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When Your Workout is Worship

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When Your Workout is Worship

On most days I come to work at the Andreason Center for Wellness with pep in my step. But on a recent morning, I was listless. Just four days earlier, my husband and I had said goodbye to our beloved dog, Moses. He was the dog we knew we'll always compare the rest of our pets to.

Moses passed on a Thursday evening. While we spent that night in tears, we headed into a busy holiday weekend that left hardly any time to reflect.

When the dust settled Tuesday morning, the grief hit me like a ton of bricks. I reasoned that sitting at home and crying was a waste of time, so I went to work and cried at my desk instead.

"I'll just go home early," I thought. But I was scheduled to teach two fitness classes that evening. To be clear, the *last* thing I wanted to do was "high intensity interval training" for 60 minutes, followed by a half-hour of "restorative stretching." But as much as I didn't want to put a headset on and fake enthusiasm for 90 minutes, I knew my body, mind and spirit needed movement.

I knew this because it's something I talk about all the time—the abundant ways in which exercise improves our overall wellness. Yes, working out helps us manage our weight, strengthen our muscles and improve our cardiovascular system, but it also affects our brains. Exercise can improve cognitive function and mood, although it is in no way an emotional cure-all. While the relationship between the physical and mental domains of wellness is pronounced, both are closely related to yet another domain: the spiritual.

Isaiah 40:31 says those who trust God will be strengthened, running without tiring and walking without fainting. In 1 Kings, after contending with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, we're told that God gave Elijah the miraculous ability to run for over 30

miles. Soon after, when Elijah was discouraged, God provided food, drink and rest, enabling him to walk for 40 days and nights.

Paul understood these domains, instructing the Corinthians that their bodies were temples for the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19) and in Romans 12:1 saying that offering our bodies as "*living sacrifices*" is a form of worship.

Worship is possible anytime and anywhere but, in my experience, especially in exertion. My mind clears of the day's distractions and my prayers become uncomplicated. In God's perfect design, exercise causes endorphins to lift our spirits and increased circulation results in improved mental acuity to help us better process thoughts and feelings.

I left the gym that evening, sweaty and fatigued, but feeling better. Not because I was less sad but because, in offering up my body as a living sacrifice, I had given my grief to the One who understood it best. My workout had served as an act of worship.

If your heart is hurting, may I humbly suggest breaking a sweat? God can be found whether we're kneeling in prayer or jogging in it. ■

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