



THE
MENTORING
PROJECT

STEWARDED YOUR BODY



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STEWARDING YOUR BODY

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle John wrote a brief letter — a note, even — to his friend Gaius. John said he “had much to write” to him, but didn’t put it all down because he hoped “to see you soon, and we will talk face to face” (3 John 13–14). Given that John had many things to say that he left out, it’s worth noting what he chose to include. It’s an encouraging little letter, with John commending how Gaius has conducted himself, and expressing his support for Gaius against those who oppose him.

But it’s John’s greeting that I want to highlight. He prays that all goes well with Gaius, and “that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul” (3 John 2).

Did you catch that? One of John’s prayers for his friend is that he would be in good health. Why would he pray something like that? Certainly there are more important things he could lift up in prayer for Gaius than his good health, right? Perhaps. But beneath John’s greeting and prayer is the belief that our bodies matter, and that the welfare of our bodies is worthy of prayer.

What I want to do through the course of this guide is help you see the Bible’s teaching on the human body and to help you grasp your responsibility as a steward of the body God’s given you.

1

AN EMBODIED BEGINNING

As with many important topics, the best place to begin our considerations is in the early chapters of Genesis. Moses sets the scene in Genesis 1 by telling us that God created the heavens and the earth, forming the structures of creation and filling them with life. Each day features a fresh miracle: light shining, land forming, plants sprouting, creatures living. And all along the way we read the divine verdict: “God saw that it was good.” He created all things with his sovereign speech, and then delighted in his handiwork.

Day six, however, provides a plot twist. Having completed his forming of the natural world, the Godhead has taken counsel and decided to create something to guard, keep, expand, and rule over this creation:

“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Gen. 1:26).

What sets this creation apart, though, is not only the task given to man, but how he’s made. Moses writes,

“So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.”

The animals were not made in the image of God. Nor were the trees, nor the stars. Man — male and female — was created in God’s own image. And after giving man the task to be fruitful and multiply and exercise dominion, God declares that this image-bearing creation is “very good.”

Perhaps you’ve noticed that, by the time you come to the close of Genesis 1, we know a good bit about the task given to man, but we don’t know much about what man is or how God designed him. So we keep reading and let Genesis 2 zoom us in closer to the scene.

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Genesis 2 tells us that “the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature” (Gen. 2:7). There it is, the first glimpse of what man’s made of. He’s created from earth’s dust, built from the ground up, and then filled with the breath of life.

As we keep reading we see that, given the task God gave the man to fill the earth and to exercise dominion, “it is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen 2:18). He has tasks to perform that he cannot accomplish in solitude. But no suitable partner exists among the animals, so the Lord sees to it that this problem gets solved: “I will make him a helper fit for him.” The Lord then “caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man” (Gen 2:21–22). The woman’s suitability as a helper to the man is due to her being made from him.

Thus were Adam and Eve made, and the same physical, embodied existence has been handed down all the way to us. If you are a man, you share physical characteristics with Adam. If you’re a woman, you share them with Eve.

These early chapters of Genesis are, to state the obvious, introductory to understanding the human body, but they are also foundational. Without the inspired narrative captured in these chapters, we would be left with conjecture and confusion.

So what do we take away from Genesis 1–2, and how do these passages contribute to our understanding of the body? Let me suggest some answers:

1. God creates our bodies. This means he wants us to have them and to view them the way he does.
2. God creates our bodies good. God did not make a mistake when he formed the man and woman, and he did not make a mistake when he formed us. He created Adam and Eve as embodied people before the fall of Genesis 3. Their bodies were not, then, something inherently negative and dangerous, but part of the good creation.
3. We receive our bodies. This is the inverse of the first takeaway — he gives, we receive. These simple truths are rejected all around us, as people instead believe they can define their physical reality. But our bodies are not blank canvases on which we create what we want, they come with some answers hardwired in them. For example, our bodies tell us whether we are male or female. If our minds tell us otherwise, we do not have the right to overthrow what God did by creating us. Instead, we

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align our minds with the reality of our bodies. God made our bodies; we have received them.

