

# **FIT FOR THE MASTER**

**Glorifying God in a Healthy Body**

**John Lehman**

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## Endorsements

Our Christianity should affect every area of our lives—including our health and fitness. In *Fit for the Master* John not only shows you how to be fit—he also tells you why, as a Christian, you should be fit. Read this book and then go live this book.

***Jeremy McMorris, Lead Pastor, Liberty Baptist Church, Dalhart, TX***

*Fit for the Master* is a wonderful resource full of practical advice and insights into living a well-balanced life. John Lehman not only writes about these ideas—he practically lives them out every day! If you desire to live a more effective and efficient life, then I would strongly recommend this book.

***James Whitaker, Men's Soccer Coach and Assistant Athletic Director,  
Columbia International University***

In *Fit for the Master*, Lehman offers a compelling and scripturally-based discussion of two topics—Christian faith and physical fitness—that, at first glance may seem unrelated, but which are actually closely connected. This book provides readers with clear, understandable, and practical guidance on how and why to begin or improve a fitness and nutrition

regimen. It is a valuable resource to Christians who seek to apply their faith in every facet of their lives, and I commend it to you.

***Miles Coleman, Corporate Attorney, Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough, LLP; Ironman triathlete, ultra-marathoner, and CrossFit coach***

Physical discipline is a necessity for a Christian to be effective. John lays out the “why” and the “how” in this encouraging and challenging book.

***Aaron Iles, Catskill Mountain 100 Km course record holder, NCCAA D1 Cross Country All-America, Quoted in Trail Runner Magazine, Sub 24 hr finish of Pine Creek Challenge 100 miler***

The content in this book challenges all of us to reflect upon our relationship with God our Creator, and realize that we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

***Brent Heidorn, Ph.D. (From the Foreword)***

***More endorsements forthcoming***



# ***Purpose***

“This book is intended to encourage everyone to be fit for the Master’s use. God created us, and therefore we should be as functional as possible, so bringing Him glory while being able to lead more efficient and effective lives.”

It has been a wonderful blessing to apply the principles that are within this book. Early in my life I simply trusted and applied them, and as I’ve grown older, have benefited from the results.

.

*John Lehman*

[www.fitforthemaster.fit](http://www.fitforthemaster.fit)

## *Dedication*

I would like to dedicate this book to the athletes with whom I've been associated as coach or training partner. Great joy has been mine through the relationships I've forged through exercise! That alone has been wonderful, but the benefits of the exercise have been a tremendous help to me through these years. It has been through this that the idea of this book was formulated.

I often think of the verse in Hebrews 10:24 which states that we are to “consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.” You have all helped me to be better in fitness, which has helped me in all aspects of life.

As is always noted, there is nothing good in me, except what God has created and entrusted. I could never pursue fitness, or anything else for that matter, without God's gracious and helpful watch care over my life. He's the One who receives any glory for any good done in and through me!

# Acknowledgements

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Greg Warner, who designed the book cover.  
Thank you for your efforts to get just the right design and detail.

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Jonathan Wooster, who filmed and edited my promotional video for the book. Your expertise, in yet another discipline, helped in this presentation.

Brent Heidorn, who reviewed and suggested material which assisted with specificity due to his expertise. Your work helped me refine and define, and I appreciate your desire to sharpen me.

Jim Holmes, who has worked tirelessly to format and “shape” this book into its final product. None of this would have come together without your oversight. You have helped me by gently directing, helpfully guiding, and continually encouraging my every step.

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## *A Note on Gender*

To avoid being slavish and using he or she, him or her, and his or hers, etc., the use of pronouns in this text has been deliberately varied. Also, please keep in mind that terms such as “mankind” and “man” are intended to be understood in a gender-inclusive way!

## Foreword

It brings me great pleasure to have the opportunity to support my good friend, John Lehman, in his recent accomplishments with his new book, *Fit for the Master*. As I think of John, many fine qualities come to mind, including committed man of God; responsible and loving husband and father of four grown children; long-time pastor and Bible scholar; and fitness and sports enthusiast.

