

Your Spiritual Workout

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:24–27; Philippians 2:12–13

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What do you think of when you hear the words “work out”? You probably think of gymnasiums, weights, and all sorts of fitness equipment. Hard work, commitment, time, and resources are necessary to grow and strengthen our physical bodies. While exercise is popular in America today, it’s certainly nothing new.

Paul made use of this familiar imagery in his letter to the believers in Philippi. In Philippians 2:12-13, Paul’s exhortation for believers to exercise their spiritual growth comes down to those two simple, familiar words: “work out.”

But the workout Paul refers to is far more strenuous than a short jog on a treadmill—and it makes a much greater impact in your life.

Doing the Work

The principle of working out one’s salvation has two aspects. The first pertains to personal conduct, to faithful, obedient *daily living*. Such obedience obviously involves active commitment and personal effort. Scripture is replete with injunctions, both negative and positive, to strive toward obedience.

Sin in every form is to be renounced and put off and replaced by righteous thinking. Believers are to cleanse themselves “from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1). They are to set their minds “on the things above, not on the things that are on earth,” because they have died to sin and their lives are now “hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:2–3). Just as they once “presented [their] members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness,” they should “now present [their] members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification” (Romans 6:19), walking “in a manner worthy of the calling with which [they] have been called” (Ephesians 4:1).

Paul exhorted the Corinthians to aggressive, strenuous effort in living the Christian life:

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:24–27, cf. Philippians 3:12-16)

He gave similar instruction to Timothy: “Flee from these [evil] things, you man of God, and pursue

righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Timothy 6:11–12; cf. 4:15–16; Hebrews 12:1–3).

If living the Christian life were merely a matter of passive yielding and surrender, of “letting go and letting God,” then such admonitions not only would be superfluous but presumptuous. But those injunctions, and countless others like them throughout God’s Word, presuppose believers’ personal responsibility for obedience. They must choose to live righteously, to work out their salvation in daily living, while at the same time realizing that all the power for that obedience comes from God’s Spirit.

Persevering to the End

The second aspect of working out one’s salvation is perseverance, of faithful obedience *to the end*.

Salvation has three time dimensions: past, present, and future. The past dimension is that of justification, when believers placed their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and were redeemed. The present dimension is sanctification, the time between a believer’s justification and his death or the rapture. The future aspect is glorification, when salvation is completed and believers receive their glorified bodies.

Believers therefore have been saved, are being saved, and will be saved. They are to pursue sanctification in this life to the time of glorification. In that glorious moment believers will see the Lord “face to face” and come to know Him fully even as they are fully known (1 Corinthians 13:12). They “will be like Him, because [they] will see Him just as He is” (1 John 3:2). It was for that glorious moment that Paul so deeply longed. Looking forward to that time he exclaimed:

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:8–14)

In the Olivet discourse, Jesus declared, “The one who endures to the end, he will be saved” (Matthew 24:13). Paul admonished Timothy: “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you” (1 Timothy 4:16). The writer of Hebrews notes, “We have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end” (Hebrews 3:14).

The Power to Persevere

Perseverance in the faith is the duty of every true believer, but the believer does not *secure* his own salvation through his own power. Instead, perseverance is the unmistakable and inevitable evidence

of divine power operating in the soul (Colossians 1:29).

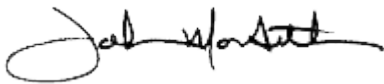
Believers will persevere because God's power keeps their salvation secure. Jesus repeatedly emphasized that truth. In John 10:28-29 He declared,

I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Earlier in Philippians, Paul wrote that he was "confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). From beginning to end, the entire divine work of salvation is under God's control. In a well-known and beloved passage Paul wrote,

We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Romans 8:28–30)

So it is clear from Scripture that believers are responsible to work out their spiritual growth. But it's also clear that their work is possible only through the power of God. How do the two coincide? Next time we'll consider the Lord's role in our spiritual growth.



(Adapted from [*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Philippians*](#).)

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