

January 4, 2015 - 11:00 a.m. Pastor Jonathan Falwell

Get Fit: Your Spiritual Health

Scripture: Psalm 119:1-11

Summary: Pastor Jonathan Falwell begins a new series, Get Fit, which encourages us to focus on fitness in key areas of our lives. In the first installment, he focuses on spiritual fitness, beginning with study and memorization of the Word of God.

Today we're going to embark on a brand-new series for the month of January. It's a series that's entitled Get Fit, and I think that's a fitting title for the month of January in any year. Now let's be honest with ourselves: How many of you a couple of days ago when the new year rolled around you made a promise to yourself, maybe a resolution, that you maybe in 2015 you decided I'm going to get physically fit. I'm going to lose some weight. I'm going to get in shape. Would you just raise your hand? That's a commitment I made. Lots of people have done that.

A lot of people make commitments to get fit financially, we're going to get our finances in order, have a budget, spend better this year, get out of debt this year. Some of you may have made the resolution or decision that in 2015 you are going to work on your relationships more. That's a good thing. That you're going to work on your marriage, work on your relationships with your family, friends, coworkers. You want to do something that makes those relationships stronger and better. Maybe you've made decisions that you want to make an impact, you want to be a better person in 2015.

Over the next four weeks we're going to be talking about getting fit. We're going to talk about getting fit physically. We're going to talk about that in a couple of weeks. I've asked Scott Bullman that day to come and share with us that day about the importance, the biblical importance and imperative for us to get fit physically. Nobody has more credibility on the subject than Scott, having lost over 215 pounds in the last couple of years.

We're going to talk about getting fit financially. In a few weeks we're going to talk about what it means to get fit financially and we're going to look at those issues. And again that's biblical issues of making sure that we're good stewards. The Bible says, "Moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found faithful," that we are good stewards of what God places into our hands.

Next week we're going to talk about what it means to get fit in our relationships, making sure that we're doing the right thing in our relationships.

Now in each of these weeks we're also going to take the opportunity that not only will we talk about it on Sunday morning, but later that night on Sunday nights and then on the physically fit one that we're going to talk about in a few weeks, on the following Saturday we're going to have opportunities for you to come back and to get involved and to drill down a little deeper on some of these issues, where you'll be able to come back in different classes and groups that will be meeting throughout the week. Some are health and weight loss and physical fitness where it might go on for four or six weeks to help us get into the habit of trying to do all that we can to get fit.

But I thought that the best way that we could start 2015 would be to start talking about what it means to get fit spiritually, about what it means in our hearts and our lives and our walks with Christ to make sure that we are where we need to be spiritually, of getting fit, of getting in shape spiritually. So today that's what we're going to talk about.

I'm going to ask you to turn in your Bibles to Psalm 119. We're going to look at a few verses in that passage in a few moments, but I want to remind you as I talked about a moment ago that we will be having the opportunity for you to come back and get involved in some deeper studies. So tonight at 5 o'clock we have three offerings for you to come back and to get involved. The first is our Thomas Road Bible study with Dr. Wilmington. We'll be kicking off a brand-new series tonight at 5 o'clock in the Bruner Fellowship Hall talking about studying God's Word.

But we also have two others groups/classes that will meet tonight as we talk about getting fit spiritually, getting off on the right foot for 2015. One is going to be how to study God's Word. That's going to meet in Pate Chapel. Gabe Etsell and John Cartwright are going to be leading that study of how is it that we can truly be a student of God's Word. They're going to talk about that tonight at 5 o'clock.

The other is going to be the basics of following Jesus. What does that really mean to be a Christ-follower? So Rod Dempsey is going to be leading that group, and that's going to meet just upstairs in our choir room. All three are meeting at 5 o'clock tonight, and we encourage you—you want to get fit spiritually, maybe you come back tonight and let's drill down a little bit more, dig a little deeper on what that looks like, what that means in our walk with Christ.

Now today what we want to do is spend a few moments looking at God's Word, talking about what it means to get fit spiritually. But before we do that, I want to lay out for you a brief statement of a resolution for us as a church. As a body of believers, as Thomas Road Baptist Church, what would be—and I began thinking this through, praying this through over the last few weeks—what would be a great statement for us as a church in 2015 of what Thomas Road Baptist Church should look like in this new year?

I want to read this statement to you: "Over the coming year, our desire as a church should be that we will grow in our relationship with Christ, that we will thrive in our relationships with others,

and that we will succeed in bringing others into a relationship with Christ through sharing our story of God's love and salvation for us."

Let me read that one more time: "Over the coming year, our desire as a church should be that we will grow in our relationship with Christ, that we will thrive in our relationships with others, and that we will succeed in bringing others into a relationship with Christ through sharing our story of God's love and salvation for us."

