02. Use It Or Lose It

1 Living Life to the Full – a Gift to be Celebrated!

2 Use It or Lose It

3 The Three Angels’ Messages begin with familiar words: “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who…

4 …dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (Rev. 14:6, NKJV). Notice with me: the first part of the message, the first thing it proclaims, is the “everlasting gospel.” All that follows—worshipping the Creator, the hour of judgment, the fall of Babylon, the patience of the saints—are built on “the everlasting gospel.” The gospel comes first. And the gospel is the great news that we are saved by the life and death of Jesus in our behalf. This is the foundational truth upon which the other truths follow.

5 Eternal life is found in Jesus, who came and lived a perfect life, the kind of life that we can’t. And the amazing provision of the gospel is that, by faith, we get that life—His life—credited to us as if it were our own.
Ellen White said it so perfectly in *Steps to Christ*, page 62:

“Since we are sinful, unholy, we cannot perfectly obey the holy law. We have no righteousness of our own…

…with which to meet the claims of the law of God. But Christ has made a way of escape for us.

He lived on earth amid trials and temptations such as we have to meet. He lived a sinless life.

He died for us, and now He offers to take our sins and give us His righteousness.

If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then sinful as your life may have been,

for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character,
and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.” Yes, that is the “everlasting gospel,” is it not? Talk about good news! No matter our past, no matter the mistakes that we have made 20 years ago, or even 20 minutes ago, we can find peace, assurance, and hope in Jesus. Not because of ourselves but, in fact, despite ourselves. We can rest, not in our own works, but in the works, the perfect works, of Jesus for us.

13 Does this mean, then, that works have no role in the Christian life? I think that we all know better than that. The struggle for Christians hasn’t been over the question of whether or not works play a role in our faith. Of course they do. Instead, the question, the one that helped spawn the great Protestant Reformation, is this: Just what is the role of works in the Christian life? Yes, we should do good works. But if they can’t save us, what is their role?

14 Well, we need to let the Word of God speak to us in this matter, right? And the book of James makes a very powerful statement precisely on this matter. “Do you see that faith was working together with his [Abraham’s] works, and by works faith was made perfect?” (James 2:22, NKJV). Please don’t miss this point. Yes, works cannot save us. We know that. We are saved by what Jesus has done for us, by what He has accomplished in our behalf. But works still have a role. What role? Well, what does James say here? “Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?” Works help make faith perfect. That is, by works—by living out our faith through trusting in God—we can grow in that faith. In other words, faith is strengthened by the exercise of it.

15 ILLUSTRATION: We’ve all heard the story about the man walking on a tightrope across Niagara Falls or some other precipitous, or very steep, chasm. When he asked someone, “Do you have the faith that I can walk across it safely?” the
person responded, “Why, sure, I believe you can.” When the
daredevil asked him, “Ok, so do you want me to carry you
across with me?” the man was a little less expressive in his
faith.

Now, let me ask this: What Christian hasn’t experienced
the reality of seeing his or her faith grow and mature
through works, through the exercising of that faith?
There’s a principle, and it works both in the physical and the
spiritual realm; and that is: Use it or lose it.

Yes, we have been taught, “For by grace you have been
saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the
gift of God,

not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His
workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,

…which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in
them” (Eph. 2:8-10, NKJV). Faith is a gift from God, but
what good does that gift do you if you don’t use it? In fact, I
can say that choices often determine our destiny. That’s heavy,
 isn’t it? Indeed, as we just saw in those texts, choice, our
choice, can determine our eternal destiny: eternal life or
eternal destruction.

ILLUSTRATION: A man wanted to lose weight but just
didn’t have the gumption, or initiative, to do what was needed
in order to shed those excess pounds. Praying that God would
remove the calories from his hot fudge sundaes and fettuccini
Alfredo just didn’t do the trick, I’m afraid. His wife, knowing
that he wanted, and needed, to slim down, bought him for Christmas a nice treadmill, a fancy, computer-driven device with all the bells and whistles and wires. You almost needed a degree in computer engineering to figure out how it worked. It was the perfect gift. But guess what? Well, I think you know the answer. The gift didn’t do him much good, because he didn’t use it.

