

## 6 ESSENTIALS FOR YOUR BODY - PreWeek

### Monday, April 19

Good morning. This week is a preparation week for our new study. We'll spend six weeks looking at six essential aspects of life in our human bodies. This is a robust study written by one of our pastors, James Drake. There will be community groups, worship services, and also a 40-day challenge to help us develop healthy patterns of life in the body. Our podcast time will lead us along a devotional track as we are learning more about the way God made us.

Here's our scripture text for today:

Genesis 2:4-7

*<sup>4</sup> This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. <sup>5</sup> Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth<sup>[a]</sup> and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, <sup>6</sup> but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. <sup>7</sup> Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*

This is how the Book of Genesis describes God's creation of the first human being. Chapter one tells us that God created human beings in his own image, bearing his likeness. There we are given the 30,000 foot view of God's work. But here the camera zooms in to show us what God did. First, he takes the dust of the earth, the common elements that the earth is made of. This means we are made of the same stuff that everything else on earth is made of. Perhaps, you have heard that about 99% of our bodies are made up of six elements: oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium, and phosphorus. Depending on your weight, the value of those elements at today's prices would be about \$500. Again, these are common elements found in our world. Much smaller amounts of other elements are also found in our bodies. We really are earthy. But here is the amazing thing. God animated the matter he used to create us. He breathed his breath upon us and made us into living beings. I remember seeing our first child born. Sandy did an amazing job delivering a little girl that God formed in her womb. We named her Rachel. When she was born, she didn't breathe right away on her own. The doctor helped her to take her first breath, but God is the one that made her capable of taking that breath. All of the elements required for a human being were there, and now there was also a living, breathing human being. That little baby wasn't so little. She weighed over ten pounds. The doctor saw Rachel's size and said, "She's a keeper." Now, consider the glory of our bodies. Not only is there the wonder of our physical makeup, the intricate design that God gave us. We are living, breathing and able to be active in God's world. You could say that we have both hardware and software. That is something you cannot put a price tag on. God gave each of us extraordinary capabilities and capacities, mental, spiritual, and physical. All of these abilities are tied to the use of our bodies. They can only happen in a body and because we have a body. Notice how God animated us. He breathed upon us. Why did he choose to give us life in this way? The word for breath or wind in scripture is the same word used for Spirit. He used his Spirit to give us life so that we might bear his image and also have spiritual capacities. He made us for a relationship with himself. Now, here is a living soul, a person made of the common elements of the earth, living with a body, made to reflect God's glory and to enjoy him forever. That's you. Now the idea today is to marvel in how God made you and the glory of the bodily life God has given to you.

Let's pray:

Almighty God, your glory reached to the heavens, your glory fills the earth. Thank you for making us, for giving us life. Use this time, we pray, in the weeks ahead, to give us a clearer vision of You and your glory. Help us to see that the lives we live, we live in these bodies you have given to us. Give us a deep joy in you and your goodness. For we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

### Tuesday, April 20

Beginning this Sunday, we will be offering community groups. Some will be virtual groups, some in-person and some will be hybrid groups. These groups will meet each week for six weeks to discuss what we are learning in our worship services.

Our scripture today comes from the book of Genesis:  
Genesis 1:27-31

*27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." 29 Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so. 31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.*

We have our work cut out for us in this study. Why? Often people of faith disregard the body, thinking that it is not important. We think of our life with God as spiritual, and not bodily. The thought is that the physical world is somehow lesser, corrupt. In the ancient world a group of people called Gnostics believed that the physical world was created by a lesser deity. This is why it was full of strife and corruptible. Therefore, God was not to be found in the physical world at all, but in ascending to higher degrees of knowledge. Only then could God be found and known. But in the words of creation, we find that God made the physical world. It reflects his nature and his great love. Therefore, God can be found and known in the physical world. Indeed, seven times he pronounced his creation good. Therefore, the physical world is not a distraction from God. Of course, the opposite is true. Everything we do, we do in this physical world, and we do with our bodies. Our life in God is lived in the body. Perhaps, you heard the story of what happened to Jean-Dominique Bauby. At one time, he edited the French magazine, *Elle*. But in 1995, he had a massive stroke leaving him almost completely disabled. Actually, he could only blink with his left eyelid. He could not move any other part of his body. He was locked in. This is very difficult to imagine. Of course, he could use his brain, and during the months before his death, he managed to write a book using only his eyelid to blink and signal letters and words. As I read Bauby's story, I realized just how deeply our lives are tied to our bodies. Yes, we may feel the limitations of our bodies, but as we will learn in the weeks ahead, they are glorious gifts of God. Indeed, as we will see, God came into our world with a body just like our own. This is the most shocking teaching of our faith that we will also look at in the days ahead. Suffice it to say today just what God said when he made our bodies. It was very good. What if during these days we praised God for our bodies? Rather than finding and focusing on the imperfections, what if we rejoiced in the good gift God has given to us?

Let's pray:

Abba Father, I can easily find things wrong with my body, but I refuse to do that today. Instead, I thank you for my eyelids that can move, and my eyes as well. Help me to marvel at the glory of your creation, and to give thanks to you. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

### **Wednesday, April 21**

Good morning. Our text today comes from John chapter 1:1-4:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.*

It is said that the great artist painter, Pablo Picasso, was traveling through a train station when he was accosted by someone that recognized him. This man complained about Picasso's art saying that the women he painted looked nothing like real women. Then the man pulled from his pocket a photograph of his wife. He said, "Here is my wife. Why can you not paint like this?" Picasso looked at the photo and said to the man, "so your wife is two dimensional? If so, she is very thin. I have never seen a woman that thin." It was a funny moment for sure. But he was making a good point. Really, how can you do a perfect representation of anyone. Now, for our study today, we should know that no one can make a representation of God. There was no one on earth with a higher understanding of God than the Jewish people. God revealed himself to them, holy and just. He is infinite in his being. He is wholly other, different from we human beings. He is Spirit.

The highest heavens cannot contain him. His ways are not our ways, and his thoughts are higher than our own. We really cannot know God unless he reveals himself to us. There is no other way. That is what John is telling us about the Word, the one called Jesus. He is God of very God, light of very light. He has always been with God, and everything in our world was made by him and for him. We are just now trying to climb up the mountain of the knowledge of God and yet we have not even arrived at the foothills. We are over our heads before we even realize it. At one point in his letter to the church in Rome, Paul is beyond himself in trying to understand the Lord and his ways. He says:

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!<sup>34</sup> “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?”<sup>35</sup> “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?”<sup>36</sup> For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen. -Romans 11:33-36*

The fullness of the knowledge is unreachable for us. But here is what John goes on to say about Jesus:

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. -John 1:14.*

Yes, God became a human being, with a body just as you have. Now, just think about what this means for us and for our bodies. The life of God can and did come to live in flesh and blood. Our bodies are not lesser or unimportant in God's plan. God fulfills his plan of salvation in a body, again as you have. So, yes, our bodies are glorious, not evil or somehow something less. They are a gift of God to us, and they become the places where the life of God in Christ takes form in your life, in your story and in our world. Your body is the street address for your life with God, your spiritual life and all that you do. Caring for your body is not some side issue. To protect and care for your body means guarding the mission God has given to you, so that you can fully live the life God has called you to live. You know, I love to stop and think about this. The living God had fingers and hands as you do, feet and legs to carry his body. He became a living, breathing human being as you are now, so that you might see the life you live for him as a life you live in your body as well.

Let's pray:

Lord God, we marvel at your glory and are overwhelmed by your majesty. Help us to remember that the Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. Help us to see that you intend for your word, your truth, to take on life in our lives as well. As we go through the day today, remind us of your faithful plan to bring life to our bodies. For we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

### **Thursday, April 22**

In 1977, a scientist named Gunther von Hagen came up with a process whereby he could preserve human bodies for study. He called his process plastination. He replaces the parts of the body that are soft tissue with a polymer that allows the body to be dissected down to some of the smallest details. The results of this process are stunning, allowing the body to be preserved and studied by scientists and lay people alike. Over 6,000 people have granted Von Hagen the right to do this with their bodies. Some years back, many of his specimen were made into an exhibit called Body Worlds. His work is partially science and partially art, revealing the amazing complexity and intricacy of our bodies. In the exhibit, he poses the cadavers playing chess, providing a view into each participant's brain, or playing tennis where you can see the complexity of the muscles involved in serving the tennis ball. It is an amazing sight to behold. It is both captivating and terrifying, amazing and macabre.

Now, here is our scripture passage for today:

Psalm 139:13-16

<sup>13</sup> *For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.*

<sup>14</sup> *I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know*

*that full well. <sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. <sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed body;*

These are the words of David, the man God anointed to be king over his people. David is amazed at the complexity of his body. He uses the metaphor for knitting which, during his day and even today, requires a complex weaving together of strands of yarn to make beautiful and useful patterns. This knitting or weaving is what God did when he formed us in our mothers' wombs. We think that God created the first human beings and then stepped away for nature to take its course. But, no, God is intimately involved, engaged in the whole process of forming each person. The result is amazing. David says we were fearfully and wonderfully made. Of course, if God gives such intention and engagement in the forming of each one of us, how are we to view human beings and human bodies? They are not the masterpiece of a scientist that has been able to turn bodies into plastic. No, they are flesh and blood, human beings full of life and breath. Of course, God's involvement and the sacred nature of each person would make us wonder if it is good to display human beings as the scientist does. We think we can break things down into their smallest component parts and then somehow know what life is. We can't. Among most ancient peoples it was forbidden to do such with a human body because the body was considered precious and should be therefore protected. We are not just an assembling of cells and structures. We are living souls. Yes, we have bodies and our lives are lived in these bodies, but we are alive, living and active. We are a complete package. You can understand why David says, "Wow!" You can see why he says this is all too wonderful to take in. Yes, that is your body. Now, of course, we don't worship our bodies, but their glory points us to the one that made us, the only one worthy of our worship. Isn't it amazing to know that God designed each of us just as he wanted us to be? That God was guiding and supervising the entire project of your formation, the development of you? Finally, David says that the Lord saw his unformed body. Yes, even before a body was developing in his mother's womb, the Lord was present and active in his plan to make David. This is the care God gives to each of us and our design.

Let's pray together:

Lord God, our bodies show forth your glory, revealing your interest in us and your mighty power. Remind us today of what care you invested into making us as we are. Help us to receive our own bodies as a gift from your hand. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

### **Friday, April 23**

I guess I am old school, but during this year of COVID-19, my doctor tried to arrange to conduct my annual physical exam via Zoom. Now, the whole idea of that seemed foreign to me. Usually, my doctor puts me on a scale to get my current weight. I don't look forward to that part. He also does a height measurement. He looks into my eyes with a lighted scope and also into my ears. He puts his stethoscope on my chest and listens to my heart, and on my back and listens to my breathing. He also takes my blood pressure, and does an exam I would rather not talk about. But the point is that this exam really is physical not virtual. During the past year we have experienced a significant excarnation. Incarnation means in-fleshing, being in the flesh, in a body. But, excarnation means removing the physical body from the equation. We no longer see each other in the flesh but via screens, two dimensional. Our faith is an incarnational faith. That means it is flesh and blood, not just ideas and concepts. God took on human flesh. Think about the way Jesus, the great Physician conducted physical exams.

Here's one of the gospels explaining how he did it:

Luke 4:38-40

*Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. <sup>39</sup> So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them. <sup>40</sup> At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them.*

