

Spiritual Fitness

A Guide to Biblical Maturity

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Answering the Question: If I'm a Christian, why do I still struggle?

A small group study in finding maturity

Introduction: How to Use this Study Guide

Purpose of this Small Group Study

1. To become connected with other Christians in a more than casual way,
2. To gain support from others,
3. To be held accountable,
4. To learn authenticity in the Christian life, and
5. To begin the process of becoming mature in a measureable way.

The Process

Learning often occurs when we combine investigation, introspection, meditation, and “truthing in love” in a group setting. Each lesson contains all of these components. We encourage each member of the group to work through the questions and complete the reading so that God may begin afresh his work. It would also be profitable if you would purchase a notebook in which you can write your observations.

This study is designed to be completed in 12 weeks, but you can break any of the sessions up smaller chunks if it works better for you. The questions should be answered ahead of time by each group member, and then discussed as a group during your regular meeting time.

Week 1: Introduction to the Material and Getting to Know Each Other

Week 2: Session 1: Understand the Myths about Spiritual Weight Loss

Week 3: Session 2: Assessing Your Spiritual Fitness

Week 4: Session 3: Get Motivated

Week 5: Session 4: Trainer #1: People

Week 6: Session 5: Trainer #2: Pain

Week 7: Session 6: Trainer #3: God Himself

Week 8: Session 7: Trainer #4: The Church

Week 9: Session 8: Trainer #5: The Bible

Week 10: Session 9: Marks on the Wall

Week 11: Session 10: Taking it to the Next Level

Week 12: Review and Sharing Time

After you complete this study, we encourage you to discuss the possibility of staying in touch as a group. Answer the question: Can we become the people who can promote growth in each other's lives?

Session 1

Understand the Myths about Spiritual Weight Loss

Although Scripture gives us a clear image of what maturity—and immaturity—look like, we are often misled by myths about maturity. In Chapter 1, we uncover eight of those myths and take a closer look at what really produces mature spiritual muscles in our lives.

Myth 1 – Maturity is age related.

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 11-12 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* It has been said that most people don't grow up until they reach their thirties. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Can you think of some character qualities in your own life that by now should be further developed but are not?

Myth 2 – She'll grow out of it.

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 12-13 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* What is the difference between growth and change? In what way does this myth affect our growth as Christians?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* If you asked your closest friends or family about you, would they name things in your life that need to be changed?

Myth 3 – Maturity just happens.

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 13-15 in *Spiritual Fitness* and Colossians 1:28-29 and 2 Peter 1:3-11.
- ❖ *Consider:* How does Colossians 1:28-29 argue against this myth?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Peter taught that believers need to be actively involved in adding character qualities to their lives. What does he list as the benefits? Which of these benefits do you most want to see in your own life and why?

Myth 4 – Maturity is directly proportional to what you know.

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 15-16 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* According to Hebrews 5:14, how do the mature differ from the immature?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Are there people in your life who you consider to be intelligent but immature? In what areas do you know more than you live out in your behavior?

Myth 5 – Maturity is all or nothing.

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 16-17 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* Looking at your life, list the areas of maturity and the areas of immaturity.

- ❖ *Evaluate:* How does this myth affect your desire to grow and mature?

Myth 6 – Maturity is position related.

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 17-18 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* Can you name people around you who hold positions of authority and importance and yet exhibit areas of immaturity?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* In what ways do you sometime hide behind your position and fake maturity?

Myth 7 – Maturity is easier for some personalities.

- ❖ *Read:* Page 18 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* Why is it easier for quiet people to be considered mature? What other personality traits do we often mistake for maturity?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* What areas of your personality might lead others to think you are mature when you are not?

Myth 8: You can mature without a relationship with Jesus Christ.

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 18-19 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* Why do so many Christians reduce the Christian life and spiritual growth to “following the rules?”

- ❖ *Evaluate:* How would you define the word “relationship?” What does it mean to have a personal relationship with someone? How does this apply to having a personal relationship with Jesus?

Putting Away Childish Things--Why Is the Process So Hard?

