

Spiritual Energy!

For the past eight years or so, I have suffered from a disease, which has three names!

The British call it *Myalgic Encephalomyelitis* (ME). Our southern neighbours in the US call it *Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction Syndrome* (CFIDS). Here in Canada we call it *Chronic Fatigue Syndrome* (CFS).

The Canadian name for this disease, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, is something of a misnomer. The majority of the population has never had it, doesn't appreciate the range and magnitude of its symptoms, and can often tend to think, "Fatigue? So what? I'm always tired too!" Some doctors even doubt that CFS, which has some similarities to Fibromyalgia, is a unique disease, despite the fact that it was declared as such by Atlanta's Disease Control Center way back in 1974.

When CFS first hit me, I didn't know what the problem was. For a while, the variety of frequently changing and recurring symptoms caused me almost to doubt my own sanity. After a month I was so weary that I could no longer work. I was no more use at home than I was at my job. My share of house and garden maintenance were out of the question. Family activities fared no better. I didn't even have the strength for a game of cards.

After being off work for three and a half months, my benefits ran out and I had no choice but to return to my job. The specialist I was seeing at the time told me that this was probably the best thing I could do. No matter how dreadfully tired I was, it was good for me to get active and get back to work!

Please don't misunderstand. It is not the purpose of this article to get you to feel sorry for me!

A few months ago at Sabbath services, we listened to a taped sermon by our late pastor general, Herbert W. Armstrong, which he recorded when he was ninety years old and was suffering from what we might think of as "the natural version of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome" that is often brought on by old age. Yet despite his advanced age, Mr. Armstrong was filled with energy. In his sermon, he admitted that many a morning he didn't feel like getting out of bed. But he knew that God had given him a work to do and he had to get up and do it!

How old are you? I don't mind admitting that I've just turned forty-eight... a little over half Mr. Armstrong's age when he died. Many of my work-mates around my age are even now talking of early retirement. Did you ever hear Mr. Armstrong speak of his plans for retirement? Never! He continued doing his part in God's Work until the day he died. Again, please don't misunderstand me. I am not criticizing those who have retired or who are planning to retire from their physical jobs. Rather, the purpose of this article is to encourage you to follow Herbert Armstrong's example, to obtain some of his energy, and to get back to doing God's Work!

Where did Mr. Armstrong get his incredible energy? What was the source? I think you know the answer to this question as well as I do.

When I think of the word "energy" I think of the TV commercial for Ever-Ready Energizer Batteries and I think of the toy rabbit banging on his drum! But, of course, spiritual energy does not come from a battery, from a generator, or from any other physical power source. Herbert Armstrong asked God for the energy he needed, and God gladly gave it to him. He gave the same gift to the apostle Paul:

Provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel. I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me. (Colossians 1:23-29 NRSV)

Will God do the same for you and me? If we ask Him for it, will He inspire within us this same energy that He inspired within Mr. Armstrong and the apostle Paul? You bet He will!

The Greek word Paul uses for "energy" in verse 29 is "energeia." Here is what the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says about this word:

***Energeia*: from *energes* = active. AV: working, effectual working, operation, strong, efficiency. In the NT used only of superhuman power**

There are seven other New Testament scriptures where this word "energeia" is used. Let us take a look at them and see what we can learn:

And what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working [*energeia*] of His mighty power (Ephesians 1:19)

Of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working [*energeia*] of His power. (Ephesians 3:7)

These two verses show that Paul did not claim that the energy he had to do God's Work was of himself. He attributed its origin to the power of God.

From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working [*energeia*] by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:16)

The whole church of God, every joint and member of the Body of Jesus Christ, can be and should be empowered by this supernatural energy. It will cause the church to grow. Not necessarily in numbers, although that would, of course, be desirable, but certainly it will cause the church to grow spiritually... spiritually bigger and stronger, like a muscle that is being regularly exercised.

Who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working [*energeia*] by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. (Philippians 3:21)

This Godly energy can, in this life, make something supernatural and super-powerful out of a group of tired, weak human beings and, at the return of Jesus Christ when we achieve total unity with Him and His Father, will transform our individual, temporary, imperfect, incomplete human frames into perfect, glorious spirit bodies.

Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working [*energeia*] of God, who raised Him from the dead. (Colossians 2:12)

When we rose from the water at the time of our baptism, God began to give us His faith and the energizing power of His Holy Spirit.

