

6 ESSENTIALS FOR YOUR BODY – Week 1

Monday, April 26

This is week one of our new study on the body and health for followers of Christ. Last week, we discussed the importance of our human bodies in God's plan for each of us. Our lives are lived out in our bodies. They are not ancillary or unimportant. No, we experience saving grace in our bodily lives, and we also come to serve and worship God in our bodies. It is true, our bodies have weaknesses and imperfections, but they are also signposts of glory, revealing the majesty and love of God.

Here is our text for today:

Psalm 8:3-5

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁴ what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? ⁵ You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.

Now as we are learning about our bodies, we reflect on the glory wired into our design. I've enjoyed Bill Bryson's book on the Body. It is what he calls an owner's manual. As he captures the overwhelming complexity of the body, I thought of great works of art. If you have ever stood in awe of a great work of art such as Da Vinci's Mona Lisa or Van Gogh's Starry Night, you are in for a treat. The glory of your body far outweighs these. Your body is an assembly of 7 billion billion billion atoms. Yes, the repetition of the billions means all those zeros. The 59 elements that make up your body are fine-tuned to allow for the complex processes that make your physical life possible. Also, the way your body is designed, the surface area inside your lungs if spread out, would be as large as a tennis court. You need this amount of area to take in oxygen and also to discard the carbon dioxide that would destroy you if it were allowed to build up in your body. The blood vessels in your body, if put end-to-end, would stretch almost half way to the moon. One of the most complex parts of your physical make-up in your DNA is the double-helix map of your physical body. Each cell carries a copy of this critical instruction set. The length of that small amount of DNA is over a yard long, but if all the DNA in your body were to be put end-to-end, it would stretch in length beyond our solar system. The main activity of this critical instruction set or map is in the making of more maps. These maps are in all the cells in your body. They are like the architect's construction plans for your physical body. Now as we start this week, we are just scratching the surface on the complexity of your body. It is this design that God created, but he did more than that. He gave us bodies, and he made us unique people with personalities and abilities. He gave these physical elements order and bestowed life. Talk about crowning us with glory and honor, as David says in this beautiful song we read part of this morning. You really are a wonder. That's what David is marveling at. God created us to reflect the glory that reaches high; it is but a little lower than his own. And, here's the thing. You don't have to make your body carry out its functions. God made it to do so almost on autopilot. You are not telling your cells to reproduce, but millions of new cells are being made in your body every second of the day. You may have little knowledge of your spleen, but it is doing the work God designed it to do. But, here's the catch. You can cooperate with your body in its activity. You can eat foods that supply resources for your immune system and exercise in such a way that you provide support for the development and sustaining of your skeletal and muscular system. You can also handicap your body, making it more difficult for your body to sustain its critical functions. You can do this through poor nutrition or failing to get the sleep you need or living a sedentary life. Years ago, I began to collect antiquarian books. Some of the volumes in the collection are from the 1500s, over 400 years old. These are amazing books that have been passed down across multiple generations. They have outlived their owners many times. They are beautiful and show the signs of their age that contribute to their beauty. Yet, there are also signs of abuse. Many of these beautiful treasures have been damaged through lack of care, or even through mistreatment. I think of our bodies as far more beautiful than these treasures, so how should we care for them so that we can enjoy the life God has given us to live in the body? Now, I am not saying this to guilt us into self-care but to help us see what God has given to us and our part in cooperating with

God's work to keep our bodies healthy. What ways can you better align your life to support the processes of your body? That is what we are learning in our study in the weeks ahead.

Let's pray:

Lord God, our bodies amaze us in their beauty, their complexity, and their function. Thank you for providing for us the bodily life that we live. Forgive us for complaining about our body's weaknesses, and help us to know how we can support the life you have created us to enjoy. For we pray in your holy name. Amen.

Tuesday, April 27

Yesterday, I mentioned the book by Bill Bryson on the human body. It is written by a layman for lay people like you and like me. He calls it an owner's manual. Since you have a body, and your life is in the body, you will want to know a little bit about it. Now usually when I buy a new piece of equipment, like a lawnmower or vacuum cleaner, it comes with an owner's manual. I quickly lay it aside and start using my new tool right away. It is usually not until something goes wrong, or if there is something I cannot figure out, that I go looking for that manual. Usually, the manual will tell you all that the new device can do, and it will tell you what it cannot do. It also has warnings about how to treat your new device or how it may place you in danger. Now, you could say that the Bible is the owner's manual for our lives, our bodies included, with this exception. We are not our own.

