

August 23, 2009

Ephesians 6:10-20

5 Minimum Daily Requirements

How can we keep our church and each individual in prime spiritual shape?

Today's lesson from Ephesians focuses on spiritual concerns for our community of faith. As a communal event, worship is the mainstay of a church's health and vigor.

Today's epistle focuses on the protective armor that shields and strengthens every individual believer.

Franklin Church as a community of faith should draw its vitality from the health of each and every soul present.

Today when we read about the "armor of God" we find it hard to envision all those ancient means of military protection, much less actually climbing into all that stuff ourselves.

But it was not that author's intention to make God's protective nature appear foreign or exotic to the community of faith.

The soldier's apparel Paul describes to the Ephesians was something familiar and easily understandable to his Roman occupied audience.

Perhaps if we translated this illustration into something more familiar and easily comprehensible today, we too could sense the security and power the "whole armor of God" offers to each and every believer.

For years children have been taught about our body's "minimum daily requirements."

Remember the "four food groups?"

Dieticians drilled into us how many servings of meat, dairy, fruits and vegetables, bread and grains we should consume every day.

Now after several decades what we believed to be our "minimum daily requirements" have turned out to be far more minimal and not even daily.

Suddenly we are informed we no longer need all that meat, or all that milk. Fat is out; fiber is in.

The pasta lovers of the world can rejoice, as the daily demand for carbohydrates climbs and proteins plummet.

Even if we are no longer sure what exactly our "minimum daily requirements" should be, we do recognize that our bodies need certain things everyday to maintain health and strength.

Just as we all have physical "minimum daily requirements," so our own spiritual body must be constantly nourished with a carefully balanced diet of prayer, worship and work.

For too long our spiritual health has been ignored or taken for granted, as though it were an aspect of our lives that would simply take care of itself. Not true.

Unlike the still growing field of nutritional science, Christians have a long tradition of those elements necessary to meet our spiritual minimum daily requirements.

The prophets, the saints and Jesus himself demonstrated how a vital life of faith is dependent on the presence of certain spiritual One-A-Day vitamins.

MDR#1. Communal Rituals -- This was the requirement stressed so strongly to the Ephesians' in their early church.

Christians are not found in singles. Christians grow like grapes -- in clusters. Participating in a community of faith is not an elective.

Daily communal rituals must be a part of any healthy spiritual regime.

Whether family devotions, prayer breakfasts, study circles, Bible studies, we need each other to practice love, keep the faith and have hope.

MDR#2. Spiritual Exercises -- Each person must flex their spiritual muscles on a daily basis if they are to keep them fit and flexible.

Do you make room in your morning or evening schedule for a time of prayer and devotions? Do you regularly sing out to the Lord -- even if it's in the shower or in the car?

Our faith must find words, and the words of praise and adoration that come out in song and prayer should be a part of our daily spiritual regime.

Prayer is especially crucial to spiritual health. It keeps us in close personal contact with the One whose love draws us together in the first place.

Prayer is not just an excuse for giving God a long list of requests. ("I'm gonna say my prayers now," a six-year-old yelled from up in his bedroom. "Anyone want anything?")

Prayer is the act of opening our spirit to a two-way street of communication.

Like breathing, prayer involves both exhaling our needs, our love, our praise, and inhaling God's peace and power and presence.

Think of prayer as a kind of spiritual aerobics, exercise that forces your spirit to breathe deeply and fully oxygenate your soul.

MDR#3. Mission -- A refreshed and strengthened spirit will naturally flow out and over others.

No matter how "busy" our lives become, our spiritual energy and health will suffer if it is hoarded, and not shared in service.

Being ministers of the gospel to others is what it means to be a Christian. We become ministers through the acts of love, the works of faith, which we offer to the world.

MDR#4. Intermission -- Keeping spiritually fit doesn't mean having to run a decathlon of events every day until you drop.

A wiped-out spirit leaves us feeling exhausted and wrung out. Taking "down-time" to rest and regroup is an important part of maintaining spiritual health.

No one can give of themselves to others when their spiritual cupboard is bare.

Take time to be silent -- to read, to meditate, to walk quietly in the world with open eyes and closed mouth. Only by taking this kind of "intermission" are we equipped for "mission."

MDR#5. The Word of God -- Thankfully our spiritual strength is not dependent on our own abilities, our own insights, and our own wisdom.

Christians have a record of God's continuing activity in the world, God's words of love and guidance to all creation.

But do we actually immerse ourselves in the Word everyday?

All Christians need a dose of scripture as part of their minimum daily requirements for spiritual health.

Strangely, what seems like such an obvious additive is the one we are most likely to ignore. Too often we think of "Bible study" as something required of kids, but optional for adults.

Others of us have never read whole portions of the Bible, and have no idea what these texts can contribute to our growth and development. Scripture is the most vital part of spiritual health.

Despite a back-breaking busy schedule, former Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole made a covenant with his home church that every week he would write a short note of concern to every member of his own congregation that was in the hospital...

This was Senator Dole's personal spiritual exercise in service.

I believe the best three minutes on television pays tribute to our spirit's desperate need for downtime and intermission. I rarely get to watch it because it airs on CBS Sunday Morning

Started by the late Charles Kuralt, who spent his life driving around the back roads and small towns of America; the program still ends every show with three minutes in which no one says anything.

There are instead images from nature designed to touch our hearts and calm our souls –

a mountain stream making its way down white birch-guarded slopes, amber waves of wheat in the plains of Kansas ...every possible place of beauty in America.

In his commencement address at Emory University, then CEO of Coca-Cola, Donald R. Keough, compared the human brain to what it most looks like: a sponge.

”When we step out into the world, the sponge is full and we begin to squeeze it.

It's our turn now to impart information and wisdom to others, and we squeeze it and squeeze it to relieve that sponge, and one day there's nothing left. It's all dry and hard.

But there's another alternative. Replenish that sponge. Throughout your life, keep doing what you've been doing here. Keep signing up for something new.

I don't mean that you should literally take courses necessarily, but approach the world as if it were a wonderful, limitless curriculum from which you can continue to soak up the new and enriching juices of life. “

Have you taken your five minimum daily requirements? If not, they are still available.

They are free for the taking.

(1) Come to worship God on a regular basis.

(2) Partake in some spiritual exercise.

(3) Get involved in service and mission to others.

(4) Take a break, take a vacation, and stop for an intermission.

(5) Read and study your Bible.

Your physical and spiritual body will thank you.

AMEN!

