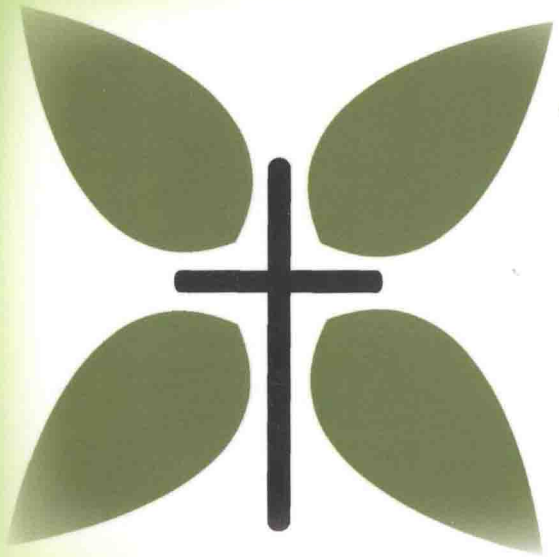


"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."
– PHILIPPIANS 4:13

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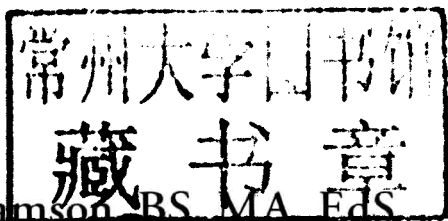
A CHRISTIAN GUIDE
FOR A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE



JIM WILLIAMSON, BS, MA, EDS

HEALTHY VESSELS

A Christian Guide for a Healthy Lifestyle



Jim Williamson, BS, MA, EdS

iUniverse, Inc.
Bloomington

Healthy Vessels

A Christian Guide for a Healthy Lifestyle

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I dedicate this book to my wife, Terri; my daughters, Jo Lynn and Julie; and my granddaughters, Megan, Madison, and Mackenzie.

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PART I:

GAINING PERSPECTIVE

Preface

Nearly eight years ago, I began to experience some deteriorating health conditions that I first diagnosed as “growing older.” I was upset that my blood pressure was higher and that a physician had recommended that I begin taking blood pressure medication. I had never had high blood pressure before, and I was bewildered about my present situation. I was also having continual pain in my left thumb. After I had X-rays taken, I was told that I had arthritis. When I received this news, my perception was that arthritis was a symptom of old age. Besides the high blood pressure and arthritis, I just did not feel healthy. Due to past knee injuries and surgeries, I had always been concerned that someday I would be a candidate for a knee replacement. Occasionally my knee would just “go out,” and this intensified my fears of a knee surgery, which I really dreaded thinking about. Like many people, I had frequent colds and experienced recurring allergy symptoms. My weight was higher than I believed it should be. I occasionally took antacid pills, and I would periodically experience a sore neck. My back would often be out of alignment, causing me pain. Things were not going well!

When I began reflecting on all of these undesirable symptoms, I did not want to accept that these physical symptoms were the result of getting older. I wanted to believe that my lifestyle was the problem because that was the only thing that I could possibly change. At minimum, I knew that my weight gain was connected to how I was eating. I thought that just maybe some of the other symptoms I was experiencing were connected to lifestyle choices. My only hope was that I might experience better health if I changed my present habits

because I knew that I could not change my age! Since I sincerely wanted to experience a new level of health, I had only one real option to impact my present health: taking a hard look at my lifestyle. I thought if I was willing to make some lifestyle changes, it just might impact my overall health.

Once I made the decision to pursue a plan of healthy eating and exercise, it was my intent to discover if my lifestyle changes could alleviate some of the symptoms that I was experiencing. And when I began researching positive health choices, I realized I was not making these healthy choices for myself. At the beginning, my focus was on losing weight, reducing my blood pressure, and strengthening my right knee in order to delay or eliminate the need for a knee replacement.

