



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

God's Gym

Relentless Joy, Philippians 2:12-18

Tim Badal | March 8, 2020



Turn in your Bible to Philippians. We're in a series titled "Relentless Joy." We're learning what it means to have joy in all contexts and circumstances, and yes, even in all of life's crises. The Apostle Paul is writing from prison to a church he loves, one he started ten years prior to writing this letter. He's responding to what the Philippians had done for him. Knowing he was in prison, the church gathered to pray for him. They also continued in ministry as they had been taught by Paul, then they collected an offering to send to him.

As we'll see next week, this offering was carried to Paul by a man named Epaphroditus. He not only encouraged Paul with this offering, but also with the news that the church in Philippi was carrying on his ministry. Their offering provided Paul with the means for some comfort in his time of need. He responded with a letter that he sent back with Epaphroditus to encourage the church, telling them he was filled with joy because of what God was doing in their lives and in his.

This morning we're in Philippians 2 where we'll be looking at verses 12-18. In this section there is a response to the text prior to it. Verse 12 begins with "Therefore," which means what he will say is to be understood in light of what preceded it. What did that earlier passage say?

As we saw last week, Paul wrote about Jesus Christ, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." This speaks of how Jesus, Who is great, humbled Himself and learned obedience.

In light of His example, Paul told the Philippians how they should respond. Beginning in verse 12, he wrote:

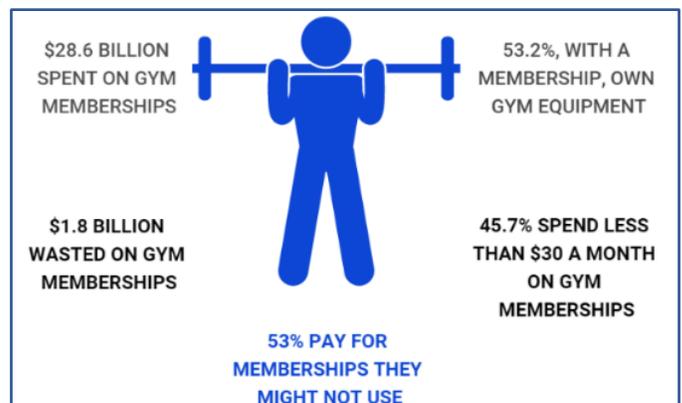
¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

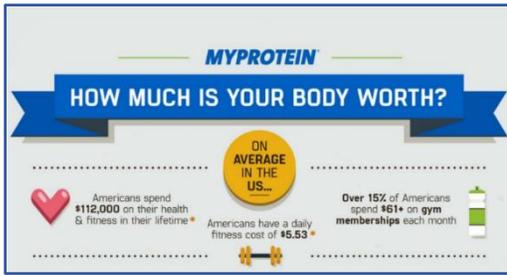
¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. ¹⁷ Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. ¹⁸ Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

I want to look at this passage under the heading of "God's Gym." Now I know, you just lost an hour of sleep. I know you got to church stammering and struggling a little bit, wiping the sleep out of your eyes. The last thing you want to hear is that there's work to do. The last thing you want to hear is that it's time to go into the gym and pump some iron, but that's exactly what our text has for us this morning.

This gym metaphor is one that's easy for us Americans to understand. We are infatuated with fitness. Now more than ever we seek to be the fittest we can be. We don't want to be flabby; we want to be lean and mean. So we invest all kinds of time and money into achieving the goal of the best version of ourselves physically.

To put this in perspective, let's look at a couple things we do as a society. We spend \$28.6 billion each year on gym memberships. That's a lot of money. Some 53% of those who have a gym membership also have fitness equipment in their homes. So it's not like we don't have lots of ways to work out. Within a quarter mile of us here in Sugar Grove there are a couple workout facilities. About 46% of us spend an average of \$30 a month on a gym membership.





Here's the disconnect. We spend a lot of time and energy desiring to be fit, but 53% of us pay for memberships we probably aren't using. That means \$1.8 billion is wasted on gym memberships. We'll get back to that, but first let's look at the other thing our society does.

The average American spends \$112,000 on health and fitness in their lifetime. That's a lot of money. That averages out to \$5.53 a day. What are we spending it on?

