

Spirit of Health



ALLEN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH + STAUNTON, VA

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A Spiritual Exercise

BY DEBORAH BUNDY-CARPENTER

Today I went on a solo hike to Humpback Rocks on the Blue Ridge Parkway. I hadn't hiked alone before, and it was exhilarating: The experience not only affected my physical self, but my spiritual self, too.

God met me along the way. As I walked the trail, a steady uphill climb, I found myself stopping to try to see everything, and then to look up the mountain to the path ahead. Then I heard a voice in my spirit say, "Don't look at what's ahead—look at me," and as I looked backward on the path, the voice in my spirit said, "Don't look back—just keep looking at me."

Knowing how lovely the view would be from the top, I was anxious to reach the summit. Plus I needed to reach my goal. Steadily I climbed. The road became rocky and narrow, and my legs began to ache. I breathed hard and deep, and my heart beat faster and faster. Physically, I was being greatly challenged (just what I wanted from this hike), but I was also completely at peace spiritually. Even though the road was rough, I knew who was leading me.

At one point on the trail, there was a choice to be made: a fork in the road. At the fork, I went to the right. (I was guessing, as I'd never encountered this trail on my hikes here in the past.) It was an easy way at first. However, after about a half-mile, the trail was no longer clearly marked.

When I could no longer discern what path I'd taken, I asked those behind me if they knew the way, and

they replied they were just following me. I had wandered off the path and unintentionally taken others with me—clearly not my plan. I immediately turned around and went back the way I had come until I found the correct path. I didn't want to get lost, nor did I want to lead others down the wrong path.

It didn't take long to get back to the right way, so I readily took it. That true path to the top of the mountain became even narrower and steeper. There were huge boulders to navigate, and trees had fallen to block the way. But, for every obstacle, there was a clear and safe detour around it. I often tripped but never completely fell.

I finally arrived at the top of that mountain. The journey had been well worth all the twists, turns, detours, and dangers along the way. The sight at the top of Humpback Rocks was breathtaking. From atop that high and lofty perch, I had a bird's eye view of the Shenandoah Valley and could clearly see across it to the Allegheny Mountains in the west. What a sight it was!

I rested there at the top. I ate my granola bar and drank my water as I basked in God's goodness. A couple ascended just behind me, and I heard someone ask, "I came all that way for this?" Feeling tired myself, I could sympathize, but I was also acutely aware of how different our experiences were. In that moment, I saw God in all his glory; I praised a God who gave me strength of limb to climb this mountain and eyes to behold his beauty. This was



a spiritual exercise for me, even if I had used my body to do it.

I encourage you to exercise your mind, your body, and your faith—all of them grow stronger for it. Let God lead you along the way, and you may find, as I did, that physical exercise enlivens the spirit.

UPCOMING EVENTS



Put on your walking shoes!

September 22 at
Gypsy Hill Park

**American Heart Association's
Annual Heart Walk**

We'll be forming a walking team this summer and raising funds to donate for the fight against heart disease. For details, contact Debbie, Rachel, or Karen, or e-mail us at health@AllenChapelStaunton.org.

"Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth."

• 3 John 1:2, King James version



Not Just Another Weight Loss Article

BY RACHEL CARPENTER

Okay, now I know you're thinking, *Man, not another list about what to do when trying to lose weight!* I hate it, too. Constantly drinking water, exercising, and eating healthy gets kinda boring. Believe me, after more than a year of dropping weight, I think I've heard it all! However, now that I'm down 40 pounds, I'm also thinking some of that psycho-babble paid off. So, here are some things to consider if you want to lose weight, too.

First off, make the conscious decision to change. I know that sounds corny, but I finally got to a point where I was wearing a size of clothes I didn't want to be (or buy), and I couldn't shop in the stores I really liked. For me, that was a deal breaker. I knew I couldn't go on the way I was going, so when the opportunity arose to join Weight Watchers (which I fully recommend), I grabbed it.

In the Bible in numerous places, it tells us to **leave the old things that we used to do behind.** The same goes in weight loss. This is probably the biggest struggle any of us face in the weight loss journey. For me, that meant no more going to Wendy's for lunch, drinking Mountain Dew, and wandering to the vending machines on breaks. Those were things I cut out, but I also added some things back in: More fruits and veggies, whole grains, water—you know, all the stuff they say you *should* eat.

I also upped my exercise quite a bit. Now, during the average week, I try to do some kind of exercise three or four times. The added activity really has helped me, and I've accomplished things I never thought I would do. I've run two 5Ks and improved each time, taken on yoga, spinning, hiking—and this past week, I rode a real bike, outside, for the first time in years, and didn't fall off. In fact, out of the people who rode, I was one of the first five people to finish, and I actually rode almost 10 miles without stopping! So, changing your patterns really make a difference in your life.



Another huge piece of advice is no self-loathing! I have learned, and am still learning day by day, that you need to love yourself and your body at *every* step of your weight loss journey. I have so many days where I look at myself and just hate every aspect of my body. Now, you might say that's motivating, but I say not. You've got to love yourself enough to want to change and want to improve. I've found the more I think to myself, *Hey, I look hot today*, the more I want to be able to tell myself that every day, and the more I want to eat right and exercise.

We've been told since we were babies that God is a forgiving God and will forgive us as far as the east is from the west. **Well, if God can forgive us so infinitely, we should be able to forgive ourselves some minor thing like having French fries.** What I'm talking about is this: Don't beat yourself up every time you slip up and eat something you shouldn't. We're all predisposed to constant failing, and it is only through God's grace that we can do the things we set our minds to, which includes weight loss. So, don't dwell on what you cannot change. Just repent, learn from your mistake, and move on.

The last tip I have is that you should, under all circumstances, but especially in weight loss, **have a sense of humor.** Learn to laugh at yourself and have fun with what you're doing. Weight loss and eating well shouldn't be a fad or something you do only to get into that swimsuit this summer, but should become a "lifestyle change": That means it follows you your entire life. Therefore, have fun with it, cheat a little, and just learn to enjoy life the way your father in heaven wants you to—and will provide for you, if you only take that first step and ask for his help.

ENJOY THIS PRAYER, which celebrates the body as a vessel for the spirit and asks for God's help in taking the best care of it.

This one and others like it are available in *My Prayer Book* by Ken Mott, which is free to download from <http://members.aol.com/myprayerbook/default.htm>.

A Prayer for Health

Almighty God, who has given me a wonderful body to hold my immortal soul, teach me how to live that I may keep it in health.

Let me learn the laws that govern my body, that I may not break them. Help me to regulate my appetite and passions, that they may serve you and me, in the building of my body, and not weaken it.

Give me health of mind, that my thoughts may be clear and insightful. Make me love your good gifts of fresh air and cool water, and use them for your good, and the good of my body.

Help me to always keep my body fit for your service.

AMEN

