



D-I-ET

Mary Southerland

1 Corinthians 6:19 (NIV) “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body.”

It is much easier to give in to sin or yield to temptation when we are physically depleted. Discipline begins in the mind and then travels to the body. I can hear you groaning already, but stay with me! Sin and temptation often find their greatest opportunity to work in the body.

I have struggled with diet and exercise from childhood. Part of my struggle is rooted in “fluffy” genes lovingly passed down to me through several generations of “fluffy” relatives. The remainder of my struggle is firmly rooted in the fact that I enjoy eating, hate exercise and sometimes use food as an emotional outlet.

Born and raised in Texas, I was a young adult and living on my own before I realized that part of the creation process included green things called vegetables. The motto in our family was, “If it ain’t fried, it ain’t right.” Gravy was a condiment and potatoes a staple at every meal. No bread? How can you have a meal without bread? Get the picture?

Consequently, over the years, my weight has fluctuated like a championship yo-yo. Satan rejoiced as I deemed myself “worthy” when I lost the weight and “unworthy” when I gained it back. Guilt and shame attached themselves to every bite of food, while the Battle of the Bulge became the War of Worthiness. Fulltime ministry brought new weapons into the fray. Ridiculously crowded schedules and chronic fatigue seemed to be regarded as holy Medals of Honor, so I signed up and quickly learned the unspoken rules of ministry - rest is for the wicked, exhaustion is for the holy, fast food is for the fully devoted and burnout the ultimate goal. At times, I can almost hear Satan, standing in the wings, laughing at my skewed priorities and lack of discipline, knowing that his opening is just around the corner.

There is simply no way around the truth that discipline of the body is part of a godly life. We cannot give our hearts to God but keep our bodies for ourselves. To do so is sin. It’s time for a new plan and a new way of thinking when it comes to disciplining the body.

- **Eliminate diets.** Replace all “diets” with a “healthy eating plan.” Fad diets are a quick-fix and rarely work long-term. A healthy eating plan requires a change in lifestyle and is not only a matter of how much we weigh but a matter of what we eat as well. Many thin people follow diets that are just as ungodly as the diets of overweight people. I have begun asking myself, “Is this good for me?” instead of “Is this fattening?” A healthy eating plan honors God.
- **Get moving.** A friend once told me that her favorite exercise was opening and closing the refrigerator door. Hmmm ... not good! Set realistic goals in the area of exercise. Start with fifteen minutes a day, three times a week. Gradually increase the time spent exercising. Choose an activity with a dual purpose. For example, while you are walking, you can pray. Walking can be a healthy way of dealing with anger, venting frustration to God instead of others. A walk can also serve as a “mini-retreat” during a chaotic day. Ask God

to change your perspective of exercise – then take the first step. He will meet you there.

- **Learn to rest.** Rest is not an option if we are to function at our best. We sometimes try to feed emotional needs by refusing to rest. After all, the world will surely fall apart without our input – or will it. Perhaps we stay busy because we are afraid to face our past or even the future. Guilt keeps us moving, trying to prove our worth.

For most of my adult life, I have wrongly equated being busy with being productive. I am guilty as charged when it comes to living each day in overdrive. My Day Timer has, at times, been my Bible. The result has always, always been exhaustion, burnout and watered down ministry. Everything looked great on the outside, but God and I both knew that the facade I had so carefully erected was nothing more than a meaningless monument to self. The house built upon the sand seemed like very familiar digs and I was not alone.

We are masters of rationalizing our way to man's approval. I am convinced that when we are willing to surrender our lives to the tyranny of the urgent, the enemy will keep 'em coming – people who need you immediately, those who clamor for your attention above your family and personal relationship with God or the person who can talk to no one but you. The list of ego strokes goes on.

Through the years, God has grabbed my attention with an illness that drove me to bed or a crisis that drove me to my knees. He is a persistent Father who understands the value of rest. Jesus even modeled the truth that it is in Sabbath moments that we will find Him most precious and hear His voice more clearly. After all, He was in charge of the creation process that included the need for rest. Did God *need* to rest? Obviously not, but by creating a day of rest, He drove home the fact that our bodies were created in such a way that rest is not an option.

Make no mistake – we will rest – one way or another. The psalmist writes, “He gives me rest in green pastures.” (Psalm 23:2 ICB) I know from my own experience, that the word “make” holds worlds of possibilities from God's hand. Learning to rest demands an understanding of several basic truths.

Rest is sacred. Sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do is sleep. The human body is programmed for a certain amount of rest. We can cheat it short term but not long term! Rest affects the efficiency rating of this frail body in which we dwell.

Rest is replenishing. While we rest, the Father repairs and restores. We run on “batteries” that must be re-charged daily. When I am tired, it is much harder for me to handle stress and I know you will agree with me when I say that life can be stressful.

Rest reduces stress. Doctors say that stress can be good or bad but either way, stress takes its toll. Elijah is a great example of good stress gone bad. One day he was the conquering hero, the next day we find him sitting under a Juniper tree begging God to let him die! The poor man was exhausted. It was stress produced by victory, but stress nonetheless.

Rest eliminates fatigue. Fatigue is not a spiritual gift but we proudly wear dark-circled eyes as badges of honor and sacrificial service. The enemy loves it! If he can keep us exhausted, we are little threat to him. We must not only learn to rest but learn when we need to rest as well. I have discovered an irritating truth with no escape clause – we need to rest most when we have the least amount of time to rest. I hate the fact that God calls me from my vicious circle of religious activity into His presence. After all, I spent a lot of time getting all of those irons into the fire I built with my own ideas and plans. However, every time I obey His call to “come apart” He transforms ineffective religious activity into powerful, life-transforming ministry – true ministry. We need to stop, be still and rest.

- **Learn to fast.** Consistent fasting produces both physical and spiritual discipline and control. Try fasting one meal this week. Next week, fast two meals on the same day and during the third week, fast the entire day. Be sure to drink water and juices and take the time you would normally spend eating to pray and read the Bible. Fasting leads to physical and spiritual cleansing as it paves the way for godly discipline.

Honestly, we know that our bodies house the Holy Spirit. In what condition is your dwelling place for God? Is He pleased with His temple? A lack of physical discipline is a foothold for the enemy, an unlocked door through which disobedience and failure ride on the wings of Satan's best schemes. It is time for us to embrace and apply physical discipline as a gift and commandment from God.