John demonstrates the epitome of health, physical activity, and continuous energy, while remaining actively involved in so many different pursuits. As a fitness fanatic myself, I have participated with John in many athletic endeavors, including cycling, swimming, basketball, tennis, racquetball, softball, weight training, and, most notably, hundreds of hours pounding the pavement and trails. John has a true passion for physical fitness, and effectively uses his similar interests with others as opportunities to grow, mentor, and share the gospel. John has been one of my mentors for several years. He consistently discusses his faith and relationship with God, but also engages in conversations related to exercise physiology, intervals, nutrition, marathon training, and more.

The content in this book challenges all of us to reflect upon our relationship with God our Creator, and realize that we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14). Using the framework of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, John comprehensively explains many basic and complicated components for living healthy, physically active lives. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in beginning, maintaining, or improving his or her level of physical fitness, while also exploring the biblical reasons we should seek godliness through exercise.

***Brent Heidorn, Ph.D.***

***Assistant Dean for Research and Assessment***

***Associate Professor in Health and Physical Education***

***University of West Georgia in Carrollton, GA***



# 1

## **Glorious Creator; Wonderful Creation**

Thinking about your place in God's  
universe

*See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but  
they have sought out many schemes.*

**(Ecclesiastes 7:29)**

God is the God of physical creation. He made a tangible, physical universe, a universe composed of stuff. It may well be said that, to God, matter matters. He, the Author of life, created the heavens and the earth. He then created the sun, moon, stars, plants, animals, and man. Man was the only created being formed in God's image.

God, Himself a Spirit, intended from the beginning of time to communicate with and have a relationship with the physical, flesh-and-blood people He had created. That was the initial and major reason He brought the world into being. God's simple statement was: "It [is] good." In Revelation 4:11 it is written, "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

Man was created so that he could bring glory to God and have a relationship with Him. Scripture specifically records that man was made in the image and likeness of God (see Genesis 1:26). If sin had never entered the world, it appears that man would have lived forever, and without the catastrophic consequences of eating the fruit of the tree of the

knowledge of good and evil, from which he had expressly been forbidden to eat.

Because the wages of sin is death, the whole of the created realm was affected by the disobedience of Adam and Eve. Sin entered the world. And with sin came several consequences—separation from God, pain in childbirth, intensive frustration in work, sickness and disease, and—ultimately—physical death. Death is the separation of the body from the soul.

At the very beginning, everything was good; in fact, everything was perfect—that is, until the ruin that came about by the fall. This brought in its wake the consequences of deterioration and death.

### **From Ruin to Redemption**

However, God did not leave it at that. In one of the best known passages in the Bible, it is written: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16, 17).

Titus 2:11-14 states “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training

us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” Knowing that man is a sinner, God provided a way that he could be redeemed, and live above the lawless state he had originally thrust himself into.

One of the reasons for providing redemption through the work of Jesus is that ordinary people—like you and me—may be brought back into a proper relationship with God. God, our Maker, designed people with both physical and spiritual dimensions. Jesus Himself, born of Mary, came into the world in a physical body. He ate food, drank liquids, grew physically, and attained various stages of physical, social and spiritual maturity. Luke 2:52 records that “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”

## **Soul and Body—Both Are Important**

The Bible unashamedly presents people as having both physical and spiritual aspects in their design. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament look forward to a final state in which we will live in perfect, resurrected bodies.

Even though we presently live in a world in which decay and death are ever-present realities, the Bible encourages a healthy and positive view of our physical makeup. Jesus took great care to heal and restore people as He went about doing good. He commissioned His apostles to do some of the same kinds of things. And as the times transitioned from His three-year ministry to the crucifixion and resurrection, the body of Jesus did not lie for long in the grave. In His real human body He ascended to heaven, and He will one day come back in that same, resurrected, glorified body!

The great preacher and Christian medical doctor, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, made the point that it is a less-than-Christian view that considers matter—and especially the human body—as evil or unworthy of proper care and attention.<sup>1</sup> In the times after the New Testament was written, there were some wrong views in circulation in which people believed that

spirit was essentially good, and that matter—physical stuff, including the body—was essentially evil. This led to some wrong thinking about the human body, sometimes being worked out in gluttony, sexual immorality, or at times in an ascetic lifestyle in which bodily needs and cares were largely ignored or minimized.

At another extreme, too much emphasis was placed on the body strong and beautiful. Some thinking and teaching that the Greeks embraced made the physical self a kind of idol to be held in awe and reverence.

### **The Bible's Balanced View**

The Bible is superbly balanced in the way it considers the interplay between the spiritual and the physical. God is Spirit, and there is a significant spiritual realm; nevertheless, He has made humans as psychosomatic beings—which means that their makeup includes spiritual and material aspects—and both require attention in living in a way that is pleasing to Him. Consequently, it is important to care for one's body and so be continually fit for His use.

This sets the scene for us to consider the emphasis of the key references from the Old and New Testaments.

- 1 Corinthians 16: 19-20 states: "... Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."
- 1 Timothy 4:8 records: "For while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come."
- Ephesians 5:18 says, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit." We should be responsible with our bodies, especially being careful with what we put in them, and considering the outcomes that could result.
- 1 Corinthians 15:54-58 states: "When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the

work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” Read the whole of 1 Corinthians 15 and its teaching on the resurrection of our bodies to see how important, from God’s perspective, our bodies actually are!

- Jeremiah 9:23-24 states “Thus says the LORD: ‘Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.’”
- Psalm 18:30-34 says, “This God—his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him. For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God?—the God who equipped me with strength and made my way blameless. He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights. He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.”
- Psalm 144:1 says, “Blessed be the LORD, my rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle.”



- 1 Peter 5:5 states that we are to “clothe ourselves in humility.” In all of one’s consideration for weights and conditioning, it is still important to recognize what Galatians 6:14 says: “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”
- 2 Corinthians 10:12 says that “when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.” Galatians 6:3 makes the point that “if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.”

### **Putting All of This Together...**

For Christians, it is important to note that their bodies are considered to be temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). In the Bible, the temple was understood to be a place where God was especially present. The connection in thought is vitally important: if you are a believer—if your faith and trust are in Christ to be your Savior and you are endeavoring to live a life pleasing to Him—then your body is a residence place of the Holy Spirit! If you care for your own residence (whether a family home,

apartment or condo)—and surely you do, taking the time and trouble to maintain it, remodel it from time to time, decorating it when it needs such attention—then how much more should you take care of the physical body God has entrusted to you!

To extend this analogy, of course moderation is a key consideration. The Bible calls for moderation in all things (“Let your moderation be known unto all men”—see Philippians 4:5, KJV). There is a time and a place for everything (Ecclesiastes 3:1–8). The careful and controlled pursuit of bodily exercise, in endeavoring to be fit for the Master, doing all things heartily as to Him (Colossians 3:23) may be a vital component in your usefulness to Him as you live out the days and years He has appointed for you in this world.

### **The Christian Perspective**

Living in our modern society can be challenging, especially as there is such a culture of competition to be thin and/or muscular and/or beautiful (etc.) in order to feel a significant sense of self-worth. People focusing on such externals will not find their fulfillment in Jesus and His purposes. The message of Jesus is so different: He is the source of self-worth;

you don't need to find it in superficial and socially related things. Your relationship with Him, not the way you look or how much you weigh, should mean the most to you as a Christian.

Yes, it can be hard to live outside of society's standards! Yet, Christ never gave in to that pressure. He lived in the world, but He was not of the world. The aim of a Christian is to be like Christ. The ultimate message He sends is that He loves His people unconditionally, and He therefore wants you to consider yourself in the light of that. As one person said, "God doesn't make any junk."

In reading the final part of this chapter, consider the following biblical principles and references:

- The Lord Jesus Christ, in coming into this world, did so not as an angel or some kind of spirit, but as the God-Man. Philippians 2 and 1 Timothy 3:16 make it clear that the Second Person of the Trinity became fully human and, in His body, achieved redemption for ordinary people. God's grace to us was brought through the physical, bodily suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. Soldiers slammed nails through his hands and feet, ripping through skin, tendons, and muscle. They

smashed a crown of thorns on his head. They stabbed a spear into his side, and bodily fluids poured out. Jesus died on a rugged cross. He went through it, suffering in his body because people are made up of both body and soul. Jesus had to really die, to provide a blood sacrifice, so that people, after seeking forgiveness for their sins, might have eternal life. To accomplish this redemption, Jesus had to be both fully man and fully God.

