

Monday, July 20, 2020

SERIES: CHARACTER OVER COMPROMISE

SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD

TITLE: Becoming Physically Fit Pt. 1

1 Cor. 6:12-20

It was January of 1999. I remember getting up one morning thinking, “This is going to stink.” I mean, how it could not? I had always had this problem. For as long as I can remember, I had struggled with it. But 1999, that was going to be different. Or would it? I had expressed the same resolution each and every year. I’d start out good. I’d try the latest fad solution. There had to be a silver bullet or quick solution to achieving my goal. But like many of you, I would start strong, running hard, motivated by guilt and the fear of failure. But then I’d trip up and begin to slide backward, only to end up where I started, if not further behind.

“Not this year,” I said. I stepped on that scale. Wow. A new record: 242 lbs. I was alarmed, but not shocked at this new high. I walked back to my bedroom and put on my size 42 jeans, which were a bit snugger than before. “Enough is enough. 1999 is the year where I finally do it. I’ll get physically fit.” And that’s exactly what I did.

In 1999, I went from 242 lbs and wearing a size 42 jeans, down to 148 lbs and down to a size 32 jeans. If you’ve seen me preach, or watched some of the videos from Back to the Bible, you are thinking “No way. You were never that big. I mean, look at you, Nat. You’re a puny dorky kind of guy. That couldn’t be true.” Well, it really is true. But I know the second thing you are thinking is “How? How did you lose over 85 lbs in a year?”

Friends, this is the question we all ask when someone make a serious life change. But I think it’s not the most important question. In time, “how” becomes an essential question. But the real question is “why?” Why did I change? What changed in me to make this even possible? “Why?” is the single biggest question we all need to answer to accomplish any goal.

Today, you may not be where I was 18 years ago, needing to lose a lot of weight. But I can guarantee that each one of us here today should have the goal of becoming physically fit. And by physically fit, we mean, to be in control of what you do to your body and with it.

Every one of us has some kind of physical struggle. If we are honest, we struggle to become physically fit because we are a slave to something. You might be a slave to food, alcohol, sex, pornography, smoking, working out, work, TV, your smart phone, or fill in the blank. You can read 50 articles, attend 10 seminars on how to overcome that addiction or idol. But until you understand *why* you need to overcome it, you’ll never get there. You’ll never become physically fit.

So you need to have a “why.” And friends, there are no greater or more powerful “why’s” than ones that come from the Bible. Everyone here can become physically fit when they believe and act upon 5 biblical why’s. That’s what we want to talk about today.

So let’s turn to God’s Word. We’ll spend time in 1 Corinthians, Chapter six. We’ll start in verse 12. Let me say a couple things about this letter to the Corinthian church. The person writing this letter is the Apostle Paul. Paul wrote this letter to identify problems in the church, offer some godly solutions, and illustrate how to live in a society that was far from God.

Corinth was a well-to-do, multicultural city. It had a stadium that could hold 18,000 people for sporting events. It housed a theater for 3000 people to listen to music and watch plays. It even had a large farmer’s market. It was also a hub for religious pluralism. You could find gods of all shapes and sizes. At one time, it had a temple of Aphrodite that housed 1,000 temple prostitutes. It was a happening city, but full of moral decay. So Paul needed to offer some advice.

So let’s see what Paul has to say. Let’s start in verse 12 (ESV):

“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything.

Paul says, “all things are lawful” or “permissible” for me. This was a Corinthian slogan. It was an “anything goes” way of living. The ancient world wasn’t much different than ours today. We say, “You do your thing. I’ll do mine. No judgement, bro!”

But what does Paul say? “Yes, all things are allowed, but are they helpful?” I like the NASB’s translation better. It says, “but are all things profitable?” Are these things to my advantage? Is it beneficial? Is it profitable?

As some of you know, I’m a certified executive coach. One of the elements of being a coach is assessing where a client is and where they want to go. What is it they hope to achieve? In that coaching process, I ask them a powerful question. That question is this, “Will what I am about to do move me closer to my goal or move me farther away?” This powerful question helps evaluate each decision in light of where they want go.

We would do well to ask this question before we say something or do something: “Is what I am about to say or do going to move me closer to my goal, or take me farther away?” “Is eating this double cheeseburger bringing me closer or further away from my goal of becoming physically fit?” “Is going to Refit bringing me closer to my goal?” “Is choosing to skip the gym to sleep in going to move me closer to my goal of becoming physically fit or farther away?”

But clearly it goes much further than our goals of being physically fit.

Paul says all things are permissible – even sin. As a Christian, you are forgiven for every sin you commit. That’s true. But sin, no matter how small or pleasurable, it is not profitable. Yes, as a Christian, you are free to do whatever you want to do, but for Heaven’s sake, why would you? Not everything is to your advantage.