Here is our text for today:

Colossians 1:16

For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

Yes, we were made by God and for God. We did not cause ourselves to be born. We are not self-created or self-sustaining. It is true that God made our bodily systems to maintain a fine equilibrium. Our hearts help to regulate our body temperature keeping us close to 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. When you go out in the cold or in the heat, your body responds to the change in temperature to maintain your body temperature. The same is true of your own bodily systems. Your heart rate responds to the work required and then returns to equilibrium and so on. But, why this body? Why these abilities and characteristics? We are told that we were made for God, or more precisely to glorify God and enjoy him forever. All things in our world exist for the glory of God. Yes, my new lawnmower was made to keep my grass trimmed, and I can also use it to blow and mulch leaves in my yard. I can use the engine for other purposes and perhaps some of the other parts as well, but its main purpose is lawn care. Our bodies also have a purpose. They give us a means of interacting in the world God has made, and with God himself for his glory. We cannot do that without our bodies. As resilient as God made our bodies, we can live on only about 4 percent of the surface of the earth. Some places are too hot or too cold for us to endure for any length of time. Yes, your body has a range of optimal performance and health. Just like a fish cannot live out of water for long, God created us to live with certain limits. Your body system requires rest and food. We can live without food for as long as our body reserves hold up, usually three or four weeks at most. We can live only a few days without water. To keep our body healthy so that we can fulfill our purpose in living requires that we care for our bodies. How we do that is some of our most important stewardship. God has entrusted to us a body to use for our life in his world. One of the ways we serve God is caring for our bodies. Here's the amazing thing. God created your body with protections of its own for safekeeping. We've all been schooled this past year on our immune system as we've joined the fight against COVID-19. We learned about antibodies and infections, quarantine and vaccinations. So many people have been just fine because God has given our bodies extraordinary abilities to defend itself against disease. In the process, we have learned that we can help by wearing masks or handwashing, and keeping a distance from those that are infected. We can also help in proactive ways by eating properly, exercising and taking time for appropriate rest. In doing so, we come alongside the immune system that God provided to support our health day in and day out. And, with these amazing bodies we can engage in a large array of activities. But, let's remember our core purpose: to glorify and enjoy God forever.

Let's pray:

Lord God, you created me, and I am yours. You have given us life to enjoy that we might know you, serve you, worship and enjoy you. I rarely think about how wonderful your creation is. The body you gave me is beyond by understanding. I am indeed fearfully and wonderfully made. Even as I pray, my body is carrying out the functions you gave to it and revealing your mighty power and creative majesty. I praise and thank you. Remind me that each day you invite me to join you in your work of caring for my body. Remind me in the process that I am yours. I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Wednesday, April 28

Ok. Like we learned yesterday, we rarely pay attention to most of our body's complex processes unless something goes wrong. What you may not realize is that this rarely happens. Yes, everyday your body produces cancerous cells—I'm not trying to scare you—but your body eliminates them just like that, and you don't even know what is happening. So many of us have health factors that put us in danger, but the body manages to compensate and take care of matters again without your knowing. Now, the problem for us can be that we seek to maintain a spiritual health without a physical health, or we pursue physical health without investing in our spiritual lives. Which is more important to you?

Here is our scripture for today:

1 Timothy 4:8

For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

These words were written by the apostle Paul to his understudy Timothy. Timothy became pastor of one of the early churches. A false teaching had come along that pressed people to take care of their bodies through strict training. These same people neglected their spiritual health, and their spiritual condition was not good. They were being drawn into false teachings that were tearing them away from Christ and also bringing division into the church. As a result, they were missing out on the richness of living their lives to the glory of God. Now, Paul is not pitting one form of training against another in his statement. He is showing that we should not have one without the other. Think of how some of us care for our bodies. During COVID-19 many have invested in straightening their teeth. Not having to be out in the public made it easier to get cosmetic surgery. You can stay home and heal up without anyone knowing that you are missing. This is the kind of focus on the body that was happening where Timothy was pastoring. Paul doesn't say that taking care of our bodies is not important. Physical training can be very beneficial. But, as we learned yesterday, God made us to glorify him and enjoy him. How might our lives be if we spent as much time working on spiritual growth and development as we did worrying about our weight or complexion? Again, the goal isn't to make us feel guilty, but to build balanced lives in Christ. Our spiritual training means investing in what will last for eternity. We'll learn later this week what happens to our bodies when we enter the kingdom of Jesus in all its fullness, but suffice it to say that we want to take care of the whole person. Why do we want to do this? Because of the way God created us. Now, there are many views of our makeup as human beings, and the debate over this is still taking place. Are we only physical bodies and really nothing more? Are we made of three parts, spirit, soul and body? Are we two parts, body and spirit? You can see why this is hotly debated. I believe scripture says that God made us whole people, and that we are both spirit and body. I like the way one writer explained. She called us "spirited bodies." That means physical bodies endowed with a spirit to make us into living persons. Why is this important to understand? There is more than we have time to explain today, but let's start here. Every activity of your bodily life that you experience is the place where you can experience God's presence and his Spirit. As a different writer has said, *He, that is God, is in a sense at the point of my pen, my pick, my paintbrush, my needle—my heart and my thought.* Yes, it is in every action, activity and moment that God is to be known and enjoyed. That means we are to seek to enjoy the presence of God in all of life, in our bodily life. So, why does Paul make this statement about spiritual training? He cannot understand why we would want to train our bodies and miss out on God. In other words, he wants the whole person to be trained, and therefore we need to be careful not to disregard God in the study we are engaging in. It is here