4. Our bodies are important. God gives them to us, and he gives us a task to perform with them: be fruitful, exercise dominion. We want to steward our bodies in a way that allows us to fulfill the tasks God gives us.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. What takeaway from Genesis is most helpful to you? Are there things mentioned above that you haven't fully considered before?
2. Can you think of a current cultural example where God's design for our bodies is being overthrown?

2

AN EMBODIED GOD

The Genesis account presents an open-and-shut case, making it abundantly clear that God intended us to have bodies and that our bodies are good. But if anyone needed more evidence, the incarnation of the Son of God should more than satisfy.

The Bible teaches, and Christians have always believed, that God exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The blessed trinity has enjoyed perfect bliss for all eternity within the Godhead. John's Gospel tells us that the second person of the Godhead is "the Word": "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The Word exists eternally with God and as God.

These are mind-bending and soul-stretching truths. And it keeps going. A few verses later, John makes the incredible claim that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory" (John 1:14). The Word — who has existed since the beginning and who is God himself — became flesh. Does this mean that Jesus remained mostly spirit and only appeared to have a body? No. In fact, that belief has been condemned since the first century as dangerous false teaching. Jesus was not pretending to be a man. He was fully and truly human.

Why did God the Son take on human flesh? To redeem embodied sinners. The redemption he wanted to accomplish was the redemption of our whole selves, body and soul. And in order to redeem us fully, he had to become like us fully. The writer of Hebrews makes this very point:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Heb. 2:14–18).

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Jesus took on flesh and blood so that he might save flesh-and-blood sinners. In every respect he became like us, so that he can save us to the uttermost. He came not to save our souls only, but to save us wholly.

One early church writer, Gregory of Nazianzus, put it this way:

That which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved. If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole.

In other words, if Jesus did not take on a fully human nature, then our fully human natures cannot be redeemed. Had Jesus not taken on flesh, our bodies would have been left out of the picture. This would only be half good news, since our souls and our bodies are subject to the effects of sin and require redemption. When Adam fell, the body that was created good became subject to frailty and weakness. Work became difficult, his body could get sick and wounded, things didn't always work the way they were supposed to, and the aging process made him weaker until finally he died.

So the eternal Son of God — he who was in the form of God — emptied himself by taking on the form of a servant and being born in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:6–7). Why was he born in the likeness of men? So that he could die in human form. Only that which was assumed could be redeemed.

The incarnation of Jesus Christ transcends our understanding, but it is there in the pages of the Gospels. Jesus grows, he eats, he sleeps, he cries, he sings, he lives, and he dies. Matthew records that when the disciples first saw Jesus after he rose from the dead, they “took hold of his feet” (Matt. 28:9). Why would Matthew relay such a minute detail? To make it clear that this was a real person the disciples were seeing and touching. Jesus was no apparition, either before or after his resurrection. He is a man, through and through. And, incredibly, he remains so. He ascended into heaven with his body (Acts 1:6–11), and he now sits at the right hand of God in human flesh. God created our bodies good. And the Son of God took a body for himself that he might redeem embodied sinners.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. How have you seen the effects of the fall manifest in your physical life, and that of those around you?
2. Why did the Son of God have to take on flesh?

3

WHAT THE BODY IS FOR

It should be abundantly clear by now that our bodies are not merely something we have, like a permanent set of clothes. Rather, our bodies are a part of who we are. There is not a “true” version of ourselves that exists apart from our bodies. Human beings exist as embodied souls, and — as established in creation and in the incarnation of Jesus Christ — this is a very good arrangement.

Now that we know that our bodies are a good gift from God, an important question to ask is “What are they for?” As tempting as it may be to start listing out a list of practical steps for stewarding your body, we will only know what steps to take if we know what purpose our bodies have. If someone has a hammer, but is unaware that its purpose is to pound nails into lumber and walls, they might end up trying to use it for something completely unrelated. The problem is that, if you try to use it in a way it’s not intended to be used, it won’t work. You can try to eat spaghetti with a hammer, and you might get a few noodles in your mouth, but that’s not what a hammer is for. Only when you know what it’s for can you start talking about the technique involved in effectively swinging a hammer.