Satan's counterfeit energy

But we must be careful. As usual, Satan has a counterfeit for God's right kind of spiritual energy. The verses containing the remaining instances of this word "energeia" were written to warn us of Satan's energy and power:

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working [*energeia*... RSV: activity] of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong [*energeia*] delusion, that they should believe the lie. (II Thessalonians 2:9-11)

We can be sure that Satan too has spiritual energy. He is very active right now transmitting his spiritual energy to the world. God has allowed a strong delusion to fall upon those who have refused to continue in the love of His Truth. Many of those who have not rejected His way of life outright have been deceived and deluded into believing false doctrine.

Although most of God's people were previously very active within His work, many have been stunned into inaction as a result of the almost unbelievable events of the years since Mr. Armstrong's death. God does not want us to retire from doing His work. Some of you have retired from your physical jobs and that, of course, is fine. But God wants us to keep doing His work as long as we are physically able:

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. (Romans 13:11-14)

If we put this scripture together with Jesus' advice in John 9:4, God seems to be warning us that the time of our human, Christian lives is like a day in between two nights. The first night – our lives before God called us, in which we slept after having partaken of some of its evil activities – is over for us. The day is here. The time for sleep is over. The time for righteous action and doing our part in God's work is here.

Jesus also commands us to do His Father's work during this "day", this window of opportunity because, in John 9:4, He warns us of an impending second night:

We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. (John 9:4 RSV)

Has this "second night," in which we will not be able to participate in God's work, come upon the church yet? Not that I know of! I cannot honestly say that I have yet heard this on good authority... on God's authority. Perhaps it is late in the day but it is not too late for us to get back to work!

It has been suggested that the great physical work of preaching the gospel is now over and that God, who started opening the doors all those years ago, is now closing them. This might be true but we don't know it for sure. God will clearly reveal it to us when the time comes. It is the lazy man's way to use speculation as an excuse for not working. We need to err on the safe side and to continue to do all we can to feed God's flock and to preach the good news of His Kingdom to the world.

Was Paul a sports "jock"?

It was the apostle Paul who wrote all of the previously-quoted eight scriptures containing the word "energeia." Paul wrote lots more about spiritual energy, and often compared this gift to various physical sports competitions. We will come to some of these examples shortly, but first let me ask you a question: In making so many references along this line of analogy, was Paul a physical-fitness freak or a sports jock? Let Paul answer for himself:

Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one--I am talking like a madman--with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. (II Corinthians 11:23-28 RSV)

And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. (II Corinthians 12:7 RSV)

No. Paul was no sports jock. His body had been wrecked by frequent scourging and other types of mistreatment. Although we have always thought that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" to be just a figure of speech representing some other physical trial, we should not discount the possibility that it may well have been a literal thorn left in from one of his many scourgings!

I mention this for the following reasons: Physical fitness and energy is all very well and good. God likes us to keep the physical bodies He has given us – these temples of His Spirit (I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19) – in as good a shape as possible. But He is much more interested in our spiritual health, fitness and energy. We should keep this in mind as we go through these sports-related scriptures:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. (I Corinthians 9:24-27 RSV)

Mark Foreman, one of my work-mates, is a marathon runner. You too probably know at least one of these incredible human dynamos who love to run these 26 kilometre races. Despite the fact that he is now in his early fifties, Mark keeps his body in virtually perfect physical shape... solid muscle and not an ounce of fat. During the marathon season, he runs long distances every day to keep his body in tip-top shape for the races. Why does he do it? Does he do it for the glory of wearing the fancy T-shirt that pronounces that he ran in the "such-and-such" marathon in 1999? No. You can pick one of those up for 50 cents at the Sally-Ann on Quadra Street! He does it to improve on his personal best time and position. The race against the other runners is secondary. He is primarily competing against himself.

As we have recently discovered, our Christian race is longer than we previously expected. We have found that it is more like a marathon than a 100-metre dash. But, unlike most sports events, there is more than one prize. In fact there is a prize for every one who crosses the finish line. We don't have to compete against our brethren, neither locally nor those in other church of God congregations around the world. Like the marathon runners, we ourselves (with more than a little help from Satan the Devil) are really our own competition. But to get to the finish line to receive our prizes, as Paul reminds us, we must run the race! And to be able to run the race we must possess that spiritual energy that only God can give us.