Well, I have another graph for you. Supplements. Gym clothing. Gym membership. Meal plans or nutritional advice. I'd love to be the guy who gets paid for nutritional advice. "Get to the gym. Give me my money." Personal trainers. I can't get in the gym regularly, so I need someone to yell at me when I'm in the gym? That's going to help. Maybe that works for you. Workout plans.

If you really are Type A and want to know things, here's how the supplements break down. Protein this. Vitamin that. Organic this. Weight loss that. Vegan this. We have everything we need to be the fittest generation there has ever been. But if you were to look at any study on the fitness of people in America, we're not getting fitter; we're getting flabbier.

Wait a minute. We're spending three times what we were spending on fitness 20 years ago and you're telling me all that money, energy and focus has us fatter than we were before? Something's wrong. Now listen. I'm the last person to speak about fitness. Let's turn in our Bibles to where Jesus says, "Judge not, lest ye be judged..."

No, my calling in life is not to make you fitter people. There's a place for that and I don't want to diminish it. God has given us these bodies to be temples of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 6:15-20). We should not allow ourselves to just fall apart or tempt fate, if you will. We should never live with reckless abandon. We need to discipline ourselves as athletes do. There's a real place for that.

My job is to prepare and shepherd you spiritually and I want to speak about that. We live in a generation where our physical fitness parallels our spiritual fitness. We live in an age when we have all the resources we need for spiritual health, and we spend a lot on these resources. We buy books and Bibles and apps to help us grow spiritually. We read articles. We can download sermons from anywhere in the world. We have more resources today than all the generations before us combined. You would think we would be the most spiritually fit generation, so that every other generation in history would call us blessed. Yet just as is the case regarding us physically, every study says we're spiritually flabbier than we've ever been. There's a disconnect.

Paul wrote to a church he loved and who he believed was doing all the right things. I stand here today speaking to a church I love, who I believe is doing all the right things. So listen carefully. My words are not intended to demoralize or discourage you. I just want to encourage you toward a greater desire to serve and honor God, for His glory and for your good.

I believe as we do what Paul instructs in this text, we will find joy. God is calling us each day to become more like Jesus which is what we were created to be. When we lean into and work toward that goal, our joy will be multiplied and full. So let's look at some things we can learn about this "gym" God is calling us to.

1. We will see results when we enroll in the program.

First, we need to realize that in order to work out in this gym, we first have to enroll in the program. I should tell you that this gym metaphor is the only illustration I'll use today. We're sitting in a gym and we're going to see how our response to a physical gym is very similar to what our response might be in a spiritual gym.

Something in our lives has come up that makes us unhappy with where we are. Maybe those jeans you put on this morning couldn't be fastened. I've been there and done that. I'm with you. When did they get so small, right? I told Amanda not to dry those pants. She didn't listen. Something's wrong. There's something physically that's happened.

HEALTH & FITNESS CATEGORY	AVERAGE NATIONAL SPEND (LIFETIME)	AVERAGE NATIONAL SPEND (MONTHLY)
Supplements (all)	\$40,286.71	\$55.95
Gym Clothing & Accessories	\$24,727.15	\$34.34
Gym memberships	\$24,397.85	\$33.89
Meal Plans/Nutritional Advice	\$12,182.36	\$16.92
Personal Trainers/Workout Plans	\$9,960.41	\$13.83
TOTAL:	\$111,554.48	\$154.93
SUPPLEMENTS BREAKDOWN	AVERAGE NATIONAL SPEND (LIFETIME)	AVERAGE NATIONAL SPEND (MONTHLY)
Protein Shakes	\$22,690.44	\$31.51
Protein Food & Snacks	\$13,427.68	\$18.65
Vitamin & Mineral Supplements	\$11,367.32	\$15.79
Organic Products	\$7,475.70	\$10.38
Weight Loss Products	\$4,408.46	\$6.12
Vegan Specific Products	\$2,330.45	\$3.24
TOTAL:	\$39,081.61	\$54.28

Maybe you looked in the mirror and are unhappy with what you see. Let's talk spiritually for a minute. As you look into the spiritual mirror James talked about, are you satisfied with what you see? Maybe instead of flab, you see sins and fleshly appetites that are alive and well in your life. You're thinking, "Man, where did that come from? Why haven't I been able to get rid of that trouble spot in my life?"