Now, this sermon is really about health, about taking care of our body temples because our bodies are a gift from God, too, just as faith is. I mean, where did you think you came from? We didn’t create ourselves, did we? We just didn’t evolve by chance, as so many believe. No, we are here because God gave us the gift of life, and that life exists in, and through, our physical bodies. We don’t believe in some immortal, conscious soul that exists independently of our flesh, do we? We are our flesh and bones. Destroy them, and we are destroyed. Period.

That’s why, just as we need to exercise our faith, we need to exercise our bodies, as well. Although works cannot save us and cannot give us eternal life, they can still help make our faith “perfect.” And just as exercising our bodies cannot give us eternal life, exercising our bodies can certainly make the physical existence that we have here and now so much better. And who doesn’t want that? Is there anyone listening to me know who doesn’t want to feel better, to sleep better, to be in better shape than he or she is now? Well, there’s one sure way that you can feel better, sleep better, and be in better shape than you are now. And that is exercise, pure and simple.

ILLUSTRATION: Let me tell you a story that helps illustrate the point. At age 91, Grace was still active playing tennis, lifting weights, and walking. Yes, 91 years old. Fifty-one years before, however, at the age of 40, her condition had been very different. Grace’s spine was badly injured during a skiing
accident at that time, and as the years passed, her back pain intensified. Her physician told her that he couldn’t do much to help her because she was “too old.” Grace later was diagnosed with emphysema and had difficulty breathing. She tired easily and, at one point, feared that she would never be able to climb stairs again. The doctor offered her no hope of improvement.

The quality of her life was bad and, unfortunately, getting even worse. Grace, however, had a strong will to recover, and so she decided to try an exercise program offered at a local medical center. For six weeks she worked out three times a week, two to three hours a day. She lifted weights, walked on the treadmill, rode the stationary bicycle, and did breathing exercises. Even when she was in pain and didn’t feel like doing anything, she didn’t quit. Eventually, her breathing improved, and the back pain disappeared. She was able to walk reasonable distances—and had energy to spare! Her doctor told her that he had never seen such progress in anyone her age. Grace attributes her health improvement to exercise.

This is nothing new. In fact, even Adam and Eve, in Eden, weren’t to sit at a desk all day and peck on a keyboard and click a mouse. In the pre-Fall paradise, they were to work outside in a garden, which to this day is a great form of exercise. “Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it” (Gen. 2:15, NKJV). To tend and to keep it. Now, we don’t know what a garden was like back then, as opposed to today, and I’m sure they didn’t have to worry about some species of pest, boring holes in their cherry tomatoes or in their lamb’s ear. But it was still work, physical work. It still gave them exercise, physical exercise.

In the context of their working in the Garden of Eden, Ellen White wrote: “Though rich in all that the Owner of the universe could supply, they were not to be idle. Useful occupation…"
27...was appointed them as a blessing, to strengthen the body, to expand the mind, and to develop the character.”—Education, page 21. Perfect beings, created by a perfect God, living in a perfect world. And yet, they needed exercise to strengthen the body? What should that tell us about ourselves, and our need of exercise, especially because we are not perfect beings and don’t live in a perfect world? It should tell us that we need it, too.

28 Now, true exercise is a form of physical activity that is planned, structured, repetitive, and performed with the goal of improving health and fitness. So although all exercise is physical activity, not all physical activity is exercise. Driving your car is a physical activity, right? But you can’t say, because you have a two-hour commute every day that you are getting two hours of exercise daily, can you?

29 Studies clearly demonstrate that participating in regular exercise provides many health benefits. Studies also show that people who are physically active for approximately seven hours a week have a 40-percent lower risk of dying prematurely than do those who are active for fewer than 30 minutes a week. There’s even substantially a lower risk of premature death when people do two and a half hours of at least moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity a week.