Did you catch that little phrase? It said, "laying his hands on each one." Of course, we know that Jesus didn't need to touch anyone to heal them. He is God and can heal anyone. There are

examples of Jesus healing from a distance. The person did not even have to be present. But, more often than not, he touched the people he healed. Why did he do that? Because God gave us physical bodies that respond to touch. Jesus not only entered our world and lived in a body as we do. He also treated us as whole complete people, not just as spirits. He touched and healed broken bodies. Often his physical healings were connected to spiritual healing as well. He provided forgiveness as he addressed a physical ailment. He didn't treat bodies. He loved and touched and healed people. I have wondered what it felt like to be touched by Jesus. I think it would be a wonderful thing to experience. But the whole scene tells us that Jesus cares for our bodies because he cares for each of us. Now, we don't know how shocking a thing this was among his own people. People that were sick were often designated unclean, kept from others and could not be touched. Add to this, there were certain days of the week that the sick would not be tended to unless it was a dire emergency. But, not Jesus. He was willing to heal, and he cared for the most shut-out people in the community. He did so most often through touch. As I think about this today, I think people are so hungry for touch. They want a real handshake not a nod, a hug and not a wave. Yes, it is because God created us to live in the body, to love and receive love in these very physical ways. Now, let me tell you what happened. I held out until my doctor would see me in person, until we could talk face to face, until he could feel my pulse and listen to my heartbeat. Let us remember, as we are learning about the glory of our bodies, that we were made for a physical life in a physical world.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus, thank you for the attention that you give to us. Thank you for touching us when others keep their distance. Thank you for a love that is palpable and real. Thank you that you are the great physician and that you care for us. For we pray in your name. Amen.

### **Saturday, April 24**

Ok. I was never much of a Walking Dead fan. I know some people were fascinated by the show. It went through ten seasons and 147 episodes. The principle of the show should intrigue us as we study the place of the body in our lives and in our walk of faith. The idea was that a zombie apocalypse came, leaving many people infected with an unknown disease. These people were dead in that they did not retain their personal knowledge or character, but their bodies were still moving and active. These bodies were on a mission to gain food by eating healthy human beings. Just a bite or wound from a zombie could transform you into one of them. As a result, they had to be killed, or they would kill you. Killing of them, though they looked like people and might even have been your relative at one point, well, it just had to be done. If you have not seen the show, this is not an endorsement. I only share the concept because we are considering the place of our bodies in the life God has for humanity.

Here is a brief scripture for today from 1 Thessalonians 5:

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

*<sup>23</sup> May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.*

Now I know the amazing thing about the ideas put forth by the Walking Dead show is that we accepted these ideas. Sure, we know that zombies are not real, but the idea that bodies might be different from real people, well, people accept that can be true. Now, to be fair, the writer struggled with this. One of the characters refused to kill his wife when she became a zombie. He continued to see her and make the connection to who she was, more than what she had become. I think all of us see the point. We have these various parts, our body, our mind, our spirit, our soul. But we miss the unified aspect of who we are. Yes, you are a body. You are a spirit. But your nature is as one. Yes, we are getting at what a person is. What scripture teaches is that you are a unified whole, not a fragmented and divided self. Just as your body cannot live without a liver, (that's why it is called a liver!) your life is found in the body. Yes, people can lose their faculties and even enter a vegetative state, but their life remains in the body, not somewhere else apart from the body. But, do you see what the Zombie teach us? They teach us that our bodies are worthless apart from our minds and our thoughts. So many of our shows do this. They fail to

take into account the effect our actions will have on our bodies. The Twilight series or the Vampire Diaries often communicate this same message. Again, this is not an endorsement of these shows, but we need to see what we are being taught about our bodies. You see, the difference with the world as God made it is that you live your life in your body. Everything you do registers not only in your body, but for the whole person. That means what you do with your body will affect your spirit, your mind, your soul. What you turn your mind to will affect your body and so on. That is the point in Paul's statement. Sanctification, the application of the grace of Jesus, is for us spirit, soul, and body. You will appear before God in the end, spirit, soul, and body. God is redeeming you in Christ, spirit, soul and body. Now this doesn't mean that we venerate our body or worship it, but that we see ourselves as a whole person before God. We will look at this more next week, but consider today that you belong to Christ, spirit, soul, and body.

Let's pray:

Lord God, our creator God, thank you for giving us bodies for this amazing human life you have granted us to live. Help us to be thankful for the way you have made us. Thank you that the redemption of Jesus reaches all that we are, and that you plan to make all things new in him. Give me a heart of gratitude for your goodness and your love today. I pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.