



Stephanie Brown: Linking Physical Fitness & Faith

What was your church experience like before you came to BUMC?

My upbringing and church background is somewhat irreverent. A child of divorce, I spent the school year with my mother and the summer and vacations with my father. My mother attended, and took me to, a Christian Science church when I was young. My step-mother, who has been married to my dad since I was 5 years old, took me to a Presbyterian Church when I was with them. I went to live with them full-time when I was in high school and began regularly attending youth group and was a member of the youth handbell choir for 4 years. I was baptized in the Presbyterian church when I was 16 years old. After we got married, my husband Lloyd and I attended a Presbyterian church in Phoenix, AZ, where our son Jake was baptized. After leaving Arizona, we attended First United Methodist Church in Olympia, WA and also became involved in *Acts 29* - a network of church-planting churches. We were blessed to be involved in a number of church planting adventures before we came to BUMC in 2011.

What are some ways that you practice your faith?

While I do attend church on Sundays, observe a liturgical calendar and participate in the occasional bible study, I try to live my everyday life in such a way that I am applying my faith to every situation and circumstance. I read a book called [The Irresistible Revolution](#) by Shane Claiborne several years ago and it changed my thinking forever. He describes how many of us are caught between being "an unbelieving activist and an inactive believer". I am continually challenged to find the gospel in everyday life.

Tell us about your interest in physical fitness and how it is shaped by your faith life.

I have always enjoyed physical fitness and have been active in different types of exercise programs, even teaching Jazzercise in the mid-90's. About 4 years ago, I became involved in a new fitness company that had a different feeling and mission than any other I'd known -- *Freedom Group Exercise*. It is a welcoming company whose mission is to bring UNITY through fitness and it was the most joyful workout experience I had ever had. I immediately signed up to become certified to teach. In the spirit of the *Irresistible Revolution*, I began to think of myself as a "fitness missionary," dedicated to lifting people up and bringing joy and empowerment to people through group exercise.

What do you want people to know about the link between physical health and spiritual health?

I have suffered from anxiety and depression on and off throughout my life. At the time I discovered *Freedom Group Exercise*, I was at a very low point. My doctor would tell me over and over that exercise was the best medicine, but when you are in a dark place, the hardest thing to do is get yourself up and walk into a gym. Finding something that brought me true joy was life changing. The exercise was fun, but the people were also amazing. Having a community to support you and hold you accountable is powerful and can be life changing. But there's also something to just giving yourself an hour every day to take care of yourself - to listen to and move to music. I find it healing. And, it has healed me in many ways. For me, working out is not just about getting fit. It's about helping others to strengthen their physical, mental, and spiritual selves. When we discover our physical "outside" strength, it translates to being stronger on the inside. When we are stronger on the inside, we can take that out into the world and use it for good - in our own lives, local communities, and around the world.

What are some of the most meaningful ways you've been involved at BUMC?

I've been involved in the music and women's ministry over the years. One of my favorite memories was attending the Women's Retreat a few years ago where I met and grew close to several amazing women. I also enjoyed organizing monthly dinners for the youth group & Common Ground for several years. Now that my son has graduated, I'll be looking for different ways to contribute. BUMC's relationship with *Interfaith Works* has led me to explore offering free fitness classes to the residents at the Women's Center. I'm looking forward to seeing what God has for me there.

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