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 19-21 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* As you consider your friends and family who are blinded to some of their immaturities, what factors do you think significantly contribute to their inability to change?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Which of the factors that inhibit the maturation process do you find yourself struggling with the most? Why?

Spiritual Workout #1: Debunk Your Maturity Myths

Read through the list of maturity myths again, looking for the myths that might be affecting your spiritual growth.

Using a blank piece of paper or the space below, draw a line from top to bottom, dividing the paper in half. On the left side of the line, write the name of a maturity myth you believe is affecting your growth.

On the right side of the line write out any specific ways in which your belief in that myth might have shown up in something you said or did.

Ask God to help you erase the myth and its accompanying behaviors from your life.

Use your concordance to look up one passage of Scripture for each behavior you want to avoid and begin each day reading that Scripture aloud to your workout partner (spouse, accountability partner, parent, etc.)

Don't give up. Workouts are more productive when we push through the pain.

Session 2: Assess Your Spiritual Fitness

If you've ever joined a gym, you know that one of the first steps of membership involves an assessment. A serious commitment to maturity starts with the same step--an assessment of our spiritual "fitness." In Chapter 2 you will read about seventeen tests containing questions that force us to look within ourselves and determine our level of maturity. In a sense, they help us discover our maturity "fitness" scale and formulate a plan to grow.

1. The Test of Contrast

- ❖ *Read:* Page 23 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
Consider: What three areas of immaturity are targeted in 1 Corinthians 13:11?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Based on this passage, what questions can be used to distinguish between childish behavior and adult behavior?

2. The Test of Application

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 23-24 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* Who does the writer of Hebrews say "solid food" (the meat of Scripture) is for?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* We sometimes believe that the Christian is passive in the process of growth, i.e. God does it all. But in this passage, what is the responsibility of the believer in using the Bible in his life? How does a person train himself in this way?

3. The Test of Responsibility

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 24-25 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* Who determines the rate of your spiritual growth? Are you victimized by the pressures of "the world" or are you responsible?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* When given freedom from direct supervision, how responsible are you? How do you handle your time, energy, and resources?

4. The Test of Stability

- ❖ *Read:* Page 25 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* Paul says that people mature when they work out with teachers who teach the Bible and with other believers. What does doctrinal stability look like?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Is there doctrinal stability in your life? Do you know how to distinguish Christianity from a cult? If you had to find a church today, what characteristics would you look for?

5. The Test of Our Spirit

- ❖ *Read:* Page 26 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* What in the list of the fruit of the Spirit do you think is most important? Why?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* What is the hardest part of allowing the Spirit to control our lives and express his fruit?

6. The Test of Scripture

- ❖ *Read:* Page 27 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* What are the four areas of benefit found in Scripture according to 2 Timothy 3:16-17? How are they different?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* What does Paul imply about the benefits of knowing Scripture?

7. The Test of Direction

- ❖ *Read:* Page 27 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* According to Romans 12:1-2, how does a person discover God's will for their lives? According to Romans 8:28-29, what is God's will for your lives?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Are you working and playing like you're in full-time ministry?

8. The Test of Transition

- ❖ *Read:* Page 28 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* If you had only four months to live and knew it, how would you describe your life?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* If you compared your life now to your life a year ago, what has changed that would signify growth? What does Peter suggest that we should do to measure our growth?

9. The Test of Insight—Wisdom

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 28-29 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* What have some of your toughest decisions been? How did you come to a conclusion?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Do your most recent decisions show insight and wisdom?

10. The Test of the Tongue

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 29 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* What are the circumstances that test your maturity in this area?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* How would your friends and family score your communication with them?

11. The Test of Mending

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 29-30 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* What qualities should we demonstrate in attempting to restore others? What is the danger?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Think of a specific example of how God is using your life to “restore” someone.

12. The Test of Endurance

- ❖ *Read:* Page 30 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
Consider: Can you think of a time when your faith was tested? What was the final outcome?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* How do you respond when the trials begin? How should you respond?