So it is with our bodies. Before we know the techniques of faithful stewardship, we need to know the body’s purpose.

Made for Worship

To answer that question, I want to look first at Romans 12:1: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

Paul urges his readers to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice.” What do we know about sacrifices? For one thing, they’re not usually “living” when they’re offered. The Old Testament sacrifices were animals slain to atone for the sins of the people. But Christ came to die in the place of sinners — to be the lamb of God (John 1:29). So there is no longer any need for bloody sacrifice. Christ’s blood is sufficient; all we have to do is believe. So Paul does

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not mean that we present our bodies as this kind of Old Testament sacrifice.

Instead, Paul is exhorting us to view our bodies as something we offer to God in his service. Our whole selves belong to God — body and soul.

And Paul wants everything we do in our bodies to be offered up in the service of God.

How do we do this? Paul tells us: by living lives that are holy — with whole hearts and whole bodies devoted to God. Earlier in Romans, Paul wrote something similar: “Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness” (Rom. 6:13).

We discipline ourselves so that our bodies are not instruments of sin, but of righteousness, holy and acceptable to God. Our sacrifice to God is made with our living bodies, seeking to do everything, whether eating, drinking, or whatever we do, to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

One implication of Paul’s instructions in Romans 12:1 is that “worship” is not merely something that takes place on Sunday mornings in a certain place for a certain amount of time. The Bible does command us to make corporate worship a part of our lives (Heb. 10:24–25), but Romans 12 has more in view than going to church. It is telling us that our entire lives are worship. Everything we do with our bodies is to be done unto the Lord — for his sake and in his ways. As you well know, there is not a single thing we do apart from our bodies. Even our thinking takes place within our bodies, and in the very next verse of Romans 12, Paul encourages his readers to be “transformed by the renewal of your mind.” This too is part of our living sacrifice.

In summary, what we do with our physical bodies is our spiritual worship. To revisit the question asked above, “What is our body’s purpose?” I hope you can see the answer now: our bodies are made for worship. And everything we do ought to be done to bring glory and honor to our creator.

Fruitful Dominion

Another important consideration when thinking about the purpose of our bodies comes from Genesis. When the Lord creates Adam and Eve, Moses tells us that God “blessed them” and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:28).

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What does this have to do with our bodies? Well, everything. Because this gets at the heart of what our responsibilities are as human beings. We are to “be fruitful and multiply” and to “have dominion” over the created order. Both parts of this mandate are inherently bodily tasks. God created us so that both multiplying and exercising dominion require the use of our bodies. This is yet more confirmation that our bodies are not merely something we have, but are part of who we are as humans.

As Christians, there is more we’re called to do than be fruitful and have dominion, but there is not less than that. Our bodies, then, enable us to offer spiritual worship to God as we obey his commands, including the call to rule and multiply.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. What is your body for? How does its intended purpose relate to how we should and shouldn’t view our bodies?
2. What might it look like for you to view all of life as worship, and not just Sunday morning?

4

STEWARDSHIP CONSIDERATIONS

With these fundamental truths established — namely, that God created us as embodied souls for the purpose of worshiping him, and that the Son of God took on human flesh to, among other things, affirm the goodness of our bodies — we can now turn to some practical matters.

How do we go about faithfully stewarding these God-given bodies? I want to consider a few crucial categories. In Eden, the Lord told Adam to “work” and “keep” the garden. And those two categories map quite well onto how we are to steward our bodies.

Work the Garden: Bodily Training

One sign of immature thinking is when someone can only put matters into two categories: most important or not-at-all important. What I mean is that there are all kinds of theological issues and questions that are not as urgent as the divinity of Christ and the authority of the Scriptures. Questions like those are, in fact, the most important ones. One less important question — one about which I have a firm opinion — is the question of “who should be baptized?” It’s an important question. Is it as important as the divinity of Christ? No. But that does not make it unimportant. So it is with many things, and we need to be able to rank, or triage, matters of importance and consider them properly.

Paul takes this very approach with the question of bodily training. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul writes “train yourself for godliness; for ... godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (1 Tim. 4:7–8). There’s no doubt in Paul’s mind that training for godliness should be a priority in Timothy’s life and all who read the letter. Godliness carries value in this life and into eternity, and any who neglect it are opting to lower their own quality of spiritual life. Perhaps you noticed that I didn’t include the entire verse. In that ellipsis between “for” and “godliness” are the words, “while bodily training is of some value.”

Read the verse again, with all the words included: “Train yourself for godliness;

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for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”

Which is more important, training for godliness or training our bodies? Godliness, of course! But notice that Paul doesn't fall into the trap of thinking that something must be either the most important or unimportant. Instead, he affirms that bodily training is “of some value.” If physical training has some value, what does that mean for us? Easy: we should train our bodies.

Exercise

I am not a personal trainer or body builder, and the purpose of this guide is not to provide a training plan for you. But what I do want to convey is that, because our bodies are to be stewarded faithfully, training our bodies has value. And that kind of training will look different for everyone.

When I think about bodily training, I prioritize doing things I enjoy, doing some things I should do, and then trying to make the best use of the time. For example, I enjoy running, and I have never regretted the decision to go for a run. There are some things I should do that go along with that, but that I don't really enjoy, like stretching and certain exercises to fend off injuries. And then I try to make the best use of the time by planning what to think about or listen to while I run. Just last week I went for a run and used the time to generate an outline for a lesson I was scheduled to give at my church. So I enjoyed the run, and was able, by God's grace, to enhance the time. I also like to lift weights, not for the purpose of gaining a bunch of mass, but to prevent atrophy and enable me to keep running. I'm not as young as I used to be, so there are aches and pains that put a limit on how far I run and how much I lift, but I enjoy those activities and they work for now.

What matters is not so much what we do, but that we do it. If we want our bodies to be used in spiritual worship (Rom. 12:1), and we want to exercise dominion faithfully (Gen. 1:28), we should tend to bodily training.

Before I list some of the benefits of bodily training, let's first identify a couple of the possible pitfalls.

Two Pitfalls to Avoid

1. We ought not believe that we can extend our lives beyond what God has sovereignly ordained. God has already determined the length of our lives, and no amount of exercise is going to change that. I have to remind myself of this regularly. In God's providence, the generations that preceded me in my family did not live very long. Between my two parents and four grandparents, only one person lived beyond the age of 70, and

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three of them didn't make it to 60. I would also add that bodily training was not a feature of many of these lives, and so part of my motivation in staying healthy is to lead a healthier life than my forebears. But I have to remember that no amount of exercise is going to extend the number of days that God has appointed for me. It's a glorious comfort to know that "in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them" (Ps. 139:16). Before our birth, God ordained precisely how long we would live. He has fixed the day of our death. Jesus asked his listeners a question that makes a similar point: "And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" (Matt. 6:27). So if anyone believes he can extend his life by exercise, he is mistaken. Although we cannot add to the quantity of our days, regular exercise can affect the quality of our days.

2. You likely know someone who loves to work out, and who loves for other people to know that they work out. In other words, the bodily training is done not in the name of stewardship, but of vanity. This kind of pursuit is not the kind that pleases the Lord, for no matter how strong or attractive we may be, the Bible tells us that the mighty man ought not to boast in his might (Jer. 9:23) and that beauty is vain (Prov. 31:30). We are all prone to self-centeredness, and we need to be careful that our bodily training does not become an expression of this self-centeredness. Similarly, there is the temptation to give too much of our time and energy to the task of staying fit. You know that's the case when other areas of responsibility begin to suffer for our devotion to our workout.

The pitfalls are not excuses for avoiding exercise, but dangers we should know about as we pursue bodily training. The benefits of exercise are so many that they far outweigh the danger. Let's consider a few of them.