Paul then uses the slogan again, “All things are lawful for me”, but I will not be dominated by anything. You and I as believers, all things are within our power to do, but we don’t need to be

overpowered by anything. You know why? It's because you are free. That's the first why. **You are free.**

DISCUSSION:

N: Let's discuss this for a bit with Arnie Cole. Cara, who's usually here; she's out of town with her family. So Arnie, do you mind sharing on a personal and practical level, how you evaluate your actions according to: does this move me closer or further away from my goal? And how does that work for you?

A: Well, that's a great question. And this is a great series on being physically fit, Nat. I could never imagine you weighing 244 pounds. When I see you weighing 110 pounds now, it's just pretty amazing, but you know, goals are tricky things. Oftentimes, you set them on New Year's Eve, and then you like mess up January 3rd, fourth, and then it's forgotten. A lot of people struggle with goals. So for me, I've tried to make it as simple as I possibly could. And that is to have just one goal. And that goal is to move closer to Jesus today than I was yesterday. And that may sound simple, but if you really focus on just that, it's one of the hardest things you'll ever do. And oftentimes, you kind of fall short, but it's easy to remember, and it's really all that matters in life.

N: Well, and it's a great way to actually use this question in our walk with God: "Is what I'm about to watch, to listen, to do, going to bring me closer to Jesus today than it did yesterday?" And what a great question it is, especially with reading the Bible. And we know the answer's going to be yes, absolutely. So we would encourage you to use this question in your walk with Jesus today.

As a child of God, you do not need to be a slave to sin, an addiction, an idol, or anything else. Why? Because Christ freed you from that bondage. **Romans 6:14** says, "**For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.**" I believe it was Ravi Zacharias who said, "Sin is meeting a legitimate need in an illegitimate way."

I believe he's right. Let's think about some common issues today and it's not to make anyone feel bad.

Think about **Obesity** – it's the abuse of something that is a legitimate need – abusing food meant for enjoyment and nutrition. Now, I'm not negating or saying there aren't medical conditions that attribute to this. I fully recognize this. But we can always do more to control our intake and our output – like going to exercise classes and managing our diets.

What about **Pornography** and sexual activity outside of marriage? It's the abuse of something that is natural, beautiful. Sex is intended for a man and woman who are married to each other. We were created for intimacy, but unfortunately we try to meet a legitimate element of who we are in illegitimate ways.

What about **sex**? Couples today have a *try it before you buy it* mentality. That's unfortunately true for nonbelievers and believers. They say, "Sure, maybe the Bible promotes sex in a monogamous marriage relationship between one man and one woman, but I can do what I want. My body. My choice."

Unfortunately, those who choose to reject God's design for sex will experience heartache, physical consequences, emotional and spiritual pain, and so much more.

Think about **Success**: As human beings created in the image of God, we lose sight of our inherent value and worth. So we begin to seek value and credibility by becoming work-a-holics at the sake of our families, by accumulating the most of amount of stuff at the cost of insurmountable debt, or having the most amount of friends on Facebook at the cost of real relationships.

Here's a big one right now: **Smartphones**. It makes me angry to go to the park with my kids. Not because I don't want to play with my kids. It's because almost every parent is glued to their phones. Their kids are playing; getting hurt; wanting some attention; wanting to be played with, and the parents are ignoring their kids to feed their addiction to their phones.

It's not just parents. I go to restaurants, coffee shops, driving in the car! They are driving a car, putting on makeup with one hand, and then surfing Facebook with the other. How are they driving??? It's insane. People are addicted – slaves – they are mastered by their phones. It's crazy.

The list could go on. Look, even working out and dieting could be a thing people are slaves to. I'm all about looking your best to the glory of God, but if you're spending your time and treasure focused on how you look, you're probably a slave.

Regardless of what your struggle is, God still loves you. Nothing will change that. And we also need to remember He wants the best for us. And we are out of shape. Paul says we are free! Christ has freed you. It doesn't matter what influenced you to this slavery and dependence. You do not need to be dominated by anything! You should become physically fit. Why? Because you are free.

Paul gives us another "why" in the next two verses.

13 "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power."

It seems the Corinthians were validating their sexual immorality by saying "food is for your tummy and your tummy is meant for food. Likewise, sex is for the body and the body is for sex." Paul doesn't disagree with the first premise. But Paul needs to correct the second. He says, "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.

Our bodies are not just created by God for the here and now. No, they will be alive and fully functional in the eternal future. Why should we strive to be physically fit? Why should we desire

to master our bodies? It's because **You belong to God**. Our bodies are for the Lord. That's the second "why". Our bodies are on loan from God. He created them. We were knit in our mother's womb. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. The notion of we should do whatever, whenever, and however with our bodies because we'll get a new, glorified body in the Resurrection is wrong. Yes, we can do what we like. But like Paul said, "Is it profitable?"

If we abuse our bodies on this Earth, will it forfeit that glorified body? No. God is gracious. Yes, you'll get a new, glorified body. But because He is loving, there are consequences here and now for abusing our bodies. Remember, they belong to God.