Maybe you're facing troubles and disappointments that cause you to grumble and complain. So instead of the joy of the Lord being your strength (Nehemiah 8:10b), you go to people—both believers and non-believers—and you spew poison. Maybe it's finally dawning on you, "What am I doing?" Maybe you're looking at the way you invest your money or time, and you're thinking, "I need to be doing something different." Whatever it is, there's a moment, an epiphany, when you realize something needs to change.

Paul told the Philippians, "I want you to keep up the good work." It wasn't like they woke up and had done everything wrong, but he was encouraging them to continue what they were doing. That's what he said in verse 12: "*Therefore, my beloved...*" I love you people, he's saying, "*as you've always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence.*" Paul loved what he had heard about this church. They were going to God's gym whether he was with them or not.

That's the great thing about having a workout partner or trainer, someone who is depending on you or has expectations for you. They expect you to be in the gym when you say you'll be there and they will miss you when you're not there. One of the great phenomena in the fitness world is CrossFit. I'm telling you, they stole the idea from New Testament Christianity. "Let's do this in community with one another." Quite frankly, there are CrossFit gyms that are way more connected than many churches in America. They're holding each other accountable. They're encouraging one another. They're not neglecting the assembling of themselves together, as some in the church are in the habit of doing. I applaud that and I wish I could see more of that in the church.

Paul was telling the Philippians, "You're going to God's gym to experience His finishing work, even when I'm not there." There's something glorious about that. What does Paul then give them as an exhortation? "In my absence, continue working out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Let's dissect this.

First, what does he mean by "your own"? I would underline that. That means I cannot get physically fit because Amanda goes to the gym for me. I wish that was the case. I wish I could sit and watch Netflix at home while I send my three boys to the gym to work out for me. What a glorious thing that would be, right? But that's not how it works. "Tim, if you want certain results in your life—in both the physical and the spiritual realm—you've got to do the work yourself."

Yet so many of us, even sitting here today, are relying on the work of faith that's going on in the life of the person sitting next to you. It might be your spouse or your parent. You're thinking, "I'm a good follower of Christ because my dad is. He gets up and studies the Bible. My mom studies. My wife or husband reads the Word." Some of you live by association. You come to church and think, "The Hattons are in the program. Wow, look at what they're doing. I'm part of something great." But Paul reminded the Philippians, "Just because someone else is working out their salvation with fear and trembling doesn't mean you're doing it." We have to make the decision to undertake this venture for ourselves. It can't be done by association.

Another thing we find in this text is there's a part of us that wants to say, "Time out." Paul wrote, "*Work out your salvation.*" Wait a minute, Paul, are you saying that my works can be credited to me as salvation? It seems to be saying right here that I can work for my salvation. The answer is no, that's not what Paul was saying.

I need to tell you that this is what divides Protestant Evangelicals from our Roman Catholic family and friends. When the great Reformation began in 1517, Martin Luther was reading through the Bible. At the time, he was a priest in the Roman Catholic church and a professor at one of their leading seminaries. But as he compared what was being taught in the church and what he was reading in the Bible, he saw that they weren't in agreement. People in the church were being taught that they must work for their salvation, so they did this with a lot of fear and trembling. Catholics embraced that part of Philippians 2:12. To be fair, they realized they needed to cooperate with the grace of God. No Catholic would ever say they worked their way into heaven alone. In their minds, God did His part and they were to do theirs.

The Reformers disagreed. For them, it was all the work of God. But how then do we understand Paul's words. Turn for a moment to Ephesians 2:8 where Paul was again writing about salvation. He wrote, "*By grace you have been saved through faith...*" Grace is God's unmerited favor for us. We don't deserve it and we can't attain it on our own. Paul goes on to say in verse nine, "*It is a gift of God...*" Salvation is God's gift to us. There's nothing you or I can do to gain salvation or to curry favor with God. In fact, the prophet Isaiah wrote that even our most righteous deeds are but filthy rags before a holy God (Isaiah 64:6-7). Paul not only says it's a gift, he then adds in verse nine that it's "*...not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*"

I get it, Paul. I can't work. I can't even cooperate with God in a way that means some of my good deeds will be added to His good deeds to result in heaven for me. The only thing I can do is bow my knee to Jesus and trust Him as my Savior. That's the way the unmerited favor of grace works through faith. I must believe that the God Who loves me and Who demonstrated His love in that while I was a sinner, Christ died for me (Romans 5:6-8). I trust this, turn from my sin and bow the knee to Jesus Christ. That is biblical faith.