Last week I shared with you that in 2015 there would be some things that we would be doing differently at each service, and one of those things that I shared with you is that we are going to take the time in every service—sometimes it will be during the sermon, sometimes it will be earlier on during the worship—where we will take the opportunity of hearing from 52 different people in our church sharing what it is that God has done for them, sharing their salvation story. Today I want to share this one with you as we begin this year looking at the story of God's salvation.

Joe: My name is Joe Richard. I'm a retired welder. Well, it came in 1966. I was 32 years old and working as a welder. I needed a fitter, and this fellow came over and began helping me, and he began to share the Lord with me. He invited me to a youth rally for Christ. I was an alcoholic. I was losing my family. I didn't know where to turn to anymore and I went, and it was at that moment I felt something was working in my heart, and then I knew I had to cry out, and so I did and God met me when He brought this man to share Christ with me. And when I come to know Christ, that John 3:16 was so precious, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." And I love verse 17, "He sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through Him would be saved." And He saw fit to save me.

My life was so changed. I became a new husband and a new father. And then shortly after that my wife, God gave me the privilege of leading her to the Lord Jesus, and I'm so thankful. As a family now with four siblings, they all know the Lord, and my grandchildren know the Lord.

Jonathan: Isn't that a great story? Now the reason we shared that with you today, the reason we're going to share with you different stories each and every week as we gather together is because one of the greatest hindrances as a church of reaching people with the gospel of Jesus Christ is that oftentimes we are afraid to share what it is that God has done for us, to share our salvation story, because we are afraid of what people might think of us. We are afraid of what they might believe.

We are afraid of them maybe laughing at us, making fun of us, and so we want to share with you some real-life stories that all of us have one of those stories and all of us, if we would get it ingrained in our hearts that it's okay to simply share what it is that Jesus has done for us, and if we as a church could do that, I firmly believe with all my heart that when this year is over in 2015 and we come to the end of 2015 if we as a church would grab ahold of the idea that it's okay to share our story, that we want people to know what it is that Jesus Christ has done for us, then we will see incredible impact throughout this year for the gospel. So we're going to share those stories with you.

Today I want to briefly read a passage, and then after we read this passage I want to take a couple of moments to share with you some important statements about what it means to get fit spiritually. We begin in Psalm 119. We're going to look at verse 1, and it says this,

Blessed are the undefiled in the way who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are those who keep His testimony, who seek Him with the whole heart! They also do no iniquity; they walk in His ways. You have commanded us to keep your precepts diligently. Oh, that my ways were directed to keep your statutes! Then I would not be ashamed when I look into all your commandments. I will praise you with uprightness of heart. When I learn your righteous judgments, I will keep your statutes. So do not forsake me utterly. How can a young man cleanse his way? [There is a question there, and the answer is this:] By taking heed according to your word. With my whole heart I have sought you. Oh let me not wander from your commandments. Your word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Now I want to read that passage in The New Living Translation to help us to once again grab ahold of the idea of the heart behind this passage.

Joyful are people of integrity, who follow the instructions of the Lord. Joyful are those who obey his laws and search for him with all their hearts. They do not compromise with evil, and they walk only in his paths. You have charged us to keep your commandments carefully. Oh, that my actions would consistently reflect your decrees! Then I will not be ashamed when I compare my life with your commands. As I learn your righteous regulations, I will thank you by living as I should! I will obey your decrees. Please don't give up on me! How can a young person stay pure? By obeying your word. I have tried hard to find you—don't let me wander from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

Now when we talk about what it means or what it looks like to be spiritually fit, I think these eleven verses in the first part of Psalm 119 is a perfect road map, a perfect statement of what getting fit spiritually really means. And so today we want to look at a couple of thoughts from this passage to help us get the idea of how we can be spiritually healthy.

And the first statement that we must understand is to be spiritually healthy, to be spiritually fit we must do all that we can to avoid sin in our lives. Look what it says again in verse 1, "Blessed are the undefiled in the way who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are those who keep His testimony, who seek Him with the whole heart! They also do no iniquity [they do not live in sin]; they walk in His ways. You have commanded us to keep your precepts diligently. Oh, that my ways were directed to keep your statutes! Then I would not be ashamed when I look into all your commandments."

It is not enough that we as followers of Christ simply claim the name of Christ; we must do our best to live our lives fully connected, fully committed to the way that God encourages us to live. Now does that mean that we will live sinless lives? The answer to that is a resounding no. It is impossible for any human, any of us in this room or anybody who is walking on the face of the earth today to live a life free of sin. Only Jesus Christ can do that. Christ is the only person who

has ever set foot on this earth that has lived a life that is sinless. We in our sinful natures, in our human natures, it is impossible for us to live sinless lives.

What it does mean, however, is that when sin does creep into our lives and into our hearts that we better make it a very short period of time from the commission of that sin to the confession of that sin.

First John 1:9 says this, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” If we are going to be spiritually fit in 2015, it requires us to make sure that we are living lives avoiding sin, but when sin creeps in, we confess it instantly, and God promises you, “I will forgive you every single time.”