- People are wonderfully created in God's image, after His likeness. While this may be primarily a spiritual reference, the fact is that He has placed us in bodies. These bodies are to be offered up to Him in the process of living a life of practical usefulness in this world. Romans 12:1 urges us: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."
- A healthy body is one that enables you more easily and practically to glorify God.
- Adam and Eve, and all of their descendents, have been created in the image of God, to be busy working in and stewards over creation. Caring for

one's physical body is one of these creative tasks.

- Modern society's view of beauty is one that is very different from the one the Bible emphasizes. As God's image bearers, in whatever way He has made our physical form, we do have a beauty, and our sense of self-worth is tied in with this. Never believe the lie that says you are ugly!
- John 10:10 makes the point that Jesus came so that we may have life, and have it to the full. John later wished his readers good health in writing these words: "Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul" (3 John 2).

You are fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God, the Master Creator. You can achieve a measure of health and fitness, and enjoy the purpose for which you have been made. Read on to find out more!

# 2

## Health and a Healthy Self-Image

Enjoying being the “you” that God  
intends you to be

*O LORD, you have searched me and known me!  
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my  
path and my lying down  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue,  
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.*

**(Psalm 139:1–4)**

## Created Strong

**G**od has created man with the ability to exercise. There are many references to physical activity in the Bible and to sports in the New Testament. Through the apostle Paul, God addresses the matter as a question “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize?” (1 Corinthians 9:24a). However, He also says, “So run that you may obtain it.” (1 Corinthians 9:24b). Elsewhere, using a physical analogy, He says that no man having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of heaven (Luke 9:62). That context has to do with farming and the physical exertion that is undertaken when one is plowing a field. In another passage, Paul says, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14).

From an historical point of view, sports such as the Olympic Games provide an excellent resource for illustrations. People would exert themselves and compete for a wreath that faded quickly away (1 Corinthians 9:25). In no way is exercise or fitness to be something that is lauded merely for its own sake. We exercise and physically exert ourselves for a

purpose; in the Olympic Games, candidates ran to win. Intentionality was called for.

Since believers are described as being temples of the Holy Spirit—places where He personally resides—it is important that these temples become physically as fit as possible for His use. It is a biblical principle that faithfulness is rewarded. Everyone who pursues faithfulness can attain it.

### **Ruined by the Fall**

Most people grow and mature to full strength by about the time they are twenty-five years old. It is documented that peak physical condition is achieved at this stage.<sup>2</sup> If life consists, as Scripture calls it, of three score and ten years—that is, seventy years (see Psalm 90)—that means that the body from age twenty-five on does not continue to improve but actually begins to deteriorate. As in anything, when something is left to itself, it will begin the process of atrophy. That is not to say that a person who is committed to keeping fit is guaranteed a long and healthy life, but it does mean that not exercising is beginning a process where the body is no longer as fit for God's use as it would be if exercise were routinely undertaken.



## **Fitness Can Help**

What does fitness produce? One major ingredient that only comes about through exercise—and is produced directly within our bodies—is that of endorphins. Endorphins are energy-released chemicals that enhance our physical makeup as well as contribute greatly to our general approach to life.

God consistently says that we are to rejoice always and be thankful (1 Thessalonians 5:16, 18). It is possible to mentally will that to occur, and many times that is necessary. However, if one can enhance that will with a body that is fit—one in which endorphins are being released—it makes it so much easier to actually have that positive outlook.

Through medical research, people have developed drugs that can stimulate muscle growth or strength. Often these are considered illegal because such may be enhancing drugs—substances that make people go beyond their regular physical limitations to become stronger or faster. However, after consecutive doses of such a manmade drug and its use is stopped, the body becomes debilitated and will be worse off than before. Because such substances can be addictive, the user may find that he has to continue using it on a consistent basis, otherwise he is not

going to feel well. Many people take drugs to make them go to sleep; others take drugs to help them wake up in the morning. In many cases, by implementing exercise into their daily routines, such people can manage without those types of drugs.