This means that when I get to heaven and God asks, "Tim, why should I allow you into heaven?" I won't be bringing a resume of all the things I did. "I washed dishes on Saturday night before You turned the clocks forward, God. I did that for Amanda. That should merit me something." No, the only thing I can say is, "I believe the reason I can enter heaven is not because of anything I bring, but because of Your grace and mercy."

Where does Paul seem to "lose it" in Philippians 2:9 when he talks about us working out our own salvation with fear and trembling? Now that we know it's not because of us but because of His grace, look at Ephesians 2:10: This is after we've been saved by the grace of God. *"We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."* The program Philippians 2 is talking about and that we're entering into is the program of sanctification, not salvation. Salvation redeems me from my sin; sanctification is the process that starts with salvation and ends with glorification when we see Jesus. It's the process by which the Christ follower becomes more like Jesus every day.

Let me change the metaphor. Some years ago when I was 21 and Amanda was 22, we stood right here with all our friends and family and we were married. My dad, who is a pastor, went through the process of marrying us. He said, "Tim, will you do this, will you do that?" I said, "Yeah, Dad, I'll do these things. She's a pretty lady and I want to do this for her." She was asked, "Amanda, will you do this, will you do that?" She said, "He's a big dude. I'm not sure, but okay." No, she said it a little more nicely than that. In that moment, we were married—a once and for all thing. We were together. But at the end of that wedding ceremony, my dad said, "I now pronounce you husband and wife." We left that place and what did we enter into? Never again did we get up each morning and ask, "Will you do this? Will you do that? Will you commit to this and that?" I don't think you who are married do that now either. Rather, what we're part of now is the daily growing in that love we committed ourselves to.

Paul is telling us that we enter God's gym to grow our love and service for the God we committed ourselves to, because He saved us from our sins by His grace. We enroll in this program of sanctification. Let's look at what is involved with that.

It's more about dedication than just a decision.

First, we need to realize sanctification is more about dedication than just a decision. I'm again going to mix my metaphors. The wedding day is the easiest day of the marriage. Ladies, it's the best he will ever look. It's the best he will ever smell. It's the best he will ever act. Why? Because his mom's in the room. Ladies, you're always beautiful. I'll just leave it at that, but let me tell you that spiritually the easiest day in the Christian walk is the day of decision when you bow the knee before Christ. You haven't done anything yet in response to that.

Did you know the easiest day you'll ever spend in a gym is the day you sign up? "This is great. I'm looking forward to this. What do I do next?" They sit you down and take your picture. "Ah, this is great. Do I look thin?" Then they take you around to show you all you're going to be doing. "There's a pool here. There's a sauna. Those are the workout machines." It all looks so great—until the next morning. "I don't feel like going. It's cold outside. It's still dark out."

Listen, the Christian life is more than a decision; it's dedication. Maybe this morning you're living on a decision, but you're not experiencing joy or purpose or contentment. The big reason why is because it's like driving by the fitness center, seeing all it has to offer, but you've never experienced it. We must dedicate ourselves to going to the gym of God's sanctifying work in us so we might experience what it offers, not just look from the outside. It's more about dedication than just a decision.

Use your strength and remember that God is spotting you.

Second, the program of sanctification calls us to use our strength while remembering that God is spotting us. We're to work out our sanctification with fear and trembling. In Philippians 2:13 we read, *"For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."*

So you go the gym, you look around and you get up enough nerve to try out a machine. Or let's talk bench pressing for a moment. You put some weights on the bar, you lie down on the bench and you lift up the weight. In that moment, you realize, "I'm in deep trouble." The weight comes down and you now have a bar bruising your chest. You're trying to move, but you can't. Everyone else in the gym is laughing, but also a little concerned. Do they need to call an ambulance? Of course, many of us don't even get the bar off the rack, because we're afraid of what it would mean if we can't lift it.

