

Breaking Strongholds—Lesson 12—God Will Help Me

I walked into the grade school gym and saw the evil contraption. It was a thick heavy rope attached to the ceiling and hanging to the ground. Underneath was a cushioned mat. I knew what it meant, and I didn't like it. It meant utter humiliation for me. We were supposed to be able to climb at least partway up the rope. The first time we had to do it was when I was in third grade. I couldn't even get a foot up the rope.

After being laughed off the gym floor for failing, I took the option of walking the extra mile in fourth grade. This was fifth grade and the Presidential Fitness Challenge had come into being and was a requirement for every student. Mr. Benson, the gym teacher, was a tall, fat guy in shorts. He said everyone had to try the climb at least twice if they didn't get up at least three feet the first time. If I couldn't do it one time, what would change by trying it a second time? I sighed heavily just thinking about it.

Climb the Rope or Else

When my turn came, I hoped Mr. Benson would just call it quits but he didn't. He explained how to put my leg around the rope and how to pull myself up with my arms while pushing with my legs. Instead of climbing, though, I got my legs all tangled up in the rope and fell on the mat. It seemed everyone in the gym did a collective snicker. I heaved a big sigh and told the gym teacher I wasn't feeling well.

He said, "Ok but if you leave now, I will have to give you an F in gym class. If you try one more time, I'll give you an M for passing."

I looked around the room. Some were watching me, but not too many. I wanted to scream at Mr. Benson and run out of the room. Instead, I thought of the F on my report card and decided if they laughed at me once they could laugh again.

This time, Mr. Benson had a little more compassion and helped by supporting my feet with his foot, so I climbed the required height, got scared, let go and fell on the mat. He nodded as I asked permission to go to the restroom.

I truly hated exercise. There was nothing I liked about it. Sure, I'd climbed a few feet, but Mr. Benson had helped me. The only other person he helped was short and fat Percy. Mr. Benson hadn't even been able to help Percy get up a foot. There was no hope for Percy. I wasn't as bad as Percy, but that wasn't saying much.

When I came back to the gym, I had to do the pull-ups. I did one. Chin-ups, again I did one. I did 10 sit-ups. Then, I started walking around the gym to get in my mile. I knew I

wouldn't make it the entire way. There wasn't time. Likely no one was watching me, but still, I hated exercise.

The Bike Disaster

Maybe if they had a class where we rode bikes, I would like gym class. Bike riding was the one thing I enjoyed doing outside. Part of it was the freedom I felt whizzing down the road in front of our house. I'd join the kids in the neighborhood riding up and down our street.

Where we lived there were four small houses in a row with a church and its parking lot across the street. Beyond our four houses were about three blocks of open fields on either side of the road. The road sloped uphill at that point. We'd ride up to the top of the hill and then come down the road as fast as we could.

One summer afternoon, I was riding my bike feeling the freedom which only comes when the wind is in my hair and I'm speeding down the hill. I decided if I rode without my hands on the handlebars, I'd feel even freer. It was truly divine until I hit loose gravel from the parking lot at the bottom of the hill. In a split second, I got thrown off the bike. My head hit the pavement with such force Mom said she heard it inside the house. This was before safety helmets were a thing.

She came running outside and determined I needed stitches. Even though Mom had emotional issues, during emergencies she was calm, cool, collected and knew exactly what to do. She grabbed me and took me to the emergency room.

Later Dad teased me saying I had rocks in my head. The doctor did take out a rock which had been embedded in my forehead and did a few stitches. It wasn't as horrible as some of my own children's accidents, but it is one I remember.

Up until that point, I had loved riding bikes. I was about 14 when the accident happened and after then I rarely rode my bike. If I did, I held on tightly. It just never had the appeal it once had. I hadn't seen bike riding as exercise, it was just fun, until the bike disaster. Bike riding never again held the appeal it once had for me. It moved over to the category of an exercise I hated.

The Ice-Skating Upheaval

I wasn't very good at roller skating, but I liked it, so when our church youth group decided to go to the ice-skating rink in a neighboring town, I was all for it. I'd never been ice skating before, but it couldn't be much more difficult than roller skating, right? Plus, our youth director said it was great fun, even better than roller skating.

We took a bus to the rink. At 13, I was one of the youngest one's going. I had no clue how to put on and lace up my skates. One of the sponsors gave me quick instructions and then headed out to the ice. I was left to lace up my skates and then attempt to get out to the rink. I watched others for a while before I attempted to stand on the slender blade, thankful I was holding on to the side.

