

# KEEPING FIT FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS

## BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Daniel 1:8-20; 1  
Corinthians 9:19-27;  
1 Timothy 4:7-12;  
2 Timothy 2:1-5

## A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Train yourself in  
godliness, for, while  
physical training is  
of some value, god-  
liness is valuable in  
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present life and the  
life to come.

(1 Tim. 4:7b-8)

1. Tammy Warren, "Our Bodies Are Our Temples: A Pastor Preaches—and Practices—Healthy Living," *Presbyterians Today*, July 6, 2022, [bit.ly/TPWBodyTemple](https://bit.ly/TPWBodyTemple).

## Daily Bible Readings

<b>M</b>	Mar. 2	Prov. 12:1-2, 10-14	Work and Discipline
<b>T</b>	Mar. 3	1 Cor. 6:12-20	The Temple of the Body
<b>W</b>	Mar. 4	1 Cor. 9:19-27	The Discipline of Right Choices
<b>Th</b>	Mar. 5	Ps. 139:1-12	God Is Always with Me
<b>F</b>	Mar. 6	Ps. 139:13-24	Fearfully and Wonderfully Made
<b>Sa</b>	Mar. 7	1 Tim. 4:7-12	The Superior Training in Godliness

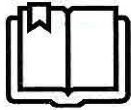
## STEPPING INTO THE WORD

As a teenager, Pastor Phanta Lansden battled obesity, anxiety, and self-doubt, as many young people do. She was bullied because of her weight. By the time she reached her mid-twenties, she weighed almost three-hundred pounds. Later, as senior pastor of St. James Presbyterian Church in Greensboro, North Carolina, she knew she had to take action to lose weight. In a 2022 article in *Presbyterians Today*,<sup>1</sup> Lansden revealed that she began to reclaim her physical health with a five-pound weight-loss goal. "Once I hit the five, I celebrated," she said; "then I said, 'I'll do five more.' When I got to thirty pounds, I said, 'I'm going to buy myself a new outfit.'" In the end, she lost over one-hundred pounds, and in 2019 she completed the Charlotte Marathon.

Faith and fitness are now central to Lansden's ministry. Seniors take part in fitness classes at her church, and members of all ages join the CROP Hunger Walk each October. She stresses good nutrition as well. "As a pastor, I challenge people to think of ways we can eat healthier," Lansden said. For example, when the congregation hosts funeral receptions, they may have heart-healthy baked chicken alongside the fried chicken. This is a challenge, because food is such a

big part of culture that it is hard to abandon—even when it is unhealthy. “It’s just thinking of ways to shift the culture to think healthier,” she said. “The healing journey manifests in our spirits, minds and bodies. God desires that we live whole.”

*Creator God, we thank you for sending Jesus to be your Word in a human body. Help us to keep our souls and bodies together through attention to faith and fitness. Amen.*



## SCRIPTURE

Daniel 1:8–17; 1 Timothy 4:7–8

**1:8** But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations of food and wine, so he asked the palace master to allow him not to defile himself. <sup>9</sup>Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion from the palace master. <sup>10</sup>The palace master said to Daniel, “I am afraid of my lord the king; he has appointed your food and your drink. If he should see you in poorer condition than the other young men of your age, you would endanger my head with the king.” <sup>11</sup>Then Daniel asked the guard whom the palace master had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: <sup>12</sup>“Please test your servants for ten days: Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. <sup>13</sup>You can then compare our appearance with the appearance of the young men who eat the royal rations and deal with your servants according to what you observe.” <sup>14</sup>So he agreed to this proposal and tested them for ten days. <sup>15</sup>At the end of ten days it was observed that they appeared better and fatter than all the young men who had been eating the royal rations. <sup>16</sup>So the guard continued to withdraw their royal rations and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables. <sup>17</sup>To these four young men God gave knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom; Daniel also had insight into all visions and dreams.

*Note: Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.*

**4:7** Have nothing to do with profane and foolish tales. Train yourself in godliness, <sup>8</sup>for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

## FAITH AND FITNESS

Paul's first letter to Timothy was written by the apostle to a younger colleague, one whom he described as "my true child in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2). He wanted the young man to be a good minister of Jesus Christ "in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). For Paul, food and marriage were things which "God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth," and he did not recommend abstention from all bodily pleasures (1 Tim. 4:3). Paul said that "everything created by God is good," including the human body and human relationships, "and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by God's word and by prayer" (1 Tim. 4:4-5).

These words set the stage for Paul's recommendation that Timothy "train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come" (1 Tim. 4:7-8). Paul uses the image of an athlete's training to illustrate how Timothy should train himself "in godliness." This is not an uncommon image for Paul, as he says elsewhere that athletes "exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one" (1 Cor. 9:25), and "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal, toward the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14).

Notice that Paul sees godliness as being of value in "both the present life and the life to come." He wants Timothy to know the importance of spiritual fitness in a life that begins on earth and then continues in heaven. "The promise is not simply of the victor's wreath in the games," notes New Testament scholar James D. G. Dunn, "but of life both now and in the age to come."<sup>2</sup> For Paul, Christian faith and physical fitness go together since both require self-control and effort in the pursuit of a full and healthy life with God, on earth and in heaven.