30 As many of us know, heart disease and stroke are two of the leading causes of death worldwide. Who among us doesn’t know, or hasn’t heard, of someone who died because of a heart attack or stroke or whose lifestyle has been greatly damaged because of either one? In the Western world, cardiovascular diseases are a scourge. And in parts of the world where they are imitating the bad health habits we have here in the West, this problem is getting worse, as well.
Yet, studies show that a significant reduction in the risk of cardiovascular disease occurs at activity levels equivalent to two and a half hours a week of moderate-intensity physical activity. The evidence is strong that greater amounts of physical activity, up to one hour per day, result in further reductions in risk of cardiovascular disease. In other words, exercise can play a big role in reducing our risk of heart attacks or strokes.

Also, as we age, we need to deal with the question of how strong our bones are. The decline in bone density during aging can be slowed with regular physical activity, beginning at one and a half hours a week and continuing up to five hours a week. Research studies of physical activity to prevent hip fracture show that participating in two to five hours of physical activity per week of at least moderate intensity is associated with reduced risk.

There’s also a problem called Metabolic Syndrome. This is a condition in which people have a combination of high blood pressure, a large waistline, too little of the healthy blood fats, too much of the bad kind of blood fats, and impaired glucose, or sugar, tolerance. What a combination! Studies have shown, however, that people with Metabolic Syndrome respond to persistent, regular physical activity; a restrictive diet; and appropriate medications. Other studies show that those who regularly engage in at least two to two and a half hours a week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity have a lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes than do inactive people.

An overweight man successfully lost a lot of weight. When asked how he did it, he replied, “I ate less and moved around more.” Though the methods he used to achieve successful results were not quite as simple as that, he was definitely on the right track.
The fact is that too many of us simply eat too much and move around too little. Excessive weight gain and obesity occur when calories ingested through food and beverages are more than calories used. That is, you are taking in a whole lot more than you are burning off. And so where does that extra stuff go: into the clouds? No, it goes into our intestines, our legs, our hips, and thighs. Just look around, and you will see what I mean.

The good news? Research shows that within the space of a year—just one year—it’s possible to achieve weight stability through two and a half to five hours per week of walking at a pace of about four miles per hour. Such physical activity is a critical factor in determining whether a person can maintain a healthy body weight, lose excess body weight, or maintain successful weight.

Now, don’t miss what I just said. Through “two and a half to five hours per week of walking at a pace of about four miles per hour,” you can do wonders for yourself. Two and a half to five hours per week of walking at a pace of about four miles per hour? That’s not exactly boot camp training, is it? The point is: when we talk about exercise, we are not talking about competing in the Olympics. We are not talking about running the Boston Marathon. We are talking about what is, really, moderate exercise. That’s all most of us will ever need!

And, please, the health benefits of physical activity far outweigh the risk of injury or adverse effects for almost everyone. Sure, adults with chronic disabilities should consult their health-care providers about the types and amounts of activity appropriate for them. As long as the activity is within one’s ability, it should be safe. In other words, if you want to postpone your funeral, exercise regularly!
Physical exercises are generally grouped into three types and have different effects on the body: **Flexibility exercises**, such as stretching, improve the range of motion of muscles and joints.

**Aerobic exercises**, such as cycling, swimming, walking, skipping rope, rowing, running, hiking, or playing tennis, focus on increasing cardiovascular endurance; however, weight-bearing aerobic exercise, such as walking, climbing, and jogging, increases bone density.

**Resistance exercises**, such as weight training, increase muscle strength and lower or prevent bone loss associated with menopause.

Again, especially if you have not been exercising and want to start, it’s important to talk to your doctor or your health-care provider. But if you haven’t been exercising, or your exercise consists mostly in putting your fork in your mouth or switching on and off the remote control to the TV, then you owe it to yourself, to your family, and to the Lord, who created you, to start exercising.