13. The Test of Adversity

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 30-31 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* According to this passage, in what way is God mature that we should emulate? Why is this so difficult?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* How do you perform on the test of adversity?

14. The Test of Solution

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 31-32 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* What is the difference between the two “wisdoms” in James 3:13-18? What is the source of each?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Think of some recent choices you’ve made. Which kind of wisdom determined your solutions?

15. The Test of Motive

- ❖ *Read:* Page 32 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* In your own words, what is Paul saying in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Why is it hard for immature people to truly love others?

16. The Test of Prayer

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 32-33 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* If you were to create a scale to measure a person’s prayer life, what things would determine how it was measured?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* On a scale of 1-10 (1 being the lowest), how would you rate your prayer life?

17. The Test of Witness

- ❖ *Read:* Page 33 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* Why are people afraid to share their faith? List one or two reasons.

- ❖ *Evaluate:* What are some creative ways you can share your faith with those around you?

Spiritual Workout #2: Assess Your Spiritual Fitness

- ❖ Read: Pages 33-35 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ Evaluate: For each of the areas below, circle the number that best represents you. (“1” means you have almost none of this quality in your life and a “10” means you have mastered this area.)

Test: “I demonstrate . . .”	1= I don’t have this. 10 = mastered this.
adult, not childlike, actions and words.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
the ability to apply the truths of God’s Word to the practical matters of my life.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
responsibility as a self-starter who works without direct supervision.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
stability in my life.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
the fruit of the Spirit and his control in my life.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
an understanding of God’s will in tangible ways.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
a pattern of adding to my faith Christ-like character qualities.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
discernment about God’s Word and spiritual matters.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
tongue control.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
the ability to mend others.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
the healthy results of having been taught the Word.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
endurance in times of stress and pressure.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
a mature attitude toward those who oppose me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
the ability to make sound decisions.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
unconditional love.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
an active and consistent prayer time.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
an ability to share my faith.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Consider sharing some of your scores with your small group. Ask them to help hold you accountable in the areas where you need the most work.

Session 3

Get Motivated

In Chapter 3, we are introduced to six motivators which are designed to move us off the couch and into action. They are also six growth producers which keep us growing.

Motivator 1: Take the Medicine

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 37-39 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* How did you define “quality time”? Why is understanding the definition important? Which one of these qualities is the hardest? Why?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* On a scale of 1-10 (1 = never & 10 = regularly) rate yourself in taking the medicine:
Quality time in the Word:

Quality time in prayer:

Quality time in fellowship:

Quality time in service:

Motivator 2: Exorcise the Excuses

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 40-41 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* What advice is Paul giving in this passage that we can apply to our study of maturity and spiritual fitness? What are the excuses that are used to avoid growing up?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* As you remember how children grow, what are the difficult aspects of growing up that correlate to our growing? What excuse do you often use that gets in the way of your growing?

Motivator 3: Change What Needs Changing

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 41-42 in *Spiritual Fitness* and 2 Timothy 2:3-7.
- ❖ *Consider:* How does this passage help us in changing that which needs changing?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* What is Paul's point in using the soldier? Athlete? Farmer?

Motivator 4: Remove the Distractions

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 42-44 in *Spiritual Fitness* and 1 John 2:15-17 and Romans 12:1-2.
- ❖ *Consider:* Have you met people like Helen who have lost a portion of their lives chasing after things that did not contribute to their spiritual maturity? Can you describe them to the group without giving away confidences?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* In today's culture, what are the warning signs of becoming distracted?

Motivator 5: Start with Your Lowest Scores.

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 44-45 in *Spiritual Fitness* and Philippians 2:12.
- ❖ *Consider:* Which tense of salvation do you think Paul is talking about in this passage?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* What were some of your lowest scores on the maturity profile from session 2? What do you think you could do to improve your scores?

Motivator 6: Stay in the Polisher

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 45-48 in *Spiritual Fitness* and James 1:2-8 and 1 Corinthians 10:13.
- ❖ *Consider:* Why is it so hard to stay in the polisher?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Can you describe some “polisher” events in your life? What did you want to do? What did you do? How did you get through it? What was the outcome?

Spiritual Workout #3: Get Motivated

1. Using the test from Chapter 2, write one of the items you received the lowest score for on your bathroom mirror (you determine the font size).
2. Exorcise the excuses. Write in parentheses (next to the item in Step #1 above) what you believe your typical excuses will be (an older friend/mentor can help you if you get stuck). This will help you identify them before you try to use them.
3. Remove the distractions. If you haven't done this before, fill in last week in your calendar with the activities you participated in (hour by hour as much as you can remember). Look over the week carefully. What distracted you most? Spend less time on this activity as you work on the item you chose in Step #1.
4. Using your concordance, find a passage of Scripture that deals directly with the area you're working on. For instance, I (Marty) am working on gladness as a part of thankfulness. Since I struggle with this when I am stressed, I am memorizing Psalm 65:12. (Having used this method many times, I know God will help me in this area. And, he will help you, too.)

Note: If you were left with a sense of not knowing the next steps, sessions 9 & 10 will help you clearly establish them.

Session 4

Personal Trainer #1: People

Whether we have a few close friends or dozens of people we like to be around, each of us needs to identify one special individual (or a small group) who can serve as our trainer and whose life can be a growth chart for us. These are the special people around us whom God will use to promote maturity in our lives; sometimes they become our mentors. To find them, we have to know what to look for.

1. Find someone who is further down the path than you are.

❖ *Read:* Pages 51-54 in *Spiritual Fitness*.

Consider: Who comes to mind when you think of mature people who are further down the path than you are?

❖ *Evaluate:* If you cannot think of any, discuss how a person would go about finding such a person.

2. Find someone you can trust with your deepest thoughts and feelings.

❖ *Read:* Pages 54-57 in *Spiritual Fitness*.

❖ *Consider:* Ask you think about the five levels of communication, who among your friends do you communicate with at the deeper levels?

❖ *Evaluate:* How much time is involved in developing this kind of relationship? Are you willing to make that kind of investment?

3. Find someone who is available.

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 57-58 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* Begin making a list of people in your church, circle of friends, family, and neighborhood who might meet the requirements of being a person God would use in helping you grow.

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Share your list with the group.

4. Find someone who knows the Lord and the Word.

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 58-59 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* Why is this standard important?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* How do you know when someone “knows” the Word? (Hint – see James 3:13)

5. Find someone who will tell you the truth.

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 59-61 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* What are the factors that make this so hard?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* What are the qualities you look for in someone who is truthful?

6. Find someone of the same gender.

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 61-62 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* Why is this important?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Why do you think this is especially important for men? For women? How would you do this if you don't know anyone who fits?

7. Give your mentor permission.

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 62-63 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* Why is this important? How does a person do this? What language would they use?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Try role-playing with your small group to practice

Spiritual Workout #4: Finding Friends

1. Look for the lesson. Before we react, we should ask, “What is God trying to teach me in this situation?”
2. Tear down that wall. Men especially put up a wall that protects them from being vulnerable in a relationship. Tear down the wall, brick by brick, and become vulnerable. (The wall is usually built from our “pride” and God hates it.)
3. Make an effort. We are amazed how many people really don’t make any effort in finding and keeping friends. If you want lasting friendships, you will have to expend energy.
4. Don’t quit when it gets rough. Dr. Phillip Howard, Senior Pastor of Valley Bible Church, points out that “those who have character have stayed through the pain.”
5. Suck the life out of each day. When the Trammell and Rollins families get together, we have a motto--“Suck the life out of every day!” The Christian was designed to enjoy life. Christ said that he gave us abundant life. We need to enjoy it more. Best friends suck the life out of their time together.

Session 5

Personal Trainer #2: Pain

Pain is part of the pathway to spiritual fitness. For the maturing believer, the physical maxim is just as true spiritually, “No pain. No gain.” So how do we deal with pain as God uses it to train us in spiritual fitness?

Know Pain, Know Gain

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 65-70 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* Read 1 Peter 1:6-7, 2:18-23, 4:12-16, and 5:8-9, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, and James 1:2-4. What are the various causes for suffering in the Christian life? What do these verses teach about the expected outcome of suffering?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Make a list of the things we learn about suffering from the above passages.