During the next twelve weeks, I was able to experience positive changes beyond my expectations. The high blood pressure disappeared; the acid reflux stopped; my right knee stopped “going out” on me; my allergies disappeared; and the arthritis symptoms in my left hand disappeared along with my lower back problems. I have been able to avoid any kind of illness for more than eight years. It would be difficult to convince me that these results have been a coincidence. I developed the Healthy Vessels program for the purpose of forwarding information to others so that they may also be able to regain their health.

This book was written in response to the obesity crisis in America, which threatens to financially bankrupt our national health care system. In addition to the financial peril, this crisis is responsible for much physical suffering and thousands of debilitating diseases and premature deaths.

It is of particular concern to me that so many Christians are active participants in the unhealthy life choices that contribute to this present crisis. Even though it is sometimes difficult to do, I believe that Christians have a responsibility to live by example. The Bible tells us clearly that we are not to follow the ways of the world, that we must take care of our bodies, and that we are to glorify God in our body and in our spirit. This is unfortunately not the standard being followed by many Christians. When we allow

ourselves to eat and drink in a manner that promotes disease and related health problems, as I did, the standard that is exemplified in the Bible is compromised. In the area of health and lifestyle choices, statistics reveal that Christians practice the same unhealthy habits that the world does, and Christians are also experiencing the negative consequences of their unhealthy choices.

It concerns me that many Christians are more than eager to discuss certain habits that abuse our bodies without addressing diet and exercise deficiencies. Issues such as the evils of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs are discussed freely in many Christian churches; however, the abuse of food—and the resulting health problems—are often not discussed at all. *I believe that abuse is abuse, regardless of the source.* The irony is that most of the prayer requests each week in church are health-related. For a three-month period of time, I recorded data regarding the prayer requests that were made each week in our church. I documented that each week between 80 and 90 percent of all prayer requests in our church were health-related. I still document the prayer requests periodically, and this statistic still holds true.

Yet solutions and practices intended to avoid or reduce one's risk of developing certain health problems are almost never discussed. This silence occurs at the same time that some health professionals believe up to 85 percent of all debilitating diseases are caused by lifestyle choices. Millions of Americans are living unhealthy lifestyles, and many of these people are Christians. Since at least two-thirds of all Americans are practicing habits detrimental to their health, it seems that this is a relevant subject area to address. It is like the elephant in the room!

This book is intended to provide some direction for both the secular world and Christians. My hope is that in the midst of our present health crisis in America, Christians will assume greater responsibility for their health and choose to set a better example. Adopting more self-control and discipline with respect to our health is consistent with Christian principles. These two qualities are always discussed positively in the Bible. The reality that more than two-thirds of all adults in this country are either overweight or obese is evidence that both self-control and discipline have been

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compromised by many people. Being overweight is a significant risk factor for developing debilitating diseases. Getting control of this visible and measurable health risk factor is a good starting point to begin the journey of establishing higher health standards. My experience is that this can be done. The Healthy Vessels program can show you how to make positive lifestyle changes!

Introduction

Except for an emergency surgery at birth because I was unable to digest food properly, I experienced pretty good health throughout most of my young life. In high school, I was the school record holder in the mile run and was the district champion in the half-mile run. I also made claim to the unofficial national high school record in the fifty-mile run. I lettered in cross country during college and placed in an AAU marathon race (26.2 miles).

However, like many adults, I failed to keep a firm grip on my health. In my early twenties, I participated in adult athletic teams and tore the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) in my right knee during a basketball game. Two knee operations would follow during the next decade. I developed poor eating and drinking habits like those that are so prevalent in our culture. My body weight ballooned to an unhealthy 232 pounds. Though in high school I had been a six-foot-three-inch distance runner weighing in at 147 pounds, I had since become eighty-five pounds heavier. For the next three decades my body weight drifted between 210 and 230 pounds. Except for my knee problems, I seldom had any need to go to a doctor for illness during that time. However, as I was approaching sixty, I had one very physically trying year. During that one year, I made a total of sixty-six visits to either a doctor or a hospital. This was a radical change for me, and I believe this number of medical visits in one year is pretty extravagant for most people. It was a troublesome year, and I was beginning to experience a sense of desperation. I began to wonder if this was just a part of growing older. I wasn't sure.