Paul mentions exercise in the above scripture. Physical exercise, in addition to the other laws of radiant health (remember those?) is a major key to success in a marathon. Does it have a spiritual parallel? Will God give us His spiritual energy without any effort being expended by us? Or is there such a thing as spiritual exercise? Yes, there is.

Permit me to briefly mention another form of energy at this point: electrical energy. It is interesting to note that a two-way path is required for the transmission of electrical energy. Regular prayer and Bible study constitute our two-way path from God for the transmission of His spiritual energy to us. Other important spiritual exercises include the proper kind of meditation (on the subjects we have recently studied or heard in sermons and sermonettes), regular fellowship with our fellow "marathon runners," and occasional fasting. Together, these spiritual exercises may be considered the conduit by which God will transmit His energy to us.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. (Hebrews 12:1-3 RSV)

In the previous chapter, the author of the book of Hebrews had written out a list of Christian "sports heroes" – incredible examples of men and women who, despite some awful hurdles, had run the Christian race and won, having been empowered by the energy of God's Holy Spirit. Here, he encourages his brothers and sisters to follow their examples and, of course, that of their "Coach and Team Leader," Jesus Christ. He urges us not to give up but to cast off every energy-sapping weight and hindrance that is not needed for the completion of the race. What are the "weights" that are sapping your spiritual energy?

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:7-8 RSV)

Here, as the end of his life approached, Paul wrote to his friend Timothy that the marathon, for him, was over. He had started the race in a somewhat unconventional manner but, with the training of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, he had maintained his spiritual energy level until the end and he had completed it. Although we should live our lives to the full and not be wishing them away, there should be something inside of us that yearns for the day when we too can say to our brethren, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race." The prize-giving ceremony is yet to come. Hopefully, soon to come! We should remember what Herbert Armstrong used to tell us about the end of the story – the end of the race? We win!

What can we do?

But what can we do? We're such tiny, scattered groups of God's people. Is it feasible for us to have a meaningful part in God's end-time work?

Yes. It *is* feasible. Think of how much God did with so little back in Mr. Armstrong's early years of preaching the gospel from Oregon. Think of the great advances in technology since then – technologies that we have access to at low cost. There are lots of members of God's true church who are right now busy doing work that belies their numbers. Comparatively small church groups are putting out good quality magazines, booklets and tapes – yes and even telecasts! Others are doing God's work by the relatively new, simple and inexpensive medium of the Internet. There is no need for us to work in competition with other sections of the church of God. Rather, we should complement each other.

Let us not forget, either, that it is not just the outgoing work of preaching the gospel to the world that needs to be done. We also must be participating in the feeding of the flock – serving and strengthening our local brethren. The motto of the Church of the Great God is "Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God."

This morning, as I was out for my morning walk, I was accosted on a quiet, suburban street in Liverpool, England, by a pair of zealous Jehovah's Witnesses who – as is usual – honoured me with a brief chat and gave me copies of their *Watchtower* and *Awake* magazines. Although we may disagree with their methods and those of the Mormons, we must grant that members of both of these groups possess a great zeal to be involved in their respective works, and we might emulate this example from them.

What can *you* do? Yes, *you* personally. God does not want you to go from house to house trying to talk unwilling people to repent and to become members of His church (Luke 10:7). But there are lots of things you can do to get active and use the spiritual energy God has given you.

You can get involved in the activities of your local congregation or group. In doing this you should try to match your involvement with your interests. I'm sure you can think of other ideas, but here are just a few examples:

- Help initiate and organize a social, a seniors' dinner or a youth activity,
- Pray for and write cards to our sick, lonely and bereaved brethren around the world,
- Visit and assist the shut-ins,
- Perform special music,
- Start a children's or youth choir,
- Arrive at Sabbath services half an hour earlier and help with the set-up,
- Help with tape or literature copying or distribution,
- Help with sermon transcriptions,
- Help with holy day activities,
- Start a home-page for your local congregation.

Have we been suffering from spiritual Chronic Fatigue Syndrome? Let us go to the One who can heal us. Let us go to the One who can give us the shot of spiritual energy that we all need.

Let's all wake up and let's get back to work!

John Plunkett

Building Bridges, The Church of God Canada

Qualicum Beach, British Columbia, Canada