we must also come to know the presence of God. And yes, we can bring our physical and spiritual training together. They really are meant to work together for our benefit and for God's glory. How does this happen? First, you come to recognize God in every moment. It is then you discover that every moment is holy, whether you are reading your Bible, enjoying a meal, sharing physical intimacy with your spouse or taking a walk through the neighborhood. You want to cultivate your awareness of this truth. Second, it is dedicating every aspect to God's glory. Doing so can help us focus on what healthy and whole living is. We will desire to do with our bodies those things that honor God. Third, we want to always consider our spiritual training. How can you use your physical training to support your life in God and your spiritual training? Years ago, when I was in graduate school, a friend of mine told me about a Volkswagen that his aunt had given to him. She was no longer able to drive, and she wanted him to have her car. When she gave it to him, she described it to him. She told him that it had a three-speed manual transmission. Now my friend knew about this model of car, and he knew this model was made with a four-speed transmission, but he did not want to contradict his aunt. When he drove the car home, he wanted to see for himself. He brought it through the gears from first, to second, to third, and finally to fourth. When he got to fourth gear, the transmission was very stiff, and it took some pressure to get the car into fourth gear. But he was able to do it. Yes, it had four gears. It was then that it struck him. His aunt had had that car and driven it for years without knowing it had four gears. The fourth gear had never been used. Wow! I think about this as I think about our text for today. We may not be fully enjoying the life God has given to us if we don't see every moment as spiritual, and see all of our physical activity as the place where we meet with God, where we can know God, where we can experience spiritual training.

Let's pray:

Faithful and loving God, thank you that you are present with me at all times. I easily create divisions in my life, putting up dividers between my spiritual life and my body. Remind me of your presence in each moment, each activity, in everything I do. Lord, prompt me by your Holy Spirit to live my life integrated and in your presence. Show me the connection between my body and spirit. Teach me how this time of training can be a time to grow closer to you and to enjoy greater physical health as well. I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Thursday, April 29

This is Thursday, and we are beginning to understand the place of our bodies in our lives and our life with God. Many years ago, when I was traveling as a young student, I had the opportunity to visit Jerusalem. This is an extraordinary place where cultures and peoples and faiths collide. It feels like the veil separating the physical world and the spiritual world has grown thin, and the feeling of this is palpable. While there, I had the privilege of entering the dome of the Rock, which is pretty much off limits today. This mosque sits at the site where the temple of the Lord was built. The last temple to occupy that spot, sometimes called Herod's temple, was destroyed along with Jerusalem in the year 70AD. What made the first temple, called Solomon's temple, so special was more than its beauty. It's true that it was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The inner walls were overlaid with sheets of hammered gold. But, the most important aspect of the temple was found in the holy of holies. In that room was only one thing. The ark of the covenant of the Lord. The most important part of the temple was an empty space just above the cover of the ark. Why? It was in that sacred space that the Lord told his people he would be present among them. That place was called the mercy seat, the place where atonement was made by the high priest for the sins of the people.

