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## Overcoming Physical Challenges

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When I was young, I really didn't think there was anything different about me. Being physically challenged (I hate the word "disabled") from birth didn't have any effect on me, not one bit. I still played Baseball with the other children, played Kickball, Dodgeball, and even one game we invented ourselves, a cross between Dodgeball and Volleyball which we affectionately named "Nuke 'Em Ball". Perhaps that was the built-in attitude that God wanted me to have, to show me that the fact that I had a physical challenge didn't mean that I was limited in any way from accomplishing whatever I had purposed in my heart to do. As I became older however, and started encountering outside resistance from other people such as my grade-school teachers, I started to lose that innocent mental image of myself that had eased my early childhood years.

The teachers especially were very vocal in pointing out that I was "different" than the other children in the school. This was ironic because it was always my belief that a teacher should nurture a student and show them that they really can accomplish their dreams, but alas this was not the case with my school teachers. They went seemingly out of their way to keep me on the side-lines whenever the rest of the class participated in any kind of physical activity or sport; P.E. was a non-existent class for me... Not because I wanted it to be – I have always enjoyed physical activity – but because they didn't believe I was capable of participating, and so they refused to even allow me to try. Whenever the class has a physical activity or sport, I would always be given the task of sitting on the sidelines being a referee or score-keeper.

Over time, the resistance from my teachers and then from my classmates, who treated me differently after seeing how the teachers isolated me from sports, began to affect the attitude I had of myself and my assessment of my own abilities. I began to simply not participate in physical activities because I no longer believed I could accomplish them. I began to gain weight, and become lazy. A far cry from the healthy energetic child I once was. This lasted for all of my teen years, except at church where I was still treated relatively normally, I would have regular sparring matches with my friend Danny between classes in Sunday school and on Wednesday night. However I never thought much of it and still had a generally low opinion of myself.

When I turned twenty, I still had a burning desire for the martial arts, but I had become fat and lazy due to my unwillingness to try anything because of my low self-esteem. Then one day I had an epiphany... The only thing that really changed was the way I viewed myself. I am still the same person who was able to participate in all those physical activities and sports when I was a young child. So I began training again. I started eating

right, exercising everyday and practicing martial arts faithfully. I dropped over 40 pounds in three months, and now today I am in the best physical shape I have ever been in.

### **Don't fear the challenge**

The point I am trying to make is that physical challenges are nothing more than that, challenges to be overcome. They are not impassable walls that can never be climbed *unless your own mind and perceptions make them into that!* Just as with me, my own perceptions crippled me for close to ten years, and they crippled me far beyond what my physical challenge ever had. The moment I realized that it was actually my own perceptions causing the real problem, I was immediately able to take steps to correct it, and it is no different with anyone else.

You can rise above your physical challenges; all you have to do is realize that they are not insurmountable, and then work to correct them. Perseverance is the key. Find the desire that God has placed in your heart, for me it is martial arts, for you it may be painting, or baseball, or wrestling.... but whatever it is, pursue it with all your being and know that what the Lord has called you to do, He will enable you to succeed in.

### **Drop the baggage**

Also, please do not pay any attention if others ridicule you or tell you that you can not do what you are called to do. I was told by many early on that I would never succeed. I was called such things as: “freak”, “mutant”, “a waste of flesh”, “useless”, “a burden”, “a liability”, and plenty of other things, and in my darker years I would have believed those lies about me. However I learned to not give any opportunity to allow those words to affect me. If you take and hold onto what someone else says about you, it will start to have a power over you, especially if it is negative. It is vitally important that you understand, if someone else says something hurtful to you, it carries no real weight unless you give it the weight by holding on to what they have said. You must let hurtful words and negative comments go if you are to truly succeed. Holding on to hurtful things – even if they were said by a friend or relative – is like carrying extra baggage that will weigh you down and stop you from reaching your full potential. You must forgive the person, and then you will be free to reach your goals.

I urge you to rise to the challenges in your life, don't allow them to rule you another day. Be strong, be determined, and be an overcomer!

James