

BY DALE FLETCHER, M.S.

# Faith and HEALTH Connection



## Get FITT

If you were working with a personal trainer, he would keep in mind the FITT acronym in developing your workout plan. He'd want to determine the frequency(F) of your workouts, the intensity(I) or how hard you'd perform the exercises, the duration or amount of time(T) you'd engage in the various exercises and the various types(T) of exercises you should perform. These are all basic considerations when working out physically. This acronym can also be helpful in addressing your spiritual fitness program as you consider the various exercises that you participate in to be spiritually fit.

Let's see how we might apply this to addressing your cardiovascular or aerobic exercise plan. If I was your fitness coach, I'd start by asking what type of activity you might enjoy and be consistent with. Perhaps it may be walking briskly, swimming or riding a bike. I'd remind you that any activity that uses your large muscle groups and that you can sustain for a period of time and raises your heart rate to a certain level would be beneficial. We'd next talk about how often or frequent you ought to engage in the activity. The *American College of Sports Medicine* (ACSM) guidelines for adults under age 65 are five days of moderate aerobic activity or three days of intense activity per week. What about the intensity of the activity? To achieve a training effect, moderate-level intensity would be important. The ACSM defines moderate physical activity as "working hard enough to raise your heart rate and break a sweat, yet still being able to carry on a conversation." Another way to prescribe moderate intensity is to recommend you exercise at a target heart rate of between 55% and 65% of your maximum heart rate. And finally, we'd need to consider the time or length of the aerobic activity. Again, according to the ACSM, moderate activity ought to be for at least 30 minutes and vigorous activity should be for at least 20 minutes. These recommendations are for the average healthy adult to maintain health and reduce the risk for chronic disease.

This FITT acronym can also be applied when you consider how you might exercise spiritually. Think about the types of activities or disciplines that you're engaged in for your spiritual fitness and reflect on the frequency, intensity, time and type of activity. Let's use prayer as an example. This is a type of activity that many people use as a spiritual discipline and I imagine most of you would consider it a spiritual exercise. How often or frequent do you pray? Is it several times during the day, daily, weekly or less frequently? Next is the intensity with which you pray. Do you typically lift up your petitions to God in a gentle way? On occasion, do you cry out to Him with all your heart? The next consideration is the length of time of your prayers. How long you pray might depend on many factors. Finally, what might be the type of your prayers? You often might praise or adore God. At other times you might pray in petition or supplication, asking God for something or to do something in your life. Another type of prayer is one of confession or penitence, asking God to forgive you of a sin in your life. A prayer of intercession is one in which we pray for another person. Lastly, an aspect of prayer can be

that of thanksgiving or praise. Using the acronym ACTS, representing adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication may be helpful in developing a pattern of daily prayer. These are just a few types of prayer. As we become more filled with God's love and grow deeper in our faith and are more spiritually fit, our prayers will typically become more varied in type, more frequent and longer. You get the idea.

Let's look at some other spiritual exercises and see how this FITT principle might apply. I'll do this by asking some questions. How frequently are you reading scripture and for what period of time? How often are you attending church? How frequent do you volunteer in service to others? How intensely do you cry out to God when you want to share your heart with Him? How long a time do you abide in God's presence? How intensely do you love God? How frequently do you reflect on the need to forgive others? How long or how frequent do you meditate on God's truths or a particular scripture each day? How frequently do you confess your sins or wrongdoings?

**What the Bible Says:** There are several scriptures about spiritual exercises that speak to the FITT principle. Here are a few:

Pray continually. *1 Thessalonians 5:17*

Then Peter came to him (Jesus) and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?" "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven! *Matthew 18:21-22*

And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. *Mark 12:30*

To sustain or improve your level of physical fitness it's especially important to consider the frequency, intensity and time of the various types of aerobic, resistance and flexibility exercises that you engage in. A sound exercise plan would apply these aspects and principles of fitness. The same holds true for your spiritual fitness program. I urge you to think about various exercises that contribute to your personal spiritual fitness. Then, apply the FITT acronym when you reflect on how effective these activities are in contributing to your spiritual health.

### Helpful Resources:

A resource on spiritual fitness that you may find helpful is a listing of *18 Spiritual Exercises for a Healthier Life* on my website. They are grouped into three areas – Your Relationship with God, Your Beliefs and Attitudes and How You Practice Your Faith. There is also an accompanying Spiritual Fitness Assessment.

A guide on prayer – [www.PrayerGuide.org.uk](http://www.PrayerGuide.org.uk)

Guidelines on Physical Activity – [www.acsm.org](http://www.acsm.org)

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