Prepare

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 70-71 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* What are the ways you can prepare for suffering?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Why is this approach important?

Pause

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 72-73 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* What do we mean when we suggest “pause?” Why is “pausing” an important step in considering suffering?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* What character qualities and knowledge are necessary to pause when suffering begins?

Ponder

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 73-74 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* What is the process of suffering designed to produce in the Christian?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Recall some specific times of suffering in which you grew as a result. Can you identify the growth? Share it with your small group.

Pray

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 74-75 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* How should we pray in times of suffering?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* What are God's intentions in our times of suffering?

Persist

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 75-76 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* Faith is at the center of the test. If we don't persist, we not only rob ourselves of the patience that comes from staying, but we miss acquiring the maturity that results.

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Based on what we have learned in this lesson and past lessons, why is persisting so important?

Praise

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 76-78 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* Pastor Rick Warren has popularized the statement, "God never wastes a hurt." It is true. Whenever pain enters our lives, we need to pause and remember that God is still in love with us and in charge.

- ❖ *Evaluate:* What trials and circumstances is God using in your life to mold you into a person who is "chiseled" like his Son?

Spiritual Workout #5: Know Pain, Know Gain

1. On the back of a business card (or a 3x5 card you can fit in your wallet) write a one- to five-word description of a painful situation you're involved in (e.g. difficult relationship, lost job, sickness).
2. Ask God and an older and wiser friend to help you see potential ways the pain could help you grow (e.g. humility, trust, and self-control).
3. Select one of the "ways the pain could help you grow" from step 2 above and memorize a passage (e.g. Ephesians 4:32) or a story from the Bible (e.g. The Good Samaritan) that deals with that virtue. (Your pastor can help with this step, too).
4. Pull the business card out of your wallet and put it in front of you during any kind of physical workout you normally participate in (e.g. at the end of your swim lane) or hold it in your hand (e.g. walking the stairs at work ☺). Review the passage you chose from step 3 and ask God to use his Word to increase your spiritual fitness in that particular area.

Session 6

Personal Trainer #3: God Himself

Although it is God who uses people and circumstances in our lives, there are those special interventions that God himself infuses into our experiences. Those interventions are what this chapter is about.

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 81-86 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* After reviewing Hebrews 12:4-11, how does the reading the word “discipline” as “child training” change the meaning you may have previously understood in this passage?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* How does your understanding of how God works in your life change with this definition?

A New Perspective

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 86-92 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* The authors listed eight observations that can be made when God invades our life and begins spiritual training. Read one of the following life stories and view it through the lens of each of these eight perspectives. Write down your notes to share with your group.
 - Daniel (Daniel 1)
 - Job (Job 1-2, 42)
 - Abraham (Genesis 12-22)
 - Jonah (The Book of Jonah)
 - Jacob (Genesis 25-33)
 - Ruth (The Book of Ruth)
 - David (1 Samuel 16-31; 2 Samuel 1-5, 11-12)

1. What we may see as disaster might become our destiny.

2. What we see as an unfair might become more than fair.

3. What we see as painful might become a surprising plan.

4. What we see as an opportunity to react might be an opportune time to refrain.

5. What we see as God's inactivity might be spiritual "wait" training.

6. What we see as "personal," might be more about others.

7. What we see as isolated pieces, might be part of an intricate plan.

8. What we see as mundane might be magical.

- ❖ *Evaluate*: What did you discover about God’s discipline in the life of the biblical character you chose? Did this help you see some circumstances in your own life from a different perspective? How do these stories reflect God’s love for his people?