God's Word tells us that we're not alone in His gym. He calls us to obedience, service, generosity and holiness, so we take that weight off the bar. We're struggling to lift the weight, but then we realize God is standing over us and His hands are underneath the bar. He's calling to us, "You can do it! Push! Let's go!" "That's the walk of faith and obedience. "I've never done this before. This is more than I can handle." Right when you think you're going to collapse, God starts helping you. "I've got a finger on the bar—keep pushing. You've got this." You never have to worry about whether that weight is going to collapse on you.

Philippians 2:13 has given me the wind I need in my sails—the wind I need under my wings—to take on great steps of faith for God.

I know Ben Hatton and that's what Ben knows. "But God, what if I get to New Guinea and it doesn't work? But God, what about this? What about that?" God says, "You go and I'll figure things out. I'm with you. I'm spotting you."

You see, so many of us are unable to take steps of faith because we think we're the ones doing the work. You are, but God will never allow that weight to crush you. So add a little weight. That's all right; God is there. He's encouraging you the entire time. Use your strength, but remember God is spotting you.

Results come gradually, but there will be growth.

The third truth in this sanctification program is that you need to recognize results will come gradually; growth will come. Just as it is in physical conditioning, so it is in spiritual conditioning. Growth takes time.

On day one, you work out like a crazy person. You come home and feel great. "I know I'm 43 years old, but I feel like a 20-year-old." Give it a couple hours; you'll feel like you're 83. But you worked out harder than you have for years. Then you wake up the next morning and can hardly get out of bed. You make it to your scale, thinking about how hard you worked. You step on the scale and you've gained three pounds. "Where are the results? I worked out." You look in the mirror and you can't see any changes. Studies reveal that something like 80% of people who quit their routines do so just as they're about to see visible results. How sad is that? They've done all that work and they're on the cusp of seeing growth, but they quit because they can't see any changes.

As a pastor, I see this all the time in people. "Pastor, you said joining a small group would help me grow. You said serving in a ministry means I would see growth. You said reading my Bible would bring growth. I don't see anything yet, so I'm going to quit." Paul says we must continue to work out our salvation. We should not stop working out. If we do stop, we're guaranteed to see no results, but if we stay with it, we will see growth.

It's easy to become discouraged. You're serving and there seem to be no results. You're reading the Scriptures, but you don't see results. You're giving, but you don't see results. This is where we as the church can help one another. Hebrews talks about how the people of God became discouraged and were giving up. That's why in Hebrews 10:24-25 we read, "*And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*" This needs to be the motif of our ministry together. We need to be encouragers.

Going back to the CrossFit phenomenon where people work out in community, allowing mutual encouragement. Spiritually, there's something awesome when someone comes to you and says, "God has a hold of you. I'm seeing some great results."

I remember as a young lay person in ministry being encouraged that way and it made me desire to become a more mature Christian as a result. "Tim, you're growing in your teaching. I'm seeing your maturity in ministry grow. You aren't saying the dumb things you used to say. Be encouraged; I see changes in you."

We're told we're usually the last people to see changes in ourselves. That's why we need the encouragement of one another. It's an easier day at the gym when your spouse tells you, "Man, you're looking good." I'm going back to the gym. I want to look better. We need to encourage one another to get into the program and stay there.

2. We will see results when we exercise with passion.

Let's move on. We're in the program. We're working out. We're sweating. We're growing. But we will only see results when we exercise with passion.

When I get to the gym, two things happen. First, I wonder where to start. There are so many machines. What are they for and where do I begin? Have you ever seen someone use a chest machine as a leg machine? It's pretty crazy. That's not what it was designed for. We can be unfamiliar with things. That's why we need to help each other. When we see someone struggling, the greatest thing that happens in a gym is when someone comes alongside you to explain things or to show you by example. "Here's my workout; why don't you shadow me?" They can put together a personal workout plan so we don't have to figure it out. We just have to show up and follow what they tell us.

