



Dear Friends in Christ,

February is a great month for baseball fans. It is the start of Spring Training. After one of the greatest World Series of all time last October, I have been waiting for months for the start of Spring Training and the beginning of another year of baseball.

This year February is also a great month for Christians. February brings us the start of Lent, which can be called the “spring training” of the Christian life. Traditionally Lent is 40 days when Christians focus on the Lenten disciplines of repentance, fasting, prayer, and works of love which strengthen our spiritual life and health.

We spend a lot of time and money caring about our physical health. Lent is the season that calls us to pay attention to our spiritual health. There are many spiritual diseases such as anxiety, fear, ingratitude, prayerlessness, and unforgiveness that ultimately are far more devastating than any physical illness. But there are no little pills to address these spiritual health concerns.

The disciplines of Lent invite us and call us into healthy spiritual living. On Wednesday evenings during Lent you are invited to gather together to spend some time focusing on the Lenten disciplines of spiritual health.

We will begin with prayer which is a lot like spiritual breathing. We exhale the confession of our sins and we inhale God's gift of forgiveness. We exhale our problems and fears and we inhale God's promises of grace. The deeper our breathing in prayer, the healthier we become. The Bible encourages us to “pray without ceasing.” In other words, keep breathing.

Secondly we will continue with Scripture reading which looks a lot like healthy eating. We chew on God's Word in study and meditation. We digest it through memory. Vitamin T (Truth) builds strong spiritual muscles and bones.

Thirdly we will look at the Lenten disciplines of fasting and Sabbath which look a lot like the rest which is essential for good health. Most Americans are somewhat sleep deprived. When we run ourselves down we are more susceptible to disease. Fasting and Sabbath are essential to a healthy spiritual life.

Fourthly we will look at the Lenten discipline of doing works of love which is all about exercising our spiritual muscles. If we don't work out our salvation into the world for the sake of others, we grow spiritually fat and weak. Acts of mercy, service, and compassion are ways in which we develop our strength.

And finally, we will look at the gift of healing which is a vital part of life physically and spiritually. What kind of healing do we need? How do we best seek that healing? How can we help one another experience God's healing?

I invite you to join us for spiritual spring training this February and March during Lent. May we help one another to grow spiritually stronger and healthier.

Yours in Christ, *Phil Nielsen*