2. James D. G. Dunn, "First and Second Letters to Timothy," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 10, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 913.



**What actions do you take in your life to make a connection between faith and fitness?**


## EAT FROM THE GARDEN

**Y**ou've heard of Daniel and the lion's den. But have you heard about Daniel and *the vegetables*? After Daniel and several Israelite youths are taken as prisoners to Babylon to be servants in the king's palace, they are given the opportunity to enjoy food and wine from the king's table. But Daniel resolves not to defile himself with the royal cuisine, and makes a request of their guard, "Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. You can then compare our appearance with the appearance of the young men who eat the royal rations and deal with your servants according to what you observe" (Dan. 1:12-13).

The guard agrees to this and tests them for ten days. At the end of the period, Daniel and his companions look healthier and better nourished than the young men who eat the royal food. So, the guard takes away their rich food and continues to give them vegetables. Daniel and his colleagues eat from the garden and are much healthier as a result.

We, too, are challenged to eat from the garden and to enjoy the health benefits that come from such a diet. This approach was not original to Daniel but goes back to the Garden of Eden, where God said to the first man and woman, "I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food" (Gen. 1:29). God recommended a vegetarian approach to the very first people.

Eating a diet made up of abundant fruits, vegetables, and whole grains not only puts you closer to the way God intends for you to eat, but it also happens to put you on the cutting edge of nutrition science. There is wisdom in eating from the garden, because a low-fat, calorie-controlled diet built on these nutritional components can help to dramatically reduce a person's risk of being overweight, which, in turn, lowers the risk of diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and some cancers. Such an approach, however, requires determination. Daniel had to stand up to the powers of Babylon. In a similar manner you may find yourself at odds with today's culture of fast food and fad diets.

 **How can you improve your nutrition and do a better job of eating from the garden?**

## STEPPING INTO THE WORLD

Christians are challenged to keep fit not only for themselves but for the sake of others. When the Babylonian guard discovered that Daniel and his colleagues appeared better “than all the young men who had been eating the royal rations” (Dan. 1:15), he continued to give them vegetables instead of the royal cuisine. Daniel and the other young men were found to be so knowledgeable and skillful that they were stationed in the king’s court, and in “every matter of wisdom and understanding concerning which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom” (Dan. 1:20). In time, “the king promoted Daniel, gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon” (Dan. 2:48).

As Pastor Phanta Lansden says so well, “God desires that we live whole.” Such wholeness requires that we keep soul and body together by focusing on both our spiritual and physical health. Our souls are strengthened by regular worship, Bible study, and prayer—activities that are responses to the apostle Paul’s invitation, “Train yourself in godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7). At the same time, our bodies are strengthened by endurance exercise (walking, running, cycling), strength training (using weights or exercise bands), and good nutrition (eating from the garden as much as possible). When we are spiritually and physically strong, we are in the best possible position to serve other people.

Spiritually strong people seek out a deepening relationship with God, look for opportunities to do God’s work in the community and the world, and understand that life’s trials are also opportunities for growth. Physically strong people are better able to enjoy recreation and sports, live independently, and take part in acts of service with people around them. Spiritual and physical fitness is what allows the members of Phanta Landen’s congregation to take part in fitness classes at church and to walk in the CROP Hunger Walk each October. We can follow their example of exercising and eating a nutritious diet, which will help us to avoid the clogged arteries, strained hearts, and aching joints that are caused by inactivity and rich food.



**What specific steps will you take to strengthen yourself in order to better serve others?**

## SCRIPTURE NOTES

*The following notes from the Uniform Series provide additional information about today's Scripture.*

1. Daniel prophesied after he was taken to Babylon with the first Judean captives. He was taken during the first of three drives to overthrow Jerusalem (in 605 BCE, in 597 BCE, in 586 BCE). Daniel, together with his three companions—Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—were chosen from the captives “to stand in the king’s palace,” as special advisers to the king, as later developments indicate. Joseph’s imprisonment and subsequent elevation to viceroy of Egypt (Gen. 39:21) parallels Daniel’s enslavement and rise to authority on Babylon. Faithfulness to YHWH is common to both men.
2. According to the Jewish law, certain kinds of meat were “clean” and other kinds were “unclean.” Daniel concluded that the “king’s meat” was unclean, perhaps because the king’s food and drink had been sacrificed to idols. To eat the king’s food was the same as honoring those false deities.
3. “Lord” (Dan. 1:2) means *Adonai*, here a general reference to the false god Bel/Marduk/Merodach of Babylon. To conquer another nation’s deities was thought to prove the superiority of the victor’s god. LORD (in all caps) translates as *adonai* and refers to YHWH, the God of Israel.
4. In 1 Timothy 4:7–12 and 2 Timothy 2:1–5a, Paul (or his disciple) encourages Timothy to stand firm in the faith through bodily discipline, namely the restraint and control exercised over the bodily appetites by a sound mind and a pure heart.