Now as you think about that, here's our scripture for today:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Now, with those words in context, we see how stunning this statement is. In ancient faiths, there were three major component parts: the temple, the priests, and the sacrifices. Christians in that world were very strange. A person that asked about their faith would say, "What sacrifices do

you make?" The Christian would say, "Jesus gave himself up for us. There are no more sacrifices to be made." Then the question would be asked, "Well, then who is your priest?" The Christian would answer, "Jesus is our high priest, and every one of us is a priest serving him." Then confused, the person would ask, "But, where do you go to worship? Where is your temple?" The Christian would answer, "Our God doesn't dwell in buildings made by human hands. He dwells in each of his people by his Spirit." Then the questioner would say, "Well, that doesn't sound like a religion at all. The Christian would say, "Exactly." Then they would tell the person about Jesus, God who took on human flesh so that we might have fellowship with God. For us today, we want to focus on the fact that God no longer dwells in a building of wood or stone. His presence is not reserved for the ark cover or any other geographical place on earth. Instead, the Lord now dwells in the bodies of his people. Your body is the new temple. The Lord God has taken his new home in our world in you. Your body is where the Spirit of God shows up in our world today. This is difficult to take in. Our bodies are not a side issue in our faith. We take special interest in our bodies for many reasons. This is one of them. This is how we know that the life of faith is a bodily life. It is not in the intangible life of ideas. No, it is flesh and blood. Now when we have special guests coming to our home, we go a little crazy getting things ready. We clear off our horizontal surfaces. Often those areas are cluttered. We blow the leaves off of our driveway. We straighten things up. If the Spirit of God is our guest, how might we want to care for our bodies, to take care of the temple? Now, I'm not saying that we need to go crazy about this but to be thoughtful. How are we taking care of the temple of the Lord's Spirit? As a young man, going into the Dome of the Rock was very sad for me. Why? Though historic and treasured by Muslims, it was just a building. I think I expected too much. When I think of our bodies and the presence of the Spirit of God, I am excited and expectant of what God will do in and through us each of us. I also think the glory of God can be put on display through each of us, through all that we do and say. As we think of life in these glorious bodies, what better way is there to enjoy and glorify God?

Let's pray:

Abba Father, thank you for pouring your Spirit out on us. Thank you that there are no more sacrifices to be made, no work to be done. Jesus has done it all. Even more, you have come to take up residence in us. Thank you for taking our lives and making us fit for your presence. We know the highest heavens are not great enough to contain you, and we rejoice that you have come to us in Christ. Remind me of this astounding truth when I think of my body. For I pray in your name. Amen.

Friday, April 30

I do not wait well. Do you? I easily become impatient or anxious for what is to come. Actually, we are told that the whole of creation is waiting.

Here's our scripture for today from Paul's letter to the Roman Christians:

Romans 8:20-23

²⁰For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

Paul is coming to terms with the brokenness in our world caused by sin. He has gone to great lengths to explain how God plans to redeem people by faith in Jesus. But now he returns to the big picture view of all things in the creation. Why did God allow such frustration and loss into our world? Of course, the first human beings chose this way, but how could it figure into God's plan? This frustration opens the way to hope, the way for people to see their need of grace and redemption. God is a redeeming God, and that is his plan. Now, all of us know frustration in our world. We feel it in the pandemic, in our human weakness and sin. We feel it in the strife between people and races. No one needs to tell us about frustration. We see it in our inability to change our stories on a personal or national level. We are stuck. But that is not all of the story. From the frustration of the world, people can see that they need life. They need hope. Here the door is

opened to a completely different sort of life, an abundant life. We also know frustration personally. We feel it in our bodies. We can't keep the weight off. We can't cure the diabetes we have. We cannot remove the scars that are physical, emotional, and spiritual. We can't guarantee our own health and future. We can't keep ourselves from dying. Just keeping ourselves healthy seems like an unending mission. Paul says that the whole of creation is groaning, waiting for full redemption that God is bringing about in Christ. I remember reading the story of the polio epidemic. It was different from COVID-19 that afflicts adults in that it disproportionately affected children, taking their lives or leaving them handicapped for life. In one hospital where these patients were being taken, a man was working to develop a vaccine. His name was Jonas Salk. Imagine coming to work each day and passing through wards of patients where people were dying daily, and he is working to develop a vaccine to protect people. It is said that the staff would say to him, "How long will it be? Hurry up. We are desperate for help." I think of this scene, and I think of our own. We spent months waiting for the development of a vaccine for COVID-19. We would love to see a cure or significant protection. This would be a gift to our world right now. But we don't know when we will be in the clear, when we will be able to see faces and enjoy being in-person for all our meetings. But there is an even greater longing we have, a redemption that we desire to see. Paul calls it our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. It is true that when we come to faith in Christ, we are brought into God's family. We become his children and also become co-heirs with Christ. But we will enjoy the fullness when the kingdom fully comes. This is what Paul is talking about here. He says when this happens, these physical bodies, caught up in the frustration of creation, will be redeemed fully as well. We will look at this a little more tomorrow. Likely, we say the same thing to the Lord that the medical team said to Doctor Salk, "Hurry up, Lord. We long for the redemption of your creation and the full redemption of our bodies." Yes, we look forward to the day when we will receive our glorified bodies. Today, suffice it to say, let's live the life of our faith in the body God has given to us. This is the place where you experience the salvation of God and also where you live, serve, and worship God.