Getting fit spiritually requires avoiding sin, but it does more than that. Getting fit, spiritual health also requires a life—and we talked about this last week—of worship. Look what it says in verse 7, “I will praise You with uprightness of heart, when I learn Your righteous judgments I will keep Your statutes; oh, do not forsake me utterly! How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to your word.”

We must recognize who He really is, and recognizing who He really is is the first step in getting spiritually fit. We have to recognize that He is God, a holy God. We don’t worship, we don’t study and read about a person who was a good teacher. We don’t follow a good person who walked on Earth and He was a person who made a difference in other people’s lives; He was helping other people; He was doing good works.

We’re not simply following a good teacher or a good leader. We are following God, a holy God. We are following God Himself, the only God there is. The God who created all that there is. And we must recognize that by living a life of worship, praising Him in everything that we do. We talked about that a little bit and Charles shared about that a little bit last week. In 1 Corinthians 10 it says that whether we eat or whether we drink or whatever we do, what? We do to the glory of God. We live lives of worship.

And so making sure that we are spiritually fit not only requires avoiding sin and requires worship, but third, this passage tells us that our spiritual health, being spiritually fit requires all of us to pursue Him with all of our hearts.

Look what it says in verse 9 again, “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to your word. With my whole heart I have sought you; oh, let me not wander from your commandments!” We must pursue God with a passion.

Dave Stone, who is a pastor of Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky, a couple of weeks ago challenged his entire church to come up with, to pray over and decide on one word that would define their 2015. Each person had to come up with a word that had to define what their life would look like in 2015. Dave, for himself as pastor of that church, chose the word *pursuit*. He said, “I want to make sure that in 2015 that everything that I do, everything that I say, everything that I read and the way that I live, I want to make sure that all of it is in the furtherance of a pursuit of God in my life.”

In that church, people came up with different words and different statements of what they wanted their lives to look like, but I love that word *pursuit*. We've got to make sure that in our lives each and every day what we are trying to achieve, what we're trying to accomplish is that we are pursuing God with our whole heart. This passage says, "How can we cleanse our ways?" Well, by making sure that we're taking heed according to God's Word, seeking Him in everything that we do.

Finally today with this passage, Psalm 119, being spiritually fit, our spiritual health requires a love for and a study of God's Word. It requires God's Word. In verse 11 it says, "Your word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you." It is impossible to be spiritually fit and biblically illiterate. It is impossible in our lives and walk with Christ to have spiritual healthiness in our hearts and in our lives when we don't know God's Word, when we're not reading God's Word, when we're not studying God's Word, and, as verse 11 says, if we're not taking God's Word and applying it into our lives.

That is why last week I shared with you the one thing that we will begin doing in 2015, together as a church, we're going to memorize God's word. And I chose this verse to be the first verse that we together as a church memorize. This verse, verse 11, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you."

What we're going to do is each and every week we are going to put out, and we're going to do it by handing out cards every week or if you use our Mytrbc app, you'll notice if you've updated or refreshed your app today, we put out a brand-new version today. There's now on the right-hand side, the second level down, a box that says "Scripture Time." And we're going to encourage and ask everybody in our church together that during that week leading up to Sunday we are going to memorize a verse of Scripture together that will play a role in, play a part in, an integral part of the sermon for that coming week.

Why? Because when we hide God's Word away in our heart, it will change you whether you like it or not. When we are studying God's Word, it will do something for you. I have said it over and over again, Hebrews 4:12, "God's Word is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword." God's Word will do for you what you don't even believe it can. So we're going to memorize God's Word together.

So right now I want that verse back up on the screen, and together, just a couple of times, we're going to say this verse through. Together. As a church. As a body of believers. As the body of Christ. To memorize this verse of scripture together. Let's read it together. "Your word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you." Let's do it again. "Your word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you." One more time. "Your word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you."

Each and every week, we're going to hide God's Word away in our lives. We're going to hide God's Word away in our hearts, because I promise you that if we as a church will make that commitment, if all of us, thousands of us each and every week make that decision, that commitment that we are going to memorize God's Word, I promise you one thing: I promise you that at the of 2015 we will see God will have done something in our church that even today on

this first Sunday of 2015 we can't even comprehend. There will be a spiritual maturity here. There will be spiritual growth here. There will be a change in our countenance, a change in our hearts, a change in our relationships. There will be changes in our marriages, there will be changes in our community, and yes, I believe that if this church, Thomas Road, with its impact all over the world, that if we will make that impact to memorize God's Word together, I believe there will be a change globally because of what God is going to do in this room.

"Your word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you." I'm asking you to make the commitment that, yes, I want to get spiritually fit. Yes, I want to hide God's Word away in my heart. It will change us.

Keywords: Psalm 119:11; Word of God, Scripture memorization, spiritual fitness, prayer, Bible study, spiritual growth, salvation, relationships