance, and ability to carry out so many different functions, regardless of my level of conscious cooperation. Whenever I have the privilege of watching a newborn infant take her first breath of air, I still can hardly believe that the baby I am looking at began just nine short months ago as two microscopic cells.

Each of us enters life in this seemingly miraculous way. Ever since that time, our day-by-day development has proceeded along a complex, well-organized pathway that made us who we are today. We are rather intricately designed individuals, you and I, with an entirely unique set of physical, emotional, and intellectual capabilities and characteristics that God has given to us to call our own.

We are not here by accident. We are uniquely designed. We are loved by our living Creator. But having said these things, there is something I would like to add.

It is an inescapable fact today: our society idolizes physical fitness and attractiveness. Pictures of 85 percent fat-free physiques and media-magnified sex appeal seem to be everywhere, from the magazine covers lining the racks at discount bookstores to the towering, larger-than-life billboards strategically placed along the local interstate. Most popular models and actresses are slimmer than 95 percent of the female population in the United States — where 60 percent of women wear a size 12 or larger. (Though the average American adult woman weighs 146 pounds, this is considered too fat in a culture where “real beauty,” as exemplified by the average model or actress, weighs 23 percent below this amount!)

Is it any wonder that many of us today — Christians and non-Christians alike — experience a chronic kind of dissatisfaction with our appearance?

As a result, millions of dollars are spent every year on having wrinkles removed, hair transplanted, faces lifted, noses trimmed, hips and thighs suctioned, breasts enlarged, and tummies tucked. Many people today have had firsthand experience with chronic dieting, compulsive eating, bulimia, steroid abuse, exercise addiction, or anorexia. We know the way we look significantly influences whom we marry, how much money we earn, and whether people will, at least initially, accept or reject us.

But what is really important is what you and I see when we look in the mirror. Our attitudes about the way our bodies look have a powerful impact on the way we think and feel about our self-worth.

It is time we gave ourselves a break. For good.

Our bodies benefit from our tender loving care; they deserve our wise stewardship rather than our constant criticism and contempt. Scripture teaches us that our bodies are temples of God — the place where the Holy Spirit resides (1 Corinthians 6:19). The Bible also clearly emphasizes that the human body is a temporary tent that we will cast off at the point of physical death (2 Corinthians 5:1-5), an important reminder that our lasting value does not reside in our bodies, which the apostle Paul appropriately called “jars of clay” (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Someday, we will receive a brand new shape and form, “*raised imperishable ... raised in glory ... raised in power ... raised a spiritual body*” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). Until then, it is our responsibility to honor what Paul aptly described as our “perishable,” “weak,” “natural” bodies by viewing them from a big, balanced, biblical perspective rather than the narrow-minded approach our culture advocates.

Something beautiful happens when we let go of the fear, shame, and anxiety we feel about the way we look and accept our bodies, rich with imperfection, as a gift of God. When we stop worrying about certain aspects of our appearance — gray hair, crow’s feet, wide hips, a double chin or untoned abdomen, for example — and smile at the imperfect reflection we see when we look in the mirror, we learn to appreciate our body with the humor and grace God alone can give.

We need to make peace with our bodies, including the way they look and function. Achieving a delicate balance in the way we view and care for our physical form and appearance requires a certain measure of self-acceptance. And as we learn to appreciate our God-given, highly individualized, wonderfully made uniqueness with genuine joy and humility, we gain a healthy measure of peaceful satisfaction about ourselves that the world cannot give us. Our appearance — the way we look — is no longer a ruling factor concerning our identity. Who we are being created to be in Christ matters to us much more.

Where shall we look to “find ourselves” today? In the harsh reflection of the hallway mirror or as a reflection of the Lord’s everlasting life within us? Standing on the shifting numbers of a bathroom scale or upon the solid foundation of our identity in Jesus Christ?

DOING OUR PART

“So we make it our goal to please Him; whether we are at home in the body or away from it” (2 Corinthians 5:9).

Have you ever noticed how simply taking a breath of fresh air is an exhilarating experience when it is accompanied by a sense of appreciation for living? Some of the most enjoyable aspects of our lives are related to the physical dimension of our existence. Perhaps this is why there is such a fine line between enjoying health and pursuing sensuality.

The impact of our personal habits on the everyday quality of our lives has sweeping consequences. Our bodies have been designed to play intricately orchestrated harmonies with our minds and spirits. If one of these parts slips out of tune, the entire symphony is affected. Emphasizing only the externals isn’t enough. How we look is only **one** aspect of who we are: Health is a state of mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being, not just the absence of disease. Thus, according to this definition, no one is ever **perfectly** healthy!