Now, we are all different, and we have different needs. But the **2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans** recommend that a person accumulate two and a half hours a week in various activities. This would be applicable worldwide. Two and half hours a week? Divide that by seven days in a week—six if you want to take the idea of the Sabbath rest maybe further than you need—then what? We’re talking about 30 minutes a day of good, brisk exercise at a minimum. Done right, and consistently, it could change your life.
How do we know the intensity of our exercise? As a rule of thumb, a person doing moderate-intensity aerobic activity can maintain a comfortable conversation during the activity. A person doing vigorous-intensity activity cannot say more than a few words without pausing for a breath. Although physical activity has many health benefits, injuries and other adverse events do sometimes occur. The most common injuries affect the muscular-skeletal system—you know, bones, joints, muscles, ligaments, and tendons.

Others problems, such as overheating and dehydration, may happen during activity. That’s why you need to keep hydrated with fluids and not overdo it. The good news is that scientific evidence strongly shows that appropriate physical activity is safe for almost everyone and that the health benefits of physical activity far outweigh the risks. That’s quite different than some of those pharmaceutical advertisements we see on TV or in magazines, isn’t it? After they flout the wonders of the drug for one ailment or another, they spend the rest of time warning about side effects: Might cause dizziness, blindness, internal bleeding, kidney failure, vomiting, suicidal thoughts, etc. Although medications are sometimes necessary, it seems that in some cases you are better off dealing with the original ailment than with some of the side effects of even effective treatment.

But there’s one medication that does wonders, and it doesn’t come with all the nasty side effects. And that is, yes—exercise. And, again, you don’t have to be a marathon runner. In fact, some studies suggest that moderate exercise is even better than too much. What does the Bible say? “Let your moderation be known unto all men” (Phil. 4:5, KJV). Let this principle apply to your exercise, as well.
Anyway, the current **Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans** encourage a person to accumulate at least two and a half hours a week in moderate-intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking. Some doctors, with good reason, promote brisk walking rather than running or jogging. Walking appeals to many because it can be done almost any time or place. It’s fun, convenient, inexpensive, and can be enjoyed alone or with friends. It requires no special equipment either. Comfortable walking shoes and clothing are all that you need. Brisk walking results in minimal injuries, while exercising most muscles and systems of the body. It stimulates the release of endorphins, which elevate the mood and improve one’s outlook in life.

More than 150 years ago, **Ellen G. White** said, “**Walking, in all cases where it is possible, is the best exercise, because in walking, all the muscles are brought into action.**”—**The Health Reformer, July 1, 1872**. A health expert, who very much promoted brisk walking over jogging, was once asked, “Is there any time when it would be good to run?” “Why, yes,” he said, “if a bear is chasing you.”

Walking, jogging, whatever—it’s time for most of us to get off the sofa and away from the TV and start moving. While exercising you should wear lightweight garments that offer maximum freedom of movement and are appropriate to climatic conditions. If it’s 85 degrees Fahrenheit outside you are not going to dress as if it were 30, right? Also, if exercising in an urban area, use brightly colored garments and reflector materials for safety. Getting hit by a car, generally, isn’t good for the health!

Exercise generates heat, so it’s better to dress in layers that can be removed as soon as one starts perspiring. If it’s very cold, consider wearing a facemask or scarf to warm the air before it enters the lungs. A hat or headband will protect the ears, which are vulnerable to frostbite. It’s vital to wear
protective gear, such as helmets, wrist guards, and knee guards, when engaging in physical activities that carry the risk of injury, including bicycling, skateboarding, and rollerblading.

52 Feet bear the weight of the whole body; therefore, it’s important that shoes be comfortable, well fitting, and supportive. Look for athletic shoes with absorbent cushioning, appropriate arch support, a solid and snug heel cup, flexibility, breathability, and good lacing so you can adjust tightness without pinching your feet.

53 There’s so much more that could be said about the health benefits of moderate exercise. There’s hardly a part of your body that won’t benefit from it. And the fact is, in many cases, exercise is often a great mood elevator. It simply makes you feel better mentally, as well. We are, indeed, physical beings, and we have been given a physical body. But, like faith, the principle remains: use it or lose it.

54 And though Isaiah was talking about something else here, there’s still something for us to glean from these words, because God is the source of our existence and strength: “He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary,

55 …and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
"…they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isa. 40:29-31, NKJV).

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