Now, is the Bible self-contradictory when we are both free and belong to God? How can we be both free - and as Paul says in Philippians 1:1 - *a slave to God*? Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:22, "**For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord.**" How can this be? I like to think of it like this:

Think of it like a boat in a lake. We recently inherited a fishing boat. It's not very big, but it will work well to take us to where the fish are. But think about the freedom a boat has in a lake. It doesn't matter how big or small the boat is. It doesn't matter if it's Holmes Lake in Lincoln or Green Lake in Minnesota; the boat has great freedom in the lake. However, what happens if I decide to take that boat on shore and try to drive it on land? Yep, I'm stuck. The boat was made for the water, but not for land. It was made to glide on the surface of the water. In the water it is free. But once it tries to go on land, it is stuck. It's useless. The same is true for us as children of God. God lovingly saves us and places us in a new path that is designed to make us flourish and to bring Him glory.

This is how we are free while serving our King. God gives us boundaries with our best in mind. So the first two "whys" of getting physically fit is 1) we are free and 2) we belong to God.

N: Let me now go to Arnie Cole. Arnie, you are a dynamic leader in our ministry. So how has freedom in God empowered you to set goals, and even change course?

A: Well, you know, even though for most of my life, I wasn't a Christ follower, my parents were. And they worked with the Dani people, who were the last known headhunters and cannibals in the world, in Indonesia. There's a book even written about them called *Peace Child*. But anyway, I used to ask my mom, "How can you do this crazy stuff at your age? You know, you and dad can't defend yourself." And she taught me even as a nonbeliever, she said, "There's no safer place than doing the will of God." So in other words, this freedom that God empowers you is, you're doing the will of God. What else - there's no safer place. Now the flip side of that is, if you're misbehaving, and you're not doing God's will, you know, you might want to think, and I don't think I'd tell kids this, but really maybe there's no more dangerous place than not following God's will. I don't know. It's something to think about, at least for a guilt trip or so.

N: Right, absolutely. Well, I think that's a really good perspective. There is great freedom within living in God's will. And if we look at it, there's really a lot of boundary to play in. We are

quite free and you're exactly right, when we do step out of God's will, it ultimately does derail us. And there's very little pleasure there once we are caught in our sin. Well, speaking of sin, there's an area that I think a lot of people are struggling with today. And that's the area of porn. Porn has become an epidemic in our culture with Christians, as well as non-believers. So talk about how insidious porn really is and how it breaks down a person's ability to even function.

A: Yeah. They say that it rewires the brain and it causes tremendous problems. It's like doing cocaine or doing a drug, and you do it long enough and it becomes less and less effective. And therefore it becomes more and more addictive. And yes, we do see that it permeates the church with the male population, especially, and all it does is, it destroys the individual. And it's not all, but you know, a lot of these guys think, "Well, you know, it doesn't really hurt anybody. Nobody really sees what I'm doing," but in the long run, it destroys the very person that thinks nobody else is seeing it. So yes, it is a critical problem that the churches face today.

N: And it affects the individual, and it also affects the family and can affect every area of life. But I think people who are listening today, they want to know, is there hope? Because it is almost an epidemic today, and people are looking around going, okay, but how do I get out of it? So is there hope, even for porn addiction?

A: Oh yeah. And you know, the guys that I've worked with, especially pastors, they get themselves in a corner. And oftentimes, I would hear, "If I told my elders, they'd fire me. If I told my wife, she'd divorce me". So they've actually backed themselves into a corner, and they've compartmentalized their life. So porn just fits in neatly with sermon preparation and all those other things. And it's very, very tough and very difficult. But you know, over years and years of talking with men, the one thing I kind of observed is, these guys talk about getting out of it, but like on a weekend retreat and stuff like that, towards the end of the time, you would see their interest is less and less involved. And really, most of the time it comes down to, the guys getting caught; they feel ripped off, and they're trying to get back with their wives. The best way though, is to do it on your own, and take it one day, one minute at a time, and just work your way through it.

N: Yeah. I think that you're exactly right. What you said about the pastors today, as a former pastor of a church, I saw that, where people would struggle with things, but they were afraid to talk about it. And I remember, there was a pastor of a church I think, on the East coast. And he actually came before the congregation. Now he went to his elders first, but he went to the congregation on a Sunday and said, I messed up this week. And he goes, "Look, I was on the internet. I was searching for something. And I came across porn and I watched it. I regret it. It was a mistake. It was a sin. I'm sorry, but I wanted to confess it to you, to let you know what happened". And what happened from that freedom to share it and to talk about it, actually created a movement in the church of other people saying, "Look, I struggle too". And they began to deal with it individually, like you said, and got their life right with Christ, rather than on the individual basis of, "Oh, I got my hand caught in the cookie jar and now I need to make things right, so I can get back with my spouse." But rather, there was a moment of vulnerability and honesty that created a pathway to hope and freedom.