Though someone may **appear** to be well, looks cannot provide a complete picture of someone’s current state of spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being. As Christians, we are aware of how weak a person may become spiritually and still be considered “healthy.” Current standards of fitness often fail to address this essential life principle.

The central reality in our lives rests upon our acceptance of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and His finished work of forgiveness. Without this belief, living a healthy lifestyle is ultimately irrelevant, isn’t it? Remember: our Creator wants to change us from the inside out. The way we live is designed to be a reflection of our faith in every dimension of our lives. Slowly but surely, God is restoring us as we *“put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator”* (Colossians 3:10). But, living a healthy lifestyle involves more than just being “whole” spiritually: it means doing our part in changing our habits and developing an awareness of the impact of our behavior on our spirits, minds, hearts, **and** bodies.

No matter what you have chosen to do in the past or will choose to do in the future, you can take one step at a time. Perhaps today it will mean going for a walk or having fruit instead of pecan pie after dinner. Tomorrow it may be having frozen yogurt in the afternoon but saying no to chips and dip at a party later in the evening. Next week, you may discover that you need to take time out for stress-reduction and simply relax for a few hours, without a set agenda, away from ringing phones and frequent work-related interruptions.

Developing a personal action plan can provide a solid point of reference to help guide your daily health-related decisions. The following evaluation consists of three corresponding sections: questions about your lifestyle as it is now; information that will help you know what changes to make to improve your health and quality of life; and suggested ways to make these changes easier.

Part 1: Your Current Lifestyle

1. How many days per week do you usually eat breakfast?
2. Do you normally eat balanced meals consisting of all major food groups, following current recommended dietary guidelines contained in MyPyramid?
3. How much water and other beverages do you drink every day?
4. How many hours of sleep do you normally average per night?
5. Are you taking any prescribed or over-the-counter medication on a regular basis?
6. What is your current weight?
7. What is your current occupation? How many hours per week does your job or school demand, including side-trips, business-related activities, take-home work, etc.?
8. Do you participate in a fitness program or exercise regularly? What activities do you enjoy and how long have you been doing them?
9. Have you moved recently or do you plan to move within the next 12 months?
10. List any traumatic events that have occurred within your family or closest friendships during the past year (e.g., deaths, major illnesses, financial crises, etc.). Describe what effect, if any, the event(s) you listed have had upon you.

11. Do you plan to quit your job, switch employment, retire, stop or start school, or otherwise change your financial picture within the next year? What impact will this have upon your lifestyle?
12. List any illnesses or injuries you have had within the past year, as well as ongoing health concerns (such as high blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis, anemia, obesity, or depression).
13. What is your health insurance coverage?
14. Do you smoke cigarettes or drink alcoholic beverages? If so, how much and how often?
15. Have you ever had a sexually transmitted disease?
16. Do you regularly wear a seat belt?
17. Are you fairly calm, stable, and even-tempered, or are you more tense, moody, and sometimes temperamental?
18. Do you find it easy or difficult to relax, other than when sleeping?
19. Are you satisfied with the sexual relationship you have with your spouse? If so, why? If not, how would you change it?
20. What is your current level of volunteer work?
21. How active would you say you are in your church?
22. How often do you have regular quiet time with God? How often do you pray, other than at meals or during church services?

23. If you are married, how satisfied are you with your marriage? If you are single, how satisfied are you with being single?
24. Do you have children? How are things going between you?
25. Name the three top sources of stress in your life right now.

Part 2: Ideas for Promoting Your Personal Wellness

1. A balanced breakfast is still considered to be the most important meal of the day.
- 2, 3. In April 2005, MyPyramid was released by the United States Department of Agriculture, replacing the Food Guide Pyramid introduced in 1992. The amounts below have been taken from MyPyramid and are for a 2,000-calorie diet. To find the amounts that are right for you, visit www.MyPyramid.gov

Grains: Make half your grains whole

Eat at least 3 oz. of whole-grain cereals, breads, crackers, rice, or pasta every day. 1 oz. is about 1 slice of bread, about 1 cup of breakfast cereal, or 1/2 cup of cooked rice, cereal or pasta. Eat 6 oz. every day out of this food group.

Vegetables: Vary your veggies

Eat more dark-green veggies like broccoli, spinach, and other dark leafy greens; more orange vegetables like carrots and sweet potatoes; and more dry beans and peas like pinto beans, kidney beans, and lentils. Eat 2-1/2 cups every day out of this food group.

Fruits: Focus on fruits

Eat a variety of fruit. Choose fresh, frozen, canned, or dried fruit. Go easy on fruit juices. Eat 2 cups out of this food group every day.

Milk: Get your calcium-rich foods

Go low-fat or fat-free when you choose milk, yogurt, and other milk products. If you don't or can't consume milk, choose lactose-free products or other calcium sources such as fortified foods and beverages. Get 3 cups every day; for kids aged 2 to 8, it's 2 cups.

Meat and Beans: Go lean with protein

Choose low-fat or lean meats and poultry. Bake it, broil it, or grill it. Vary your protein routine – choose more fish, beans, peas, nuts, and seeds. Eat 5-1/2 oz. every day.

Know the limits on fats, sugars, and salt (sodium)

Make the most of your fat sources from fish, nuts, and vegetable oils. Limit solid fats like butter, stick margarine, shortening, and lard, as well as foods that contain these. Check the Nutrition Facts label to keep saturated fats, trans fats, and sodium low. Choose food and beverages low in added sugars. Added sugars contribute calories with few, if any, nutrients.

In addition, find your balance between food and physical activity:

- Be sure to stay within your daily calorie needs.
 - Be physically active for at least 30 minutes most days of the week.
 - About 60 minutes a day of physical activity may be needed to prevent weight gain.
 - For sustaining weight loss, at least 60 to 90 minutes a day of physical activity may be required.
 - Children and teenagers should be physically active for 60 minutes every day, or most days.
4. In spite of the opinions of various people, eight hours is still the recommended amount of sleep for each night.
 5. Discuss all medications you take with your health care provider.
 6. Consult your doctor's current height/weight chart (published by a life insurance company) for specific standards and recommendations.
 7. There are no specific time-management guidelines in existence to tell us when our work crosses the line into overwork, e.g., work that creates harmful levels of emotional, physical, and spiritual stress. What is "too much" for one person is "too little" for another. Thus, it is up to each of us to individually determine if and when work has become detrimental to our health, as evidenced by the illnesses, moods, and stress signs that clearly accompany chronic overwork.
 8. With your health care provider's approval, walking, swimming, cycling, low-impact aerobic dance, and running activities are excellent ways to promote cardiovascular health, while certain stretching and strengthening exercises will enable your body to adapt more easily and recover more readily from the stresses placed upon it.
 9. Moving is stressful. If at all possible, avoid relocating your home during a time when other stressful life events are taking place.
 10. Regardless of what brought about any of the events you listed, their impact on your life is real and inescapable. Healing of your mind and body will take time. Staying busy may only exhaust you, if that is how you are coping. On the other hand, social withdrawal and inactivity can intensify feelings of isolation. Seek the support you need.
 11. Financial stress can affect your health, too. Do what you can to ease the load. For example, consult a non-profit consumer credit agency for advice on how to reduce budget strain.
 12. Taking care of yourself wisely includes not discounting health concerns that may already be present. Become familiar with alternative medical therapies as well as standard treatment plans to create an action plan that considers your current health needs.
 13. Be sure that you understand the specific providers, services, and related expenses your health insurance covers before obtaining medical care. It will be easier for you to plan possible ways to pay for costs not covered by your insurance company if you know in advance what they are.

14. Cigarette smoking and inhaling the smoke of others have been linked to various cancers and cardiopulmonary diseases, as has the heavy consumption of alcohol. With God's help, you can be addiction-free.
15. Get the testing and treatment you need to promote your sexual health; avoid any lifestyle behavior that exposes you to the risk of developing a sexually transmitted disease.
16. Though state laws require car passengers of all ages to wear safety restraint devices, many people still have not added this behavior to their everyday list of healthy lifestyle habits. Yet it is a proven and effective way to reduce serious injury if and when a car accident occurs.
- 17, 18. If you are struggling with anger, depression, guilt, anxiety, or any other difficult-to-deal-with emotional responses, ask your pastor, physician, or Christian counselor for advice on what steps you can take that will help restore your sense of emotional well-being.
19. Be honest about what you would change if you could, and discuss this with your spouse. Keep an open mind that allows you to truly hear what your partner is saying. A sexual relationship within marriage ideally allows men and women to appreciate and express the differences that our Creator designed our bodies to enjoy. Seeking to understand the whole picture, rather than just a one-sided view of human sexuality, enlarges our capacity for mutual marital joy.
- 20, 21, 22. Many of us spend too little time with our families — or alone with God. Except for limited periods of time when overactivity is unavoidable, this way of living does not promote our spiritual, physical, or emotional wellness. Love takes time, time spent together with the ones we love. The time we invest in meaningful moments with loved ones — and with the Lord in prayer — reduces daily stress and yields lasting dividends, including spiritual renewal and significant long-term health benefits.
- 23, 24. Marriage and family relationships play a key role in personal wellness. As you consider the following “one anothers” of the New Testament, reflect on how they are being expressed in your family relationships:
 - Have peace with one another (Mark 9:50).
 - Love one another (John 13:34).
 - Be devoted to one another (Romans 12:10).
 - Be like-minded one toward another (Romans 15:5).
 - Serve one another (Galatians 5:13).
 - Be patient, bearing with one another (Ephesians 4:2).
 - Be kind to one another, forgiving each other (Ephesians 4:32).
 - Submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21).
 - Abound in love one toward another (1 Thessalonians 3:12).

