

What I Learn from Running

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Recently I have been running along German Mills Creek here in Toronto. My wife and I are living at Tyndale Seminary this semester, and I enjoy running along a paved path that goes south toward Lake Ontario.

An interesting thing happens when I run regularly. The more I run, the more I lose weight. And the more I lose weight, the faster I run. It's a kind of balance or equation. I am seeking a healthy balance of weight and exercise because I want to "glorify God in [my] body" (1 Cor. 6:20).

This is a Christian virtue—to glorify God in our bodies. To be spiritual is also to be physical. Our Lord Jesus Christ "became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). In the New Creation our physical bodies will be resurrected to be like Jesus' resurrected body (Rom. 6:5).

Here are three things I learn from running:

First, *physical, spiritual, and mental health are connected and reinforce each other*. It is hard to be spiritually alert if you are physically ill. If I am sick and unable to run, that affects me mentally and emotionally. Running helps me understand more deeply the interconnection between spirit, body, and mind. It makes me more alert spiritually and mentally.

Running reminds me that I am definitely physical! It reminds me also of the beauty of the world around me; the joy of inhabiting God's good earth.

Second, *discipline becomes easier the more we practice it*. If I haven't run for a few weeks, it is hard to get back into practice. But running becomes easier and more enjoyable as I persist.

The same is true with spiritual disciplines. Prayer, Bible study, devotional reading, generosity, and participation in Christian community become easier and more rewarding the more we practice them. As we exercise ourselves spiritually (in biblically sound ways) we grow spiritually. The more we grow spiritually, the more disciplined we become.

Third, *life moves in patterns and cycles*. We live cycles of days, months, seasons, and years. This is the way God made the world, as the Bible teaches us.

Cycles can work for us or against us. If I've put on extra weight from overeating, I tend to run slower. But if I push against that and run faster, I tend to lose weight. The more I run, the more fit I feel, and the more fit I feel the better I run.

Many people are not physically able to run, of course. But still the principle holds. We live by cycles that work for us or against us.

The same is true with the physical creation and the way we treat it. Humans have

dominion over the earth—constructively or destructively. There are cycles of life and cycles of death within the created order. Cycles of death, introduced by sin, include the human sin of failing to care for the good earth.

Cycles of life are God’s way—living cycles in our ongoing discipleship. Empowered by the Spirit and Christian community, cycles of life not only help us grow spiritually. They actually contribute to the coming of the new creation in fullness.

Cycles of life and death are physically, materially, and economically true for the whole created order, just as much as for our bodies and spirits. Healthy cycles—for instance, daily and weekly patterns of enough food, rest, exercise, and productive work—increase our health and well-being. But unhealthy cycles—insufficient sleep and rest, too much or too little food, overwork—undermine our health. They are cycles of death.

We need a healthy biblical balance. We can live by the life-giving rhythms of the Spirit. This means respecting and cooperating with the rhythms of physical life, not just spiritual life.

Some of our most important disciplines relate to Christian community. As Christians we run *together*, not separately. As Christian community, we need cycles and disciplines of life together, shared life. Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matt. 18:20). This gathering in Jesus’ name and presence is essential Christian discipline (Heb. 10:24-25).

So “let us lay aside every weight, . . . and let us run with perseverance the race set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:1-2).

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