Benefits

First, exercise encourages self-control. The Scriptures call us repeatedly to practice self-control. When Paul writes to Titus and tells him how different people are to live — older women, older men, younger women, younger men — self-control is all over the lists of virtues. In fact, the only instruction for young men is that they should be self-controlled (Titus 2:6)! The Proverbs, too, call for self-control, warning us that "a man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls" (Prov. 25:28).

What does this have to do with physical exercise? Bodily training both requires self-control and encourages it. It requires self-control because in order to exercise, you will need to plan when to do it and where. Your schedule likely doesn't have big gaps of time for you to exercise, so you'll need to make those sessions happen. And there will be days when you don't feel like exercising,

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and you'll need to rule your spirit on those days (Prov. 16:32). This is why Paul can say that "every athlete exercises self-control" (1 Cor. 9:25). Similarly, exercise will encourage self-control. What I have found to be true is likely true for most people: self-control and discipline in one area begets self-control and discipline in other areas. It will lead to more disciplined use of time, and will hopefully make us more mindful of what we eat and how much we sleep.

The second and corollary benefit is that exercise discourages sloth. The lazy person has many plans, but no action. He or she may talk about getting in shape and exercising self-control, but there's always a ready excuse for why this is not a good time. Simply starting a routine of exercise, even a modest one, is a great way to take the offensive against laziness.

Third, there are a host of physical, mental, and emotional benefits that are widely recognized. Those benefits include physical aid like boosted energy, more control of your weight, and improved sleep. Then there are more mental and emotional benefits like helping maintain a better mood and keeping stress and anxiety down. For me, and I assume for others, exercise is something of a time multiplier. What I mean is that, though it takes time out of my day to exercise, the energy bump makes me more efficient and productive after I exercise. Exercise takes time, but it improves the quality of work I do when I'm done.

The last benefits I'll mention are that, when we take care of our bodies through exercise, it will make us more useful to others.

- If you have young children, it's a blessing to be agile enough to get on the floor with them.
- Your spouse will appreciate it if your body does not decline ahead of schedule.
- Your church will likely have ways you can serve physically. For example, there may be people who need help moving on occasion. And while your schedule may give you a (welcome) reason not to help, you don't want your physical condition to disqualify you.

There are more benefits than these, of course, but you get the point. The question is how will it look for you to exercise? Can you take your dog on more walks? Can you coach your kids' cross country team? Can you get a low-cost gym membership? Ride bike with your kids, walk with your spouse, do some pushups and situps every morning? God does not give us a training plan, and he does not require us to become fitness gurus. All he asks is that we be faithful stewards.

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Keep the Garden: Food and Sex

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

-1 Corinthians 6:19–20

We do not belong to ourselves, but to God. And the purpose of our bodies is to bring glory and acceptable worship to God. What does this have to do with food and sex? A good deal, in fact.

Let's first consider food.

Food

The Bible — that divinely inspired source of wisdom and guidance for all things pertaining to life and godliness — says a lot about food. The foundational truth it teaches about food is that it is a gift of God.

From God

Our provision is from him. When Jesus taught his disciples how to pray he included the petition: give us this day our daily bread (Matt. 6:11). By teaching us to pray for our daily needs, Jesus is seeking to orient our hearts and minds to the truth that if we are going to have our daily needs, God is going to need to provide. Later in that same chapter, Jesus teaches us that our Father in heaven delights in doing just that, and so we need not worry:

Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (Matt. 6:25–26)

I venture to guess that most of us who have grown up in the culture of American abundance have not worried about our next meal. We have never been far from a grocery store. So our temptation is likely not anxiety about whether we'll have food, but presumption that we need not pray for it. And yet the Bible is adamant that the source of all provision is our heavenly Father.

In the beginning, God told the man and woman that he gave them the plants and trees “for food” (Gen. 1:29). Then he tells Noah in Genesis 9 that “every moving thing that lives shall be food for you” (Gen. 9:3). God created the animals and seeds that grow in order for us to eat. The psalmist tells us that it is the Lord “who gives food to the hungry” (Ps. 146:7), and that “the eyes of all

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look to you, and you give them their food in due season” (Ps. 145:15).

What is the proper response to this truth that God is the giver of our food? The proper response is to thank him.

