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How to Get in Shape

Here's a curious thing to consider: Although we Americans are notoriously sedentary (we sit still to watch an average of three hours of TV every day), our language is peppered with expressions that are based on images of activity. As author Bert Lee Hudson noted ... we wrestle with problems, we jump to conclusions, we buck the system, we skate on thin ice, we bend the rules, we rock the boat, we climb the corporate ladder, we fly off the handle, we split hairs, we run amok, we stir up trouble, we sling mud, we carry things too far, we dodge responsibility, we shoot the breeze, we throw our weight around, we punch the clock, we paint the town, we capture moments, we hit the sack, we saw logs, and finally, we kick the bucket.

All those lively, colorful metaphors we employ to describe our lives, full of action verbs, would lead you to believe that we never sat still for a second! And yet only about a third of us actually exercise regularly. It seems our language is more active than we are.

Perhaps we've come to substitute talk for action, and that's a practice that has been found questionable for a very long time. Even Shakespeare contributed to the disparagement of those who talked much and produced little. A character in *Richard III* says with distinctive Shakespearian flair, "Fear not, my lord, we will not stand to prate; talkers are no good doers: be assured, we come to use our hands and not our tongues."

So here's a question for all of us today, some 417 years after Shakespeare issued his statement on idle talk: Which are you better at... using your hands or using your tongue? Are you more likely to talk about the day's newsworthy events or get involved in shaping them? Are you more likely to grumble about someone or something that displeases you or to offer constructive help toward improvement? Are you more practiced at being a critic or a contributor?

There are many ways to live out our lives faithfully and productively. Surely, there is no single prescribed pattern to which we must all adhere. But it seems to us that the starting point for virtually any meaningful life of faith lies in the willingness to get up and do something. Or as Jesus issued the challenge and the call so very long ago: "Come and follow me."

Have you heard a call to follow your faith into places and situations that challenge you and serve others? Then don't settle for discussing and debating the prospects. Don't rest content with idle talk and good intentions. Maybe it's time for all of us to get up and go out to engage in a truly active, committed life of faith. And that just may be the most rewarding way possible to get in shape.