Spiritual Workout #6: Craving Correction

1. As you study the Bible (make sure you’re involved in a solid and sensitive Bible study group), ask God to show you character areas that might be in need of his correction and training.
2. Ask God to help you avoid rationalizing away his “child-training” kind of love (since you know that God “trains” those he loves--Hebrew 12:4-11).
3. Write down in the back of your Bible or journal one character area you believe God might be training you in and take that item to an older, wiser Christian of your gender.
4. Ask that Christian brother or sister if he or she believes you’re on the right track. If he shows you how you’re incorrectly interpreting God’s “child-training,” be thankful. If he agrees with your assessment, be thankful, too.
5. Memorize at least one related passage of Scripture
6. Share that passage of Scripture with the older individual you talked to in step 3.
7. Record any evidences of growth in your calendar. (They’re great to look back at and celebrate!)
8. Ask God to help you sincerely desire his direct intervention (even to “crave correction”), so you can reach the level of maturity that he longs for you to know.

Session 7

Personal Trainer #4: The Body of Christ

Please note: This lesson is not designed to challenge the worship or teaching at your church, but to challenge the participant to seek deeper meaning in his or her attendance.

God made us to need each other. That’s why our fourth trainer, the body of Christ—his church—is so important to spiritual growth. It is part of the power God’s Spirit uses to help us mature.

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 95-96 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* Have you experienced the feeling expressed by Philip Yancey in the opening quote? If so, please share the circumstances that brought you back to church.

- ❖ *Evaluate:* What are the social values of being involved in church? In what way does church meet a social need? Spiritual?

A Paradigm Shift

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 97-106 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* This chapter offers eleven changes worth considering when it comes to our view of church. After reading through each paradigm, circle the phrase that indicates your agreement or disagreement with each one. Discuss your views with your small group.

Church needs to stretch us rather than make us more comfortable.

Strongly disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly agree

The church is designed for family not consumers.

Strongly disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly agree

The church is designed for participants, not spectators.

Strongly disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly agree

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Why were gifted people given to the church? What does this say about God's expectation on our participation and service?

Church begins our week rather than ends it.

Strongly disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly agree

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Do you think that most people in our culture view Sunday as the last day of the week or the first? How does this paradigm affect our approach to Sunday?

Church is not a luxury but a necessity.

Strongly disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly agree

The church is not designed to promote correct preaching but to stimulate correct practice.

Strongly disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly agree

Church is not a social club but a family meeting.

Strongly disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly agree

- ❖ *Evaluate:* What are the qualities of a family that should be expressed in our relationships in the church?

The church is not about religion but relationships.

Strongly disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly agree

The church should be a local one.

Strongly disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly agree

❖ *Evaluate:* What is the distance past which a church is no longer local? Why?

Church should involve life-changing worship and teaching rather than an experiment in boredom.

Strongly disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly agree

❖ *Evaluate:* What are the attitudes that should be evident in a healthy church meeting the standard of Ephesians 4:11-16?

Wrap Up

❖ Read: Pages 106-109 in *Spiritual Fitness*.

Spiritual Workout #7: Body Building

Over twenty times in the New Testament we are reminded about how crucial our commitment to each other is. Choose your strongest item from the following list and share it with your spouse and/or a friend at church, as well as with your small group. Describe the joy it brings you. As you do this, you'll be building into their lives reminders of the power in teamwork.

- To love each other
- To greet each other
- To encourage
- To bear with each other
- To offer hospitality
- To agree
- To be devoted
- To submit
- To have fellowship
- To live in harmony
- To live in humility
- To be kind to each other
- To be compassionate
- To serve one another
- To speak truth in love

Session 8

Personal Trainer #5: The Bible

As we've moved through the four previous fitness stations and met our personal trainers, we've grown much closer to the team. Each workout has reminded us that we are involved in a divine cooperative: each of us figuring out and implementing activities we can do to add maturity to our lives while the chief trainer, the Holy Spirit, controls the efforts and their results. It's crucial for us to realize that our last trainer, like every previous trainer, is not acting alone-- the Holy Spirit is working as a coach beside each trainer to quicken our souls to God's working.

Two Groups of People in the Gym

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 111-116 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* In what ways do people resist the Holy Spirit's work in their lives?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Have there been times in your life where you believed the Holy Spirit was moving you to action and you put it off? What was the outcome?