Paul wrote to Timothy these words that prove immensely helpful for our thinking about food: “For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer” (1 Tim. 4:4–5). May our pre-meal prayers reflect this truth: that our food is from God, and we owe him our thanks.

For Our Enjoyment

The second way to respond to God’s provision is to enjoy what he gives. Solomon emphasizes this response throughout Ecclesiastes. Look at what he teaches:

- “There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God” (Ecc. 2:24).
- “I perceived that ... everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God’s gift to man” (Ecc. 3:12–13).
- “Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot” (Ecc. 5:18).
- “And I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful” (Ecc. 8:15).
- “Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart” (Ecc. 9:7).

Why does Solomon so insist that we enjoy our food and drink? Because it’s God’s gift to us, and it honors the giver if we enjoy what he gives. A parent is not honored when a child opens a gift and grumbles about it. But it brings joy to the mom and dad who watch their child open a gift and take delight in it. So it is with what God supplies for our provision. He gets honor when we thank him and enjoy the gift.

Another reason why Solomon calls for joy is that it’s a great way to cultivate contentment. If we are busy enjoying God’s gifts to us, do you know what we’re not doing? We’re not wishing we had someone else’s gifts, and we’re not grumbling in our hearts about what we don’t have. We’re content, and there is great gain in contentment.

In case you think we’ve lost track of our concern about stewardship, we have

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not. Gratitude and enjoyment are part of how we steward our bodies. But lest you finish this guide with no sense of direction for what to do with food, let's give some time to that.

If we truly believe that our bodies are not our own, it will affect what we choose to eat. If you were responsible to ensure that someone else had good, healthy eating habits, you would put thought and care into what to feed them. And yet for many of us, myself included, we do not use such thought and care into our diet. This is a mistake because, as we know, our bodies do not belong to us; we are caring for a body that has been entrusted to us.

I said above that I am not a physical trainer. I am even less of a nutritionist. I'm not what some call a "foodie," and I enjoy ice cream. Until fairly recently, one of my motivations for exercise was that it allowed me to eat whatever I want. I have since realized that this may not be the best approach to diet and exercise. So my own practice includes limits on when I eat (occasional intermittent fasting) and on how much I eat (general portion control). In addition to those simple things, I have benefitted from being more mindful of how much processed food and sugar a food contains. If you want detailed analysis of those things, I am not the person to provide it. But there is a lot of research out there that would encourage us to eat food that's more natural and less processed than many of us do.

As with exercise, this will look different for everyone. Given how common food allergies and intolerances are, there will not be a one-size-fits-all solution. But the call to steward our bodies is a call to be aware that our bodies are not our own, and to guard the temple of our body by watching our diets.

Sex

To get a more full grasp of what it looks like to be faithful to God in the area of sex, I would encourage you to read Shane Morris's excellent field guide on that topic. But for our purposes, let Paul's exhortation guide you: "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" (1 Cor. 6:13–15).

To repeat myself yet again, your body does not belong to you. It is for the Lord. One way that someone rejects that truth is through sexual immorality. God created sex, and as with everything he made, he created it good. But perhaps more than anything else in all of creation, sex has been marred by sin. Confusion abounds in our culture when it comes to sex. If you want to steward your body faithfully and shine as a light in a twisted generation, flee sexual immorality and pursue godliness. It is a tragedy that the pursuit of

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chastity outside of marriage and of faithfulness within it is abnormal, but that is the current state of things.