Maybe you desire to become more like Christ, but when you open the Word, but it's Greek to you. You don't know how to pray. All these resources, these tools—they don't make any sense to you. This is where a trainer can be helpful. We too can help younger believers as they try to figure out what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. "Why don't you follow me and watch what I do?" This is what we call discipleship.

The second thing that happens when we go into the gym is we look around and realize we're the fattest and most out of shape person in the room. We see people who are fit, strong, muscular, toned and tanned, so we think, "Wow, they look great." Then we see ourselves in

a mirror and we think, "Oh, that's terrible." When we do these comparisons, we aren't looking at someone else who's there on their first day. We compare ourselves to the person who's been there for 20 years.

We do this spiritually as well. We join a small group and hear others pray. It's like we're in the very throne room of God. They open their Bibles and say, "Well, in this commentary I looked at, the Greek word means...", and you wonder, "Why is he looking up Greek words? We're in America." Someone starts talking about the past-present-participle or passive verbs, not aggressive terms. "Okay. This isn't college. I can't do this. What Bible is he using?"

So a word to mature people: be careful that you don't flex your muscles simply to show them to other people. There are people coming into God's gym who are struggling just to stay. Encourage them. Walk with them. That doesn't mean we have to dumb down the truth or pretend we're all new. The new person does need to see what the results are of staying in that gym.

I'm thankful that godly people who seemed out of my reach were walking with God at a level I wasn't yet. What was important was that they encouraged me when I was taking little steps along the way.

Let's quickly look now at those exercises we're called to do.

Cling to Scripture.

Paul wrote in Philippians 2:16, " *Holding fast to the word of life...*" How do we cling to Scripture? How do we hold fast to the Word of life? We do these four easy things:

1. Read and study the Word. Seventy-five percent of you have the program in front of you right now. It comes in our small group ministry. Last week you were given Philippians 2:12-18. So using our study guide, you read the text on your own, you answer the questions we give you, then you interact with the text on a personal level. "God, how does this text apply to the comings and goings of my life? What are You calling me to do?"

2. Discuss the Word. You meet with other Christians to talk about what you've read. In dozens of homes across the Fox Valley area, our people are meeting with the sole purpose of studying God's Word together and praying with one another. They're asking each other, "How is God working these truths into your life?" You can learn from Sally, Tracey, Bob and Billy new ways to deal with the trouble areas in your life where you're not making progress.

3. Listen to the Word. Then on Sundays we gather to hear the Word of God taught in an authoritative way. We're not playing games. This is serious business. My prayer—and hopefully you're praying for me as well—is that what you hear on Sunday mornings is coming from mature individuals who are walking the talk. I pray this for myself and for each of our campus pastors. That's our call as we shepherd you.

4. Do the Word. You can follow the first three steps and then stop. As James 1:22-25 says, you can be a hearer of the Word but not a doer of the Word. So the fourth thing is simply to do the Word. Put what you've learned into practice. As we say earlier, \$1.8 billion is spent on memberships in gyms that people never go into. You're wasting your time if all you do is read, discuss and listen to the Word, but never do anything with it.

Being doers of the Word is what it means to cling to Scripture. There are lots of other tools. There are Bible apps. There's Our Daily Bread. There are all kinds of ways to cling to Scripture. I don't care what you choose, just choose whatever gets you into this Word and motivates you to do what it says.

Cut out sin.

We not only cling to Scripture, but we must also cut out sin. We don't see sin mentioned in our text, but Paul does say in verse 16, "I don't want to labor or run in vain." No matter how much we work out, it can still be in vain.

We have a fitness center near here that sits in a lovely place; I think it's the Jewel parking lot. As you walk out the door, what are you looking at? McDonalds! Some of us get out of the gym and walk across to McDonalds. "Okay, I'll take a double quarter-pounder with cheese, a couple apple pies and make that large fries. Oh, and give me a diet Coke." Can I tell you something? That hour you spent at the gym was a waste.

Back in my college days we would play basketball for hours. My son and his friends do this now. In my day, we didn't have McDonalds here in Sugar Grove. We had to go to the west side of Aurora to the Burger King. They had a deal for college guys only: five Whoppers for five dollars. Amen? So we would eat five Whoppers and we would feel good about ourselves. We'd just played basketball for a couple hours! "But you've just consumed 7,000 calories! You'll need to play basketball for nine and a half years!"