Personal Growth

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 116-123 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* Read each of the following passages and answer the questions. Be ready to discuss your answers with your small group.

Psalm 119:9-16, 105

- ❖ Outline the psalmist's solutions for moral success in life.

Acts 17:11-12

- ❖ What do you think motivated the Bereans to examine the Scriptures? Mistrust? Inquisitiveness? Desire to study it out for themselves? Why?

2 Timothy 2:15

- ❖ What does it mean “correctly handles the word of truth?”

2 Timothy 3:16-17

- ❖ What does Paul suggest that the Bible is useful for? How does this relate to our topic of maturity?

Hebrews 4:12-13

- ❖ Can you rephrase verses 12 and 13 so that they harmonize?

Luke 8:11-15

- ❖ According to this passage, what impedes the Word producing maturity?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* These are just some examples—write down some other verses that come to your mind that you would recommend to a new believer that would help them understand the role of the Bible in their growth.

Spiritual Workout #8: Breathing the Bible

1. Start small. Using the steps from *Living by the Book* or *How to Read Your Bible* (or a similar book recommended by your pastor or mentor) choose a book of the Bible to study. (Although every book will help you in your pursuit of maturity, Ephesians and Colossians are good places to start.)
2. Study the background of the book of the Bible you chose, using the short summaries in *How to Read Your Bible* or a similar book.
3. As you become acquainted with the meaning of the passage to the original readers, you'll be able to see how it applies to a few of your daily activities, relationships or conversations.

Session 9

Marks on the Wall

Each trainer's goal is to bring us closer to the image of Christ. As we mentioned earlier, when we join the gym, our thinking needs to change about spiritual exercise. Remember our teen years when we or some of our friends put posters of people we emulated up on the wall? We wanted to be like them in some way, many times in terms of their physical attributes. As we grew up, we realized (sometimes painfully) that we just weren't going to be able to make it happen. Many of us learned some wisdom and finally gave up the quest. As we continued to mature, some of us traded that poster for a new one--the person of Jesus Christ. The struggle through the years has been to keep that poster prominent. Spiritual fitness involves thinking differently about our personal world. This is especially hard for the immature who find themselves at the center of every poster on their wall.

The Blame Game

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 127-130 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* In what way do we use blame to not make growth measureable? Why do we do this?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Can you think of some situations in which you used blame to avoid growing? How did they impede growth?

Join in Some Journal Jogging

- ❖ *Read:* Pages xx in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* Why is it unwise to use yesterday as a measurement of our growth?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* On a scale of 1-10 (1 being the lowest) I have moved from _____ to _____ in my desire to become spiritually fit.

Make Measurement Matter

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 131-133 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* Find your spiritual fitness list. Chose one of the following passages and write out the words expressing character qualities and items of maturity that can be used as measurement.
 - 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a
 - 2 Peter 1:4-11
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28
 - Colossians 3
 - Philippians 4:4-9
 - Ephesians 4:25-5:21
 - Galatians 5:16-26
 - Romans 12:9-21

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Identify some practical ways in which these words can be given measurement in your life. (For example if you picked I Corinthians 13, you might ask, “Where are the areas in which I struggle being patient? Who are the people with whom I am impatient? The next time an incident occurs I will act patiently towards this person and it will look like this: then describe it.)

Make a Plan

- ❖ *Read:* Pages 133-138 in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* What are some examples from your past where you have made a goal and not kept it?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Write down at least three goals for your spiritual life. Share them with your group and ask them to hold you accountable. Review your goals every day for a month, then once a week until you can document measurable growth.

1.

2.

3.

Spiritual Workout #9: Measuring our Maturity

1. Choose one of the lists from Scripture mentioned in the paragraphs on page 132.
2. Choose one aspect of maturity from the list that seems most troublesome at the moment. Write this aspect at the top of a page in your maturity journal (or any journal you already use).
3. Ask, “With whom am I most likely to be _____?” (the negative aspect of the quality you chose to work on). Write the answer to that question in your journal, too.
4. Use your concordance to see what the Bible says about the quality you are working on. (The Holy Spirit will use his Word to instruct you.)
5. Share your journal with a spouse or trusted friend.
6. Mark on your calendar a one month maturity checkup date. On that day review your original journal entry and celebrate with your spouse or your friend the elements of growth you’ve seen in your life.

If you use your journal this way, it will become like growth marks on a wall. Each time you evaluate your maturity will become a moment of joy and a motivation of hope for the future.

Session 10

Taking It to the Next Level

If we are going to climb out of the crib of immaturity and become the mature adults Gods wants us to be, we are going to have to change some things. Let's see how we can take our workout plan to the next level.

- ❖ *Read:* Chapter 10 and the Epilogue in *Spiritual Fitness*.
- ❖ *Consider:* Before getting into this last session, what are the things that you have identified in your life that have to change in order to grow and mature?

- ❖ *Evaluate:* Go through each item in the list below and write down any thoughts you have about how each one relates to growing and maturing.

It Can't be Done without Sacrifice

Time

Change your Friends

You Can't Do it Alone

You Have to Know the Enemy

It's Never Too Late

Expect Failure

Don't Try to Change Everything

You Will Always be You

Don't Lose Your Balance

Push Through the Pain

Remember that Growing Older Means Growing Younger

Remember God is the God of Second Chances

Don't Give Up

Spiritual Workout #10: Grow with a Pro

1. Look for someone from your small group Bible study who is fun to be around, but who is also older and wiser in her understanding about how to apply the Bible to life. (Obviously, if you're not in a small group of caring people who read the Bible together, you'll stunt your maturity until you make the change.)
2. Explain your situation. (Something like, "I've been trying to add patience to my life, but I still find myself falling back into immature responses. Can you help me?")
3. If you try this individual's advice and you're still struggling, seek a professional counselor. Sometimes aspects of maturity, like "kindness," don't stick because there's something from childhood slowing us down (like anger). A caring and Christ-centered counselor can help you discover any previous spiritual conditions that might be impeding your progress.
4. The next time you respond to any situation appropriately (with patience), write about the growth in your calendar on the same day. Looking back at your calendar, from time to time, will encourage your spirit and help keep you from crawling back in the crib.

Note: See the appendix in your book for additional resources to aid your spiritual fitness.

About the Authors

Rich Rollins, D.Min., has served as a healthcare professional, college vice-president, and church consultant. He is the executive pastor of Valley Bible Church, a nationally acclaimed community church with a congregation of 2,000 in the San Francisco-Bay area (60 percent of the congregation has been saved out of drug and alcohol abuse.) For more than thirty years, Rich's work in pastoral leadership and church organization has made him a sought-after consultant and conference speaker. Rich and his wife, LouAnna, have been married for more than forty-six years. They have two married daughters and sons-in-law, and two grandchildren, who all encourage Rich in his ministry and appreciation of golf, reading, and sports.

Rich is the co-author of *Redeeming Relationships* and *Spiritual Fitness* and also co-directs Redeeming Relationships Ministries.

Marty Trammell, Ph.D., is Chairman of the English/Communication Department at Corban University in Salem, Oregon, and a pastor at nearby Valley Baptist Church. Nicknamed Dr. Love by scores of college couples who have come to him and his beautiful wife, Linda, for premarital counseling, Marty feels "blessed to have a growing platform for ministry."

Marty is the co-author of *Redeeming Relationships* and *Spiritual Fitness* and also co-directs Redeeming Relationships Ministries. He is a sought-after speaker and has contributed application and research notes to various study Bibles and books. Marty and Linda have three caring sons (and a joyful new daughter-in-law!) who inspire their ministries and help them enjoy music, sports, and road trips.

Together, Rich and Marty have spent several decades in churches and professional organizations helping repair relationships damaged by immaturity. They welcome your insights on how to communicate these truths to the millions of Christians who want, so desperately, to move forward in their faith, and they hope you will share this book with your small group, Sunday school class, your neighbors and your friends.

Both are available for pulpit opportunities, workshops and retreats. They can be contacted at www.redeemingrelationships.com

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