

[Luke 12:32-40](#)

Last Sunday afternoon, along with a massive chunk of the population, Debbie, Mark, and I sat in front of the TV to cheer on the England Lionesses in their Euro 22 final against our old friends from Germany. When the match went to extra time at 1-1, I thought the Germans were the more likely winners. I am glad I was wrong!

During the week we also enjoyed the exploits of the Scottish runner Eilish McColgan who followed in her mother Liz's footsteps by becoming Commonwealth 10,000 metres champion – and breaking her mother's record.

These tremendous athletes will all have given close attention to their fitness in order to scale the heights of their respective sports. Without doing so, they would not have ended up with medals being hung around their necks and trophies being lifted triumphantly before the fans.

You know where I'm going with this. Sometimes the New Testament uses the analogy of athletes in training to challenge us about our spiritual lives. Paul tells the Corinthians that running to win the crown of life requires discipline (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). Near the end of his life he says, 'I have run the race' (2 Timothy 4:7).

And while Jesus doesn't explicitly use that language in today's reading, there is something similar going on in what he teaches here. These verses may not seem terribly connected, but what holds them together is a theme of 'spiritual fitness'. I am going to draw out two areas of spiritual fitness that I believe Jesus highlights here.

Firstly, *the heart*.

A young man I once knew got married in his late twenties. A year later, he was dead, his beautiful bride left as a widow. The inquest showed that he had an undiagnosed heart condition, and this killed him. Nobody had any idea that he had any heart troubles. Apparently, there are many cases like this every year.

We need to pay attention to the states of our hearts. Some of us pay little attention to our hearts and do not realise that they are diseased. Something could go wrong for us, too. Think of the stories you have heard over the years about Christians who seemed strong in their faith, but then – seemingly out of the blue – either they lost their faith or alternatively they were caught in a

serious sin. When we don't pay attention to our hearts, disasters like this can happen.

Jesus says,

³³ Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

We read this off the back of last week's reading where we thought about biblical attitudes to money and possessions. One of the things I talked about last week was including the poor in our giving. Here Jesus specifically calls for that response from us.

This is not necessarily a call for all of us to sell all our possessions, for otherwise how would Jesus' ministry have been funded by the wealthy women that Luke mentions in chapter 8?

But it is an issue of our heart. 'For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'

In other words, where do our most fundamental desires lie? When we have time to ourselves and are not occupied with anything from work to looking after the grandchildren, what things does our heart alight upon? If we had limitless money and all our bills were taken care of, how would we spend that cash? If there were no obstacles, what would be our dream lifestyle?

Did anything come to mind as I asked those questions? Were we thinking of that dream cruise? Were we going to spend our money on yet more fancy toys? Were we going to fund the ultimate home improvement?

Or did Jesus and advancing his kingdom come into any of our minds?

What we set our hearts on is what we treasure, says Jesus.

Are the deepest desires of our hearts skewed off course? Do we need some spiritual heart surgery so that our number one passion is our love for Jesus and our service of his kingdom?

Perhaps when we were young Christians these were the things that commanded our energies. But over the years, our arteries have become clogged with the cares of this life and the attractions of Mammon.

How many of us need heart surgery? We may be doing a lot of good, right, and competent things in our lives, but like the church at Ephesus which received a letter in the book of Revelation, is it possible that we have lost our first love?

If our arteries have become clogged up, I offer these words from a song entitled 'Passion For Jesus' by an Irish singer named Brian Houston. May they become our prayer:

I'm calling out to You
There must be something more,
Some deeper place to find,
Some secret place to hide
Where I have not gone before.
Where my soul is satisfied,
And my sin is put to death,
And I can hear Your voice,
Your purpose is my choice,
As natural as a breath.
The love I knew before,
When You first touched my life,
I need You to restore,
I want You to revive.
Oh, place in my heart a passion for Jesus,
A hunger that seizes my passion for You.
My one desire, my greatest possession,
My only confession, my passion for You.¹

Secondly, *posture*.

Right now, we are waiting as a family for our son's A-Level results, but as many of you know, I never sat my A-Levels. About a month before the exams, I had a sudden onset of severe neck pain. The cause was never diagnosed at the time by the consultant rheumatologist, but years later when my wife was pregnant with our first child, our daughter, I was suffering from migraines and went to the GP about them.

"I'm pretty sure your migraines are caused by your neck problem," said the GP, and he advised me to book an appointment with an osteopath attached to the practice. After a number of treatments with him, he offered a diagnosis of my neck problem.

Posture. And it had two causes. One was that as a typical blue-eyed boy I am highly sensitive to bright light. As a result, I had developed a slightly stooped, round-shouldered posture as I tried to shield my eyes. This has not had a good effect on my neck.

The second was due to my left-handedness. My secondary school made all the pupils use fountain pens, and these are difficult for left-handers, since we push the pen from left to right across the paper and have to avoid putting our writing hand in the ink that is still drying. I was not taught (as I learned too late in later years) that the answer is to turn your paper forty-five degrees, so I developed what is called the 'hook' writing style.

Moreover, at Sixth Form we had chairs with desks hinged to them. You could rest your writing arm on them. Well – you could if you were right-handed. They didn't have any for left-handers. This exacerbated the bad posture of the hook writing style.

Putting all this together led to the bad posture that caused the pain which kept me from my A-Levels.

Jesus calls for us to adopt a certain (good!) posture as Christian disciples.

Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning,

he says in verse 35.

Have the posture of a servant. This is how to be ready for when he will appear again in glory.

Jehovah's Witnesses live in fear that if they are not actively doing God's work at the very moment of the Second Coming they will not receive their eternal reward. But what Jesus says is more subtle than that. 'Be dressed ready for action.' It's not about filling every second with frantic activity, but it is about having the right attitude, the right stance, the posture if you will.

Go back to the Commonwealth Games, and go to the athletics track or the swimming pool. See the sprinters on their blocks awaiting the starting gun or the swimmers on their pedestals awaiting the hooter that starts the race. These athletes are adopting the right posture for their race and are ready for action.

Jesus is calling us to be on our starting blocks, ready for the opportunity to serve.

After all, he says, when the Master returns, he will serve. To serve is to be like the Master. It is to be like Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, or ready to heal those in need who come across his path. Our posture is one of service because that is the posture of Jesus.

This raises a question about how we live our lives each day. Are we just going about our daily business, much like anybody else on Planet Earth, or do we begin each day on the starting blocks, ready to hear the starting gun that calls us to service?

Is it our daily prayer that we will take the opportunities to serve people in the name of Jesus when he brings such people across our path? Do we desire to have the same posture as Jesus?

If we do, then we don't need to worry about the return of Jesus catching us by surprise and worrying us. We will be ready. As the late David Watson put it,

For those who are ready, he will not come as a thief in the night
but as a friend in the day.²

So – what is our spiritual health like? There are many other areas to consider as well as what I have spoken about today. Is our heart healthy? Do we have a passion for God's kingdom and a heart for the poor?

And is our posture healthy? Are we ready and willing to serve as Jesus did?

If there were a spiritual equivalent of a medical, what would it say about us?

¹ Brian Houston, 'Passion For Jesus' from the album *Big Smile* Copyright © 2000 Kingsway's Thankyou Music

² Quoted by Ian Paul at <https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/how-do-we-live-in-trust-generosity-and-readiness-in-luke-12/>