Now let's get serious. Some of us are doing all the work of sanctification while holding on to our sin. Let me tell you, you're wasting your time. If you're going to hold on to your sin and try to do sanctifying work, God won't work with you. You need to let that go. If you want to see results, you've got to change what you're thinking about. You've got to stop looking at or reading that stuff.

Paul talks about this all the time in the Bible. You have to hate your sin so much that it becomes ugly to you. You've got to be willing to say, "I don't want to be like that anymore. I'm going to be in the gym extra early and stay a little longer, because I don't want to be involved in that sin."

Cultivate a life of sacrifice.

Finally, we need to cultivate a life of sacrifice. Paul brings up the Jewish tradition of the drink offering in verse 17: *"Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering..."* Later in 2 Timothy, near the end of his life, he mentions this again. He says in 2 Timothy 4:6, *"I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come."* He's okay with this. Sacrificing for God takes a lot of endurance.

I'll be honest; I slept only a handful of hours last night. There's something going on with my foot that's killing me. I woke up and told Amanda, "The last thing I want to do tomorrow is preach." I'm not asking for sympathy.

But there's a reason Paul used the word he did in Philippians 2:12—the word "work." In the Greek, it means work. It's not vacation. It's not summer break. It's work. Sometimes in the Christian life you're going to be called to do things that will hurt, that will cause stress or even sorrow. I can't imagine Paul sitting in prison being excited to be there. Yet he can still write this in verse 17, *"Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering..."* When the drink offering was poured out on the altar, it wasn't just a little drizzle. The whole thing was poured out, so much that it would create a pouf of steam. As a result, there was an aroma that filled the room.

Paul says, "I'm spent. I'm hurting. I'm tired." Then notice what he says next: *"I am glad and rejoice with you all."* He goes on, "So, Philippian believer, when you're in God's gym, you should also be glad and rejoice with me."

Those are the exercises. If you need help, ask someone to show you how to do them. But do them. It's going to be hard. If you work out tonight physically, you're going to be hurting in the morning. That's okay. Keep it up; the pain will subside.

3. We will see results when we evaluate our progress.

How do we know if we're doing this well? How do we know if we're becoming more like Christ? How do we know if we're sticking with the program? We need to evaluate our progress. The text gives us three questions we can ask.

Who am I accountable to?

First, we need to ask ourselves who we're accountable to. This is seen by figuring out whom we fear and are trembling before. Is it our boss? Is it our spouse? Is it our circle of friends? Is it the Christians in our small group? Or is it God? Who are we accountable to? If it's God, then let Him ask you questions. Let Him point out the troubled areas in your life. It's not that He'll point them out to show you how terrible you are. He's doing that as a good father would do. He's the Father Who loves you and wants the best for you. Who are you accountable to?

How's my attitude?

Paul says in verse 14, *"Do all things without grumbling or disputing."* How much grumbling are you doing right now in this walk of faith? It's easy to complain. "I'm in this all-In campaign. I'm committed to giving the church this amount of money, but my neighbor got a new car. Must be nice. If he gave to the church, his house would look like my house does." It's easy to grumble, right? Your laughter is nervous; I must be hitting close to home.

Grumbling means we're questioning God and His sovereignty. "God, You don't have this figured out. God, Your ways are not good." No, we just sang the truth, "You are perfect in all of Your ways." But grumbling means we're telling Him He's wrong.

Am I becoming more attractive?

One final question for you is are you becoming more attractive? That's why we work out, right? We want to look better. Maybe we want to feel better, but a lot of it has to do with our looks. We don't like the way we look.

Spiritually, how attractive are you? Notice what Paul said about the Philippians in verse 15. He wanted them to be *"blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation..."* He wanted them to *"...shine as lights in the world."* What do people see when they look at you? If you're working out hard, people will see the change in you. Then they'll ask, "What are you doing? You're losing weight. You look muscular. Tell me your secret." On Monday, do people say, "You're so filled with joy and peace. Will

you tell me your secret?" Or are you like the rest of this twisted and crooked generation? Are you grumbling? Are you spiritually flabby, instead of being the fit individual people see that they want to be like?

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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