

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

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Dearest Grandchildren,

Today our letter will deal with “training” and “exercise”. While we will talk about both physical and spiritual exercise, spiritual exercise, of course, is more important. Your Great Grandfather, Henry Boyce Mouton was at one time a professional boxer. Training was very important to him. Each morning he would run from Tulsa to Sand Springs and back. He honed his ability to skip rope into an art form. He also lifted weights and prided himself as being “wasn't waisted”. Physical fitness means success or failure in the ring.

Jack Dempsey was one of his heroes. Pound for pound, Dempsey has been called the toughest fighter of all time. He won the Heavyweight title on July 4, 1919 in Toledo, Ohio. The champion he dethroned was Jess Willard. Willard was 6' 6 ½” tall and outweighed Dempsey by 50 lbs. Before the fight he approached Dempsey's manager, Doc Kearns, and wanted legal immunity in case he killed his diminutive opponent. He didn't have to worry. Willard was knocked down 7 times in the first round. At the end of 3 rounds the battered champ sat on his stool unable to answer the bell. His cheek and jaw bones were broken. 6 teeth had been knocked out. His ribs were broken. His face was a pulp of cuts and blood. His right eye was closed. His lips were cracked and bleeding, and he had lost the hearing in one ear. My dad was an impressionable 16 years old at this time. (The fight is available on You-Tube if you care to see it).

Dempsey was a fanatic about training. He was constantly running, jumping rope, doing calisthenics, working out on the bags, sparring, and shadow boxing. Obviously, his training paid off. Dad once told me that the average person was in such poor shape that they would whip themselves in 3 minutes. That's why my father trained so much. Boxers train and compete for a corruptible crown, but training to be godly prepares us for eternal rewards.

Paul wrote to young Timothy: **“train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.” (1 Tim 4:7-8)** The reason for this letter is to encourage you to train yourself to be physically healthy, and also to be godly! Godliness, as we have already said, is the most important!

All effective training is hard work. “No pain, no gain”. Winners, however, pay the price. They run one boring mile after another. Their strength and endurance are not an accident. They know that the agony of their exercise can be translated into victory. Their hard work and training are rewarded, but the rewards they receive are only temporal. Their crown will fade and their wealth will be left behind for others. “Godliness” by comparison, provides rewards both in this life, and also in the life which is to come.

Paul put it like this: **“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one**

gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” (1 Cor 9:24-27)

You have all been raised to read the Bible, go to church, and pray. I'm sure that there are times when all of this spiritual exercise seems boring. You have probably already been tempted to “break training” and become spiritually lazy. I hope you won't yield to this temptation. I hope you will never stop training yourself to be godly.

Dr. Wayne Bigelow spoke on campus at the Ozark Christian College many years ago. His message was titled “The Road of No Regrets”. He told of three patients he tried to help as a young intern in San Francisco. Unfortunately, all three died. No amount of training or technology could reverse their medical conditions. One died of lung cancer, the second of cirrhosis of the liver, and the third from a sexually transmitted disease. All three died from the result of unhealthy life styles. The first was a smoker, the second was an alcoholic, and the third was sexually promiscuous. Dr. Bigelow encouraged the students to follow Christ, for He will lead you down a road with no regrets!

Years ago I met a dentist in Des Moines, Iowa who had become addicted to running. He even brought his running shoes and sweats to church so that he could run home afterward. He explained that for a long period of time he dreaded running. Now, however, he experiences what he called the “runners high”. Apparently β -Endorphins are released during long, continuous workouts that produce the euphoric feeling he experienced. I believe the same kind of “high” can be experienced spiritually. At first our spiritual exercise seems to be boring, but if we keep it up it can become the best part of our day. The late Don DeWelt, for example, found his “Sweet Hour of Prayer” to be the most exhilarating hour of the day. It usually doesn't start out that way, but if you persist in your spiritual training you will be traveling a road with no regrets.

The book of Hebrews reminds us that “milk” is for infants, but “solid food” is for the mature. This maturity is realized by “training” or “exercise” **“We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” (Heb 5:11-14)** Proper “training” enables us to “distinguish good from evil” and prepares us for spiritual victory.

Chastisement is also a part of spiritual discipline. Our Heavenly Father chastises us for our own good, just as earthly fathers do. **“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” (Heb 12:11)**

Training with the Bible is of particular importance. The Bible is the “Sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17). As you may know, the Latin word for “sword” is “gladius” from which we get our English word “gladiator”. Often gladiators were slaves who were forced to fight for the entertainment of the Emperor and other sadistic spectators. Gladiators were highly motivated to train for to not do so meant certain death. Our motivation for spiritual training is even greater for the stakes involve eternity.

Thanks for taking time to read these words. I pray for each of you by name every day, and pray that some day we will be together in heaven for all eternity.

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce