

Sept. 16, 2018

# Exorcizing exercise

I should have seen it coming. Perhaps I did and chose to ignore it. Perhaps my occasional Taco Bell lunches were so tasty that reality had been hiding behind a couple of bean burritos and a side of nachos.

As I looked into the mirror the other day, I realized that somehow, somewhere along the line, I had begun to acquire the shape of a Hefty bag filled with mashed potatoes.

I thought back to high school when I was into weight training. During the summer after my ninth grade, I bench pressed every morning, so that by the time I entered high school that fall, I was feeling pretty good about myself. It did nothing to boost my confidence. I was still deeply insecure, still scared of my own shadow. And girls were still as mysterious as Bigfoot, only better looking.

Cut to some 40 years later.

Looking in the mirror on that recent day, I decided that I wasn't good enough. I wanted to pack on a few muscles, replacing the ones that had since dissolved away thanks to a comfortable couch and years of quality television. I'd make myself the stud muffin I used to think I was! *Except with a grey beard, wrinkles, poor eyesight and diminishing hearing. Oh — and I need to add (without any urging from my wife): a devotion to one woman who happens to be my spouse.*

Otherwise, total stud muffin.

So, I'm in a thrift store the other day and I see one of those hand exerciser things. You know the ones: with the two handles that you squeeze and squeeze and squeeze to ultimately give you a powerful grip and, if you keep it up, Popeye forearms. *Maybe I'd even get an anchor tattoo on my arm!*

"It's not much, but it's a start," I thought to myself (since it's hard to think to anyone else). I took it up to my office. Won't everyone be impressed?

"Oh, me? (*squeeze, squeeze*) I'm just havin' myself a little work-out between writin' articles (*squeeze, squeeze*). Ain't nothin' (*squeeze, squeeze*)."

And they'd walk out in total and complete awe, wishing they had a hand exerciser thing like Dave.

I started with my right hand: "Squeeze, squeeze, squeeze, squeeze, squeeze."

It was working! My forearm felt tight. I immediately felt stronger!

Then my left hand: "Squeeze, squeeze, squeeze, squeeze, squeeze."

Suddenly I had a desire to go out for sports! Train for a marathon! Age is nothing but a number! I was becoming that young stud again! Get out the disco ball! It's time to party like it's 1999!

The next morning (and this is all true), I felt an odd twinge in my back. It seemed to radiate from my left arm.

As the day went on, it grew from a manageably dull pain to a pain like one would feel when slowly being turned on a spit over an open flame.

I asked my wife if she had accidentally placed red hot shards of metal on my hand in the night. She thought for a minute and said, "No, I don't think so. Why?"

Sunday night was a night of intense misery interrupted by moments of severe agony. By Monday morning, Labor Day, my hand had swollen to the size of a small automobile—one of those zippy foreign imports. All the doctors' offices were closed, so my only recourse was the emergency room.

As I waited the brief eternity for my wife to get ready, I thought I'd pick up one of the young cats in the back yard. *A little lovin' comfort, that's the ticket.* Anything to get my mind off the pain. When I went to set the cat down, he dug his hypodermic needle claws into my skin on my bad arm, leaving little dots of blood.

*I'll miss that cat.*

We arrived at the emergency room where the staff briefly made me forget about the pain by handing me my co-pay bill of \$100.

"Squeeze my finger," the doctor ordered moments later.

"Are you gonna fa--"

"I'm testing your strength," he said with a roll of his eyes.

I pressed with my thumb and index finger with all my might until I felt a twinge of pain. Not enough pressure to catch a butterfly by the wing at that point.

"Press against my finger with your pinky," he said. *No problem! Didn't hurt a bit! I'm tougher than I thought!*

"Now press with your ring finger." *Easy! Ha! I'm Mr. Tough Guy after all!*

"Now press with your index finger."

*"Yii! Owie, owie, owie, owie, owie!"*

"You've got tendonitis," he said matter-of-factly as he handed me a kleenex to dry my tears. He gave me a brace, a prescription, and told me not to type with my left hand for three or four days.

It wasn't the first time I had allowed ego to guide my actions resulting in serious pain (remember the great mole removal of 2017?), and probably won't be the last.

So, here I sit, typing with one hand, twinges of pain in my other—oh, and I'm minus \$100 (and this before getting my actual bill).

I have to chuckle in spite of myself. God is such a great teacher. I didn't want to improve the *temple* so that it better serves the Lord, I wanted to improve as to better serve my ego. And filling up on ego doesn't leave much room for God.