But it is far better to swim upstream with God's favor than to go along with the current and end up destroyed. What does it look like to steward your body and swim upstream? It includes:

- *Quitting and staying away from pornography (Matt. 5:27–30)*
- *Learning how to control your body (1 Thess. 4:3–8)*
- *Being faithful to your spouse (Matt. 5:27–32)*
- *Not coveting the spouse of another (Ex. 20:17)*
- *Denying same-sex urges and activities (Rom. 1:26–27)*
- *Keeping the marriage bed honorable (Heb. 13:4)*

That is a rough outline of the path to sexual faithfulness, and it's a good place to start. There are slithery lies all around us telling us that God has not really said these things, and that if we live by these words it will rob us of the joy and pleasure we deserve. Those are lies we must reject. The path of faithfulness is the path to a clean conscience and full joy. So steward your body by devoting yourself wholly to the Lord. Your body is his.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. Describe your relationship to food. Do you think of food as simply fuel for your body, or something to be enjoyed? Are you more inclined to worry about food or presume upon provision? Are there changes you think you should make to your eating habits?
2. Are there things in your life that are in conflict with the rough outline of sexual faithfulness above? If so, what needs to change?
3. What do you think about the Bible's teaching regarding bodily training? Was this something you've considered before?
4. What are your own training habits? Do you do any training? Are there changes you want to make or should make?
5. If you do consistently exercise, what are your primary motivations?

5

MORE STEWARDSHIP CONSIDERATION

We've covered some of the big categories for body stewardship, but there are other considerations worth giving some attention. One is a positive reminder, the other a warning.

Take Your Body to Church

One of the best things you can do as you steward your body is go to church. If you're reading this field guide, you likely already know that it's good to worship with other believers on the Lord's day. But do you know that it's something God commands? The Holy Spirit inspired the author of Hebrews to write, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb. 10:24–25).

In order for us to stir up other believers to love and good deeds, we must not neglect "to meet together, as is the habit of some." The act of meeting together requires our body to be in a specific place on Sundays and not somewhere else. You will be somewhere on Sunday mornings, the question is whether you will be at church or elsewhere.

The technology that allows people to livestream worship services and listen to sermons online can be a blessing. At my church, it's common to have members utilize the livestream when they're sick or out of town. We also have a podcast where we post sermons and make those available. We think those are good things to offer in service of our members and outsiders. But what can be a problem is when someone views a livestream or a podcast as a replacement for physically gathering with other Christians at church.

A livestreamed service can certainly be encouraging and instructive. But it also encourages us to think of our churches as a product to consume rather than the family of God and body of Christ, where we are to serve and worship the Lord Jesus with his people. When we gather physically, we

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have the benefit of hearing other members lift their voices in song, we get to hear the wonderful sounds of crying babies and turning Bible pages, we hear the Word preached, and we have opportunities to fellowship before and after the service with God's people. None of those things can be replicated online.

So, please, go to church. If you're not part of a church or you're currently part of a church that does not preach the gospel and teach the whole counsel of God, maybe this is the time for a change. Your body is going to be somewhere on Sunday mornings; why not make it a priority to be physically present at a healthy, God-honoring church.

Put Your Phone Down

This field guide is not about stewarding technology, so I won't belabor this point. If you have eyes and have been in public at any point over the last decade, you've noticed the ubiquity of the smartphone. And, like most technology, its capabilities are stunning and can absolutely be used for good.

But attachment to our phones also has a numbing, dehumanizing effect. For one thing, it monopolizes our attention while we're on it. And if we're in a room with other people, being on our phone is poor stewardship of our physical presence. And then there's the content on our phones, which can consume our time and focus such that our online "world" is more real and affects us more than the world in which our body resides. We want to pursue moderation in use of all technology, including our phones. They can be amazing servants, but how quickly they become much more than that in our lives.

But What About?

We live on this side of Genesis 3, and one of the effects of the fall is that not everyone's body functions the way it should. We all know people who were born with a physical defect or have suffered a serious injury that changes what faithful stewardship looks like.

Our God is sovereign and good, and all that he does is right. No injury or defect has ever occurred outside his loving providence, and he does not require of us things we cannot do. What he requires is that we be faithful with what he's given us. And he is patient and gracious beyond what we can imagine.

We all feel the effects of sin in our bodies to one degree or another. The fact that we experience decline and die is one effect that nobody escapes. And

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before we die there is the possibility of disease, sickness, cancer, accidents, injuries, and more. Our bodies are a part of the created order, and the fall of man plunged not only our moral frame, but our physical frame, into a tailspin. The Apostle Paul says “the creation was subjected to futility” at the fall, and we join with all of creