



For Women Only!

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GOING FOR SPIRITUAL GOLD

*"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."
Philippians 3:14, NASB*



I'll admit it - I exercise at Curves. Unlike the grueling, body-sculpting routines of LA Fitness and Bally's, Curves offers a kinder, gentler workout for women only in a friendly and encouraging environment. So I decided to join after discovering with shock that I had gained over 10 pounds. The facility was close to home and I reasoned that the 30-minute circuit, three times weekly was a routine I could live with over the long haul.

Thus I incorporated this workout into my schedule over 6 months ago. The exercise was easy and I barely broke a sweat; therefore it was no mystery why the weight didn't just fall off. Moreover, I was starting to become a bit bored. But having signed a long-term contract, I persisted to keep the financial commitment from being all for naught.

Then some weeks ago Curves introduced a new program: a custom-tailored workout. The machines were equipped with a sensor-not unlike the Speed-Pass at gas stations. After taking my weight and measurements, the staff calibrated each machine for me by scanning a tag over the sensor. Then I performed a few representative movements that registered my own level of strength and energy for each machine.

Programmed with this information, the machines served as electronic personal trainers at every turn. After I scanned in, they pushed me to work harder by registering either "green" (good) or "yellow" (less than good). At the end of the workout, I could review my performance at a computer station that summarized everything I had done, including whether or not I made progress.



Suddenly the easy workouts of the past vanished. No longer content to chat with the staff while using the machines lackadaisically, I pushed hard to keep the green light from turning yellow. After 15 minutes I was sweating and my heart pounded; by the end of half an hour I was flat out tired. But I couldn't wait to visit the computer station to see how many calories I burned, what muscles were strengthened and if I'd progressed to a higher level. Having experienced measurable progress, I was highly motivated to workout again; the routine that had become tougher was now much more rewarding.

Physical training is beneficial, and the apostle Paul acknowledged this in the context of attaining the greater spiritual benefit of godliness (1 Timothy 4:7-8). But to be godly requires a pattern of thoughts and actions that are steady, consistent and disciplined, much like the physical conditioning required to successfully run a race (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). So I must lay down the right priorities if I'm to grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Moreover, as my body gains little through a minimum exercise investment, my spirit profits little if I relegate the things of God to the back burner.

Paul described spiritual self-discipline as "buffeting his body" (1 Corinthians 9:27) and "pushing onward that he may attain the prize of the upward calling" (Philippians 3:4). But this higher goal may be met with discord by the weaknesses of our earthen vessels that cry out for comfort and convenience. Yet with eyes fixed on God, we can press on. This isn't unlike when fatigue hits in the middle of exercise; the higher goal galvanizes a willing mind to make the unwilling body continue when it feels like stopping.

Like physical conditioning, spiritual conditioning involves labor, but godly good works aren't sourced in ourselves but in God working through us. God's alive and powerful Word, implanted in us, becomes fruitful and bears righteous works that are vibrant, not lifeless like works that are akin to dead branches because they're apart from Jesus, the Vine (John 15). Moreover, concurrent with these good works is the Fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace and more (Galatians 5:22), which can't be cultivated from the barren heart of natural man.

The spiritual race is life-long and I may fall short, yet it's my hope that my movement progresses in the overall right direction. Though stumbling can happen, the race continues with the opportunity to get up and back on track. Furthermore, it's important to remember that our own spiritual best differs from someone else's because God's grace has gifted each person uniquely. Therefore it's fruitless to compare our performance with others, or to use as our standard anyone but Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). So we run to walk deeper with God. And in this race we don't compete to beat others; rather we encourage others to keep running with us.

God's Word pierces the soul and spirit (Hebrews 4:12) and so it's a mirror for self-evaluation on a daily basis. But not until eternity will we clearly understand how well we ran the entire race in our lifetime. At that time full comprehension will enable us to distinguish deeds that were fire-resistant as gold from those that were combustible like wood, hay and stubble (1 Corinthians 3:12). Thus "going for the green" at Curves benefits me physically, but it's godliness and spiritually "going for gold," that endures eternally.



- By Mary Nixon