

# STRONG *to the* CORE

H. NORMAN  
WRIGHT



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## STRONG TO THE CORE

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## JANUARY 1

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*Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales;  
rather, train yourself to be godly (1 Timothy 4:7).*

**Y**ou know what it's like to sweat. You're playing an intense game of racquetball or working in the yard. At first small beads of water ooze from your pores. Then, as though a pump were turned on, water pours down your face and body. Your shirt absorbs the perspiration, but soon it's so wet and sticky that it's in the way. You strip it off. The harder you work or play, the more you sweat. And for most of us, the better we feel.

The word *train* that Paul uses in today's verse literally means *naked*. In ancient Greek athletic contests, the athletes competed without clothing so they wouldn't be hampered by it. The word *train* meant "to exercise naked." And whenever you train, there is sweat.

Do you catch what Paul is saying in today's verse? He's saying to train (exercise, work out) for the purpose of godliness. Paul is calling for spiritual sweat. As the Greeks rid themselves of clothing that got in their way, Paul is calling us to get rid of any habit, relationship, or practice that keeps us from being godly men. The writer of Hebrews put it this way: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Hebrews 12:1).

After Paul said to train, he noted that we need to labor and strive for it. Labor means "strenuous toil." The Christian life isn't an easy walk in the park. It takes effort, energy, and sweat!<sup>1</sup> One man put it this way: "The successful Christian life is a sweaty affair. No sweat, no sainthood."<sup>2</sup> Is anything holding you back from being godly? Ask the Lord to show you what to do about it. Then put forth all your energy to train for godliness.

*It is God's will that you should be holy (1 Thessalonians 4:3).*

**T**he Bible says we are to be holy. What does that mean? And how do we do that? Perhaps a good place to begin is...with lust. Yes, lust—an issue we all struggle with in one way or another. Paul says, “Train yourself to be godly” (1 Timothy 4:7). In 1 Thessalonians 4:4-6, he says, “Each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you.”

That's strong language, but it's important to heed. As Christians, we're called to be different. We're called to purity in our sexual lives. Impossible? No. A struggle? Yes. And that's why we need God's presence and power in our lives—to enable us to use our sexual passion in a positive way. How can we control raging hormones?

- Be accountable to someone you can be honest with.
- Pray specifically for your purity in thought and action.
- Memorize the Word of God. “I have hidden your word in my heart” (Psalm 119:11).
- Watch your thought life and what you focus your eyes on.

Job said, “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl” (Job 31:1). Did you know that was in the Bible? We need to be careful what we focus on. A minister said, “One look of recognition, one look of appreciation, and no more looks!” Holiness takes on new meaning when applied to everyday struggles, doesn't it? But it is possible!<sup>3</sup>

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## JANUARY 3

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*Wounds from a friend are better than kisses  
from an enemy! (Proverbs 27:6 TLB).*

**G**ive it to me straight, I can take it.” Is there anyone in your life who will tell it to you like it is? Have you got someone who will level with you and with whom you can level? And the relationship is stronger because of the honesty? That’s what Proverbs 27:6 is talking about. We may not want to hear the truth, but we’re better off because of what was said. Proverbs 17:10 (TLB) states: “A rebuke to a man of common sense is more effective than a hundred lashes on the back of a rebel.” Oh yeah, it feels good to have someone flatter you, but it can cause problems. “Flattery is a trap” (29:5 TLB).

What I’m talking about here is candor—being open and honest so the truth builds the relationship. Candor comes because of our care and love for the other person. We have his well-being in mind. Ephesians 4:15 (TLB) says “speak the truth in love.” This creates a healthy relationship. How many of those do you have? One? Several? If so, you’re fortunate. Mutual candor is a sign of close friendship. You’ll be a better person and so will your friend when candor is present. Proverbs 27:17 (TLB) reveals the result: “A friendly discussion is as stimulating as the sparks that fly when iron strikes iron.”

Keep in mind that your response to the candor of your friend (it could even be your wife!) will make a difference. Defensiveness kills candor. Responses like “Let me think about that” or “That’s something for me to consider” keep a relationship going.

So...can you take it? Should you take it straight? Why not? Will you build better relationships with candor? Definitely. One last thought: If you really want to have someone give it to you straight, take a look at God’s Word.<sup>4</sup>

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## JANUARY 4

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*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters (Psalm 23:1-2).*

**H**ave you watched a marathon or experienced running those 26 miles under a hot, baking sun or a cold, driving rain? Mile after mile you lift one foot, slam it down on the concrete, and do the same with the other foot. How many times does each foot slam into that unyielding surface? Thousands upon thousands!

Sometimes microscopic cracks begin in the outer layers of the bones in the feet or legs. If the running continues and the lower body continues to receive punishment, those crevices enlarge. Soon they're large enough to create pain. These are called stress fractures. You may think stress fractures are limited to the bones, but they are not. We pound our bodies in other ways. Our schedule piles up, as do the bills; we take on a coaching job, learn to eat on the run (usually junk food), try to satisfy the boss, spouse, and church. Before long our nerves have microscopic cracks. We're on edge like a tightly wound rubber band ready to snap at whatever gets in our way.

Your spirit and your heart can be stress-fractured from taking on and doing too much by yourself. You were not called to go through life alone. That approach will break you. There's a Shepherd waiting to help you. Why don't you let Him?

He lets me rest in the meadow grass and leads me beside the quiet streams. He gives me new strength... Even when walking through the dark valley of death I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me (Psalm 23:3-4 TLB).

Read this psalm aloud each day for a month, and then check your stress level.