Let's pray:

Abba Father, thank you for the gift of sonship, that in Christ by your Spirit we become your sons and daughters. We look forward to all your children gathered to you, to the full redemption of our bodies. There are days when we pray for you to hurry up. The groaning of creation drives us to desperate prayer for healing, for forgiveness, for unity. We trust you and your timing in our lives and in our world, and we join with the rest of creation in groaning for the fulfillment of all your promises in Christ. In the meantime, enable us by your Spirit to live by faith, and to live the life of faith in the bodies you have given to us. For we pray in your name. Amen.

Saturday, May 1

Years ago, as a graduate student in Great Britain, I was issued a green card that allowed me to be a resident as long as I was in school. I'd never been an expat before. The feeling is an unusual one because while you may be living there, it is not your true home. It is not where you belong, and there are many times when you feel this. For one, the culture is different, the language is different, and in many ways the life is as well. There were customs that were strange to me, and I lacked a sense of belonging, of personal connection. In Miami, we play host to people from almost every country on earth. We hear much of the immigrant experience, one where people feel uprooted and unrooted.

This is the experience Paul the apostle says Jesus' followers have in this world:

Philippians 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

He says that when we come to faith in Christ, the world begins to feel strange to us. We live here for sure, and it is the only world we know, but it is not home for us. We are aliens and strangers, sojourners looking for our true home. Scripture tells us that Abraham knew this even when God promised to give him land of his own. He was looking for a city whose architect was God. Yes, we are looking for the place formed around the throne of our true king, Jesus. In the meantime, there

will be days when we wonder if we belong here, and how we can possibly fit in. It isn't just that the values of our king are often missing. It is that we are not with our heavenly Father. As we learned yesterday, we are waiting for the day when we go home. Now, this is not an escape plan. We are not to deny the realities of our world or to withdraw from it. No, we have work to do here, lives to live for the glory of God. It is in Christ we have a taste of the kingdom, and we are ready to move on from the appetizer to the main course. We long for a world under the rule of Jesus, a world redeemed and renewed in him. Notice what Paul says about this world. It will not be an intangible place. You won't be living on a cloud or having your existence as a spirit floating around. No, you will have a body in your home world. Your life there will also be a bodily life. But, notice the body you have now that is subject to weakness and decay will be raised up to be like that of Jesus himself when he was raised up. Yes, Jesus did not ditch his body at the resurrection. His body was glorified. People saw him, spoke with him, ate with him, and were invited to touch him. Now, you might ask what this means. First, this means that we should have a longing for our glorified bodies. We know the struggle of our bodily life in this broken world. Our bodies need constant maintenance and care. They are subject to sickness. Indeed, we die. But our glorified bodies will not be like that. Our weaknesses will be caught up in the redemption of God. We will be like the Lord Jesus.

As we are told by the Apostle John:
1 John 3:2-3

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

He says we don't have all the details. We only know we will be like Jesus. Seeing him will bring about our redemption and transformation. The body you have now will be your body, only it will be glorified and fit for your life with Christ. In the meantime, John tells us how we can now live with that day in view. Now, this means not only pursuing purity and faithfulness before God, it also means how we live in these bodies God has given to us. He is telling us we can get ready for that day in what we do and the way we live today. I think all of us have a longing for home, where we belong and are safe, with those we love and that love us. That's what I am looking forward to. Now as we finish this first week in our study of the 6 Essentials for Your Body, I hope you have come to better understand and appreciate your body as God's gift to you, fearfully and wonderfully made, the place where you serve and worship God, the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the body that will one day be raised up in glory to share life in Christ.

Let's pray:

Faithful and gracious Father, this world is not my own. I am looking forward to the city built by you, with you at the center, and to the glorified body you have planned for me. During the days that I wait, guide me by your Holy Spirit to learn and live your ways. Thank you that you have prepared a place for me, my true home. Thank you for your steadfast love. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.