As I was trying to pull myself along on the side, one of the older guys asked if I wanted to skate with him. I told him I didn't know how.

"It's not hard," he said. "Just hold my hand. I'll help you."

I knew he was just trying to be nice. His girlfriend was a friend of mine. I decided to trust him. I skated with him about halfway around the rink. As long as I was holding on to him, I was fine. Then he just dropped my hand and skated off. It was his way of throwing me out into the water and letting me swim on my own, but I was too far away from the side of the rink and people were going way too fast around me. My one goal was to get to the side where I could hold on to a rail.

Then a speed skater whizzed past me and slightly touched me as he went around. I know he didn't do it to intentionally make me fall. He was basically letting me know he was there. One minute I was standing in the middle of the ice rink and the next I had landed on the ice with my left foot underneath me.

After they figured out that I was indeed hurt and couldn't get up, a couple of guys helped me to the bench to take off my skates. My foot was swelling fast and hurt badly. It hurt a lot. Everyone else ignored me and was having fun. Somehow it made sense the one time I went ice skating I would get hurt. When I finally got home, Dad wrapped my ankle with an ace bandage. We went to the doctor the next day and found I had a badly sprained ankle. He sent me home with crutches and told me to stay off of my foot for three weeks. Every time I took a step, it hurt and I was reminded of how much I hated exercise of any type.

The High School Gym Class

In high school, we had some choices for gym class. One of those was swimming. I wished I could take swimming every semester, but I couldn't. I had to take the regular exercise class during the opposite semester.

It was hard enough walking around and around the grade school gym endless numbers of times to total up to a mile, but it was much worse walking the high school

track. All the way around was a mile. If I was only halfway around and it was five minutes until the bell rang, I had to run. I don't like to run. When I run, I usually fall and hurt myself. We had about half an hour to walk the mile. Some even ran two miles during the same time. I was doing good if I made it a mile.

Swimming, though, was different. It was the one time I enjoyed going to gym class. It never felt like exercise. Although I wasn't a fast swimmer, I liked the sidestroke and backstroke. I loved being in the water. It felt peaceful. It was one exercise I enjoyed.

As an adult, any time anyone mentioned exercise I equated it with torture. I was glad I was done with physical education classes. I sincerely hoped those days were behind me. I didn't even like going shopping because I had to walk, and walking felt like exercise which was torture. Whenever I tried to lose weight and people would tell me I needed to exercise, I once again felt like I wanted to run and hide.

To be honest, I knew I had missed a lot of things when my children were growing up because I hadn't joined them and their dad on bike rides and hiking trips. Even when we'd go on vacation, they would go explore and I would sit in the car and read. I told them I preferred to read, but I just didn't want to walk. I knew exercise would be good for weight loss, but my experience taught me it was something I should avoid.

Changing Habits

When I started on my lifestyle change journey, it was God who mentioned that nasty word to me again—exercise. One of the first concepts I learned on was that instead of going on another diet to lose weight, I needed to learn how to change my habits. I needed to choose one bad habit to stop and a good habit to start. I just didn't realize the good habit would be exercise.

For habit change to work, I had to put firm boundaries around this bad habit. It wasn't something I was stopping temporarily until I got the weight off. It was a habit I wanted to discard completely. Stopping the bad habit would leave a void, so this meant I needed to start a good habit in its place. I would use all the energy I had been putting towards the thing I've just stopped to fuel this new and better habit which would help get me where I wanted to go.

I wanted to stop all sugar, but I knew this was not a doable stop for me. My stop had to be simpler so I would have success. I chose to stop eating candy. I knew what it was. I couldn't fool myself into saying I could eat it. Knowing it was childish would make it an easier thing for me to eliminate for the rest of my life.

The start was more challenging. This is when God dropped the bombshell and told me to start exercising. I argued with Him. I told Him I hated exercise. I told Him I got hurt exercising so how could it be good for me?

“Have you ever gotten hurt exercising in the water?” He asked. We had a family membership to our community recreation center which had a pool. I would go every once in a while to the water aerobics class. I hadn’t been a regular, but I’d never gotten hurt in the water. The water supported my body. The more I thought about it, the more I knew the water was the best way for me to exercise.

I thought God would want me to take a Zumba, yoga or weight-lifting class, but He knows me. He knows what is best for me, what would work for me and what would help me the most on my journey. This was many years ago and I’ve been exercising in our community pool regularly ever since. It was the first good habit I started, and I still do it today, more than ten years later.

Stronghold Revealed

I didn’t understand I had a stronghold where exercise was concerned. I thought I was just clumsy, accident-prone and no good at sports, but God helped me see moving is an integral part of working on my physical body, which is the very home of the Holy Spirit.

What God helped me to understand is my body is a place of importance to Him. It’s where He lives and He doesn’t want it filled with junk food wrappers. He wants to live in a fit and healthy body so together we can reach others with the message of His love.

Although in the beginning I began going to the pool for exercise, God has shown me my pool time does a lot more for me than exercise. I work from home and am in front of the computer a lot. My pool time helps me move, but it also gets me out of the house. I have to interact with real people even if it’s just acknowledging they are there.

It also revives and refreshes me in a way I never dreamed possible. I love to go in the mornings before they begin playing music. It’s just me and God jogging in the water. It’s a time I look forward to. God knows He has my undivided attention when I’m there.

I started going three days a week for 30 minutes. As I added additional sugary things I wanted to stop, I added additional days and more time to exercise. These days I go five days a week. It’s become a habit I don’t want to miss.

I no longer hate exercise. I dearly love it. God addressed this lie I believed and turned it around simply by showing me the exercise which fits my lifestyle and helps me the most. I even do some recumbent bike riding and weightlifting from time to time.

Exercise has been an integral piece in my weight loss transformation. I had to get over my hatred and fear of it. God helped me change simply by sharing the truth with me. I've never been hurt while swimming. Working out in the water was an exercise I could do even when I was super morbidly obese. I am lighter in the water so, I am not taxing my joints as much.

How God Helps Me

There are days when I don't want to go exercise because I don't feel like it, I have too much to do, the weather is bad or any number of reasons. On those days, I am reminded of what God said to me about my journey.

“Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God,” (Hebrews 12:1-2 NKJV)

This is great encouragement for me because I want to lay aside every weight which holds me back. When I have committed to God to do something, I should not allow anything to keep me from it. It would be disobedience to God to do so. Disobedience is sin. Sin ensnares me and makes me falter on the race God has set before me.

This race a journey with Jesus as our guide. He's the one who started us on this path and the one who will be there at the end. Sometimes life gets hard. It even got hard for Jesus, but I love what these verses tell us. He didn't look at the pain or the shame of what was happening in the moment. He was always looking at the joy He knew awaited when He saw His Father once again. He endured everything He went through, even the horrible pain on the cross because He knew it was His purpose.

When it gets hard, we know He is with us helping us all the way. We need to remember this prescription to renew our spiritual vitality. “Be made strong even in your weakness by lifting up your tired hands in prayer and worship. And strengthen your weak knees, for as you keep walking forward on God's paths all your stumbling ways will be divinely healed!” (Hebrews 12:12-13 TPT).

Sacred Time

God really has changed my desires. My exercise time is on my calendar. I work everything around it. The other day, Roy and I were having some car issues. He had an appointment out of town, and we were down to one car. I told him I would skip exercise.

He said, "I know how much you love to exercise. I don't want you to have to skip it. I'll take my motorcycle." He said this even though the forecast had a possibility of rain. It showed me God has helped me change completely in this area. Even Roy recognizes the change.

God helped me in an area I didn't even know I needed help. He's good at that. He knows us so much better than we know ourselves. "This plan of Mine is not what you would work out, neither are My thoughts the same as yours! For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than yours, and My thoughts than yours," (Isaiah 55:8-9 TLB).

I'm so glad I have a God who shares His thoughts and plans with me. His wisdom is what guides me on my journey. Thank You, God, for helping me navigate my life journey towards better health.

Action Steps

1. What types of exercise or play did you do as a child? Did you enjoy any sports? If you did, why did you stop?
2. How do you feel about exercise now?
3. Is there any exercise you enjoy now or think you might enjoy? Put an X beside those you dislike or don't want to try. Circle those you would like to try. Which will you do this week? Share that and utter insights in the comments under this video on the FB page.

Walking	Bike riding	Water aerobics
Jogging	Roller Skating	Team sports
Weight training	Treadmill	Rollerblading
Stationary bikes	Swimming	Skiing
Ice skating	Water jogging	Triathlon
Dancing	Jump rope	5K
Aerobics	Trampoline	Sky diving
Exercise videos	Walking your dog	Parasailing
Yoga	Zumba	Surf boarding