The Golden Rule of “do unto others” ideally begins with our closest neighbors!

Part 3: Developing A Plan

Now that you have read through the previous sections, you may wish to use the following ideas in developing an action plan in making your lifestyle healthier — and more enjoyable.

1, 2, 3. Suggestions for improved eating habits:

- Keep track of your daily food intake, using the Food Guide Pyramid.
- Make menus and meals that appeal to you and shop only for items for which you have planned ahead.
- Clean out your cupboards. Remove all foods that are high in fat, sugar, and calories. Replace with healthy snacks and staples.
- Make fresh fruit and vegetables more accessible: wash ahead of time and store in easy-to-reach bowls and see-through containers.
- Fill a liter-sized insulated bottle with filtered water and carry it with you for frequent refreshment.
- Don't condemn yourself if you slip and eat a piece of chocolate cake instead of a cup of low-fat cottage cheese. God loves you no matter what you eat.

4. Changes I can make to enable me to get the sleep I need:

5. List of drugs and vitamins I am taking, noting physician's comments and possible side effects:

6. Refer to 1-3.

7. Four questions to ask about daily tasks and work responsibilities:

Can this task be

- (A) eliminated?
- (B) done less often?
- (C) done at the same time as another task or activity?
- (D) delegated to someone else?
- (E) done later if I take a temporary break?

8. My current level of physical activity is:

Types of activities that my doctor has approved for me:

Activities from this list of recommendations that I enjoy:

My plan for starting (or continuing) a personal activity program:

9. If moving is necessary, I can make it easier by:

10. The events that still affect me are:

My plans for coping:

Bible references for building spiritual strength:

11. Debts that can be avoided or eliminated:

Temporary expenses and worries about meeting them:

Scriptural reassurances about God's provision for me:

12. Current plan regarding existing health concerns:

13. My plan for reducing/meeting health care expenses:

14. What I desire to change about smoking cigarettes or drinking alcoholic beverages:

Where I will obtain support as I make these changes:

15.Changes I need to make now:

Special recommendations to follow:

16.Plans for changing seat belt wearing or driving habits:

17, 18. Plan of action (prayer, regular quiet time, counseling):

Two areas of my life in which I desire God's help:

19.Ways we can improve our communication and our sexual relationship so that we can be relatively free from resentment, frustration, and guilt in this area of our lives:

20.Current volunteer activity involvement that can be reduced, phased out, or eliminated:

21.Current church involvements (committees, Bible studies, small group meetings, ministries, etc.) that can be temporarily postponed or eliminated, if necessary, so that I spend more time with my family and/or with God:

22.Changes I want to make in my prayer and Bible study habits:

23, 24. A list of four “one anothers” I desire to put into practice now, with God’s help:

By learning to form realistic expectations, we can reject the one-dimensional popular view of the “perfect” man or woman. As we take our eyes off of our failures, deficiencies, and shortcomings and say yes to living God’s way, we find rest for our souls and, not surprisingly, start making healthier lifestyle choices.

“The Lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing” (Zephaniah 3:17).

Turning away from our former life patterns, from all that would hinder us from recognizing our new life in Christ, enables us to walk forth with Him in liberty. As we experience the continuing companionship of our risen Savior, we are daily strengthened and supported by the incredible blessings of His grace, faithfulness, mercy, and love.

Lord, I believe!
I believe in the life-giving
power of Your Spirit;
I have been set free
from the law of sin and death!

Born from above,
my new life is a reflection
of Your steadfast love.

And so I will not lose heart
as You inwardly renew me
day by day —

I thank You for each tiny
transformation
made along the way.

Inch by inch,
moment by moment,

I am learning how
to trust You, Lord,
to rely upon Your strength
and sustenance
instead of temporary things.

I believe that You are faithful, Father,
and will not forget to finish
the work You have begun.

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