God has said that man will toil and by the sweat of his brow he will work (see Genesis 3:17–19). That physical toil brings him to exhaustion. A measure of exhaustion causes a person to enjoy a good night's sleep. And a good, proper night's sleep will bring one to a state of refreshment. Drug-induced sleep does not produce the same quality of rest as physically exhausted daily living will. And the same goes for taking medications to improve alertness during the day—it is far better to have rested well during the night than to depend on a substance in order to be efficient during daylight hours!

Not only does sleep come so much more easily to a person who has exerted his body, but it is interesting to know that a person in a fit state needs not quite as much sleep. Just like a well-maintained engine in a vehicle operates so much more smoothly and uses less gas for the work it does, a body that is generally in a fit state will not need as much refreshment to be charged and ready to function the next day. You can

read more about this in Chapter 7.

It is interesting to note that the industry of drugs and medicines and stimulants is becoming more and more prevalent as our society becomes more and more sedentary. It is often so that people would rather eat or somehow ingest their rest by mouth than to take the rest that God actually provides through sleep. People enjoy staying up for entertainment purposes but then find it difficult getting proper rest because their bodies are not fit and exhausted. They feel they need something to get them charged up for the next day to be able to function properly. Our world has so many energy drinks and energy enhancements available and those who use them—even if they contain toxins—find that these products initially have a positive effect on them. However, in reality, the chemicals found in these products are not going to naturally help these individuals be what they could be.

So if energy drinks and stimulants are not really helpful, what is the answer? The natural and God-given way is exercise and rest. Both of these should be in proper proportion and in moderation. It is wrong to say that a little exercise is good so lots of exercise makes it even better. Rather, one should

find what helps make one's body the most efficient for God's glory. Taking into consideration the natural cycle of a day, it is evident that from the beginning, when God created the sun, moon and stars, He established the pattern of mornings and evenings, days and nights. He knew that when He created human beings, they were going to need to function on a daily cycle. That cycle has unfortunately been stretched and distorted today because of the conveniences of electricity, and a result of the means by which people can use electronic media and literally be stimulated for a lot longer than is good for them.

If people would realize their goal in life is to love God and bring glory to Him, then they would take that as their lifelong approach and desire to do so all the day long. To bring glory to God, people should be as fit as possible. And to be as fit as possible requires them to evaluate their entire life and to determine what is going to help them best to be able to function for God's glory.

### **Joy, Endorphins and the Manufacturer's Handbook**

God has created our bodies in such a way that they are able to withstand pressure and be strengthened when pressure is applied. That pressure comes in a

variety of ways. One way, (the way this book will direct you) is that of exercise. Exercise will strengthen the heart. The heart, by being strengthened, will beat fewer beats per minute and will function more efficiently. By beating less and by beating fewer times and more efficiently, it is going to be able to beat longer. That allows for one's physical makeup from the blood flow to be in better condition and for one to be able to live more efficiently for God's use.

Medical specialists have determined certain blood pressure values that identify whether one is in an overall state of good health—in the region of 120/70. They have also determined how many heart beats a minute is the standard for people typically in good health—between 60 and 80 beats per minute. God's Word, the Bible, encourages individuals to cultivate lifestyles that are conducive to their wellbeing, so it is helpful to consider the reference points supplied by medical specialists and be guided by such parameters. Whether a person is a student, an employee, a homemaker or retired—whatever a person's calling may be—it is important to be in as good a state of health and with as high a level of energy as possible.

The Bible often addresses life by way of broad principles, so there are no Scripture references that

speak specifically to bed times and participating in exercise. However, scientists and other medical specialists have found that increased exercise and regulated sleep have the effect of enhancing many of the things that people do. Science—and keep in mind that true science is simply accurate knowledge—confirms the wisdom of building good habits in these areas.

God created humans as physical beings, and declared everything that He had created was good. In caring for the garden, Adam was to be involved in physical work. When endorphins are released in response to physical activity, there is a direct correlation on the part of the person exercising in that he or she has a much more thrilling and enjoyable experience of life. While the Bible nowhere explains how or why endorphins are released in response to physical exertion, the fact of the matter is this: people engaging in physical activity typically enjoy heightened euphoric feelings, and therefore a significant sense of wellbeing. Exercise (keep in mind that exercise involves exertion) releases these endorphins. So, people who pursue endorphin-releasing activities have this sense of joy and peace.

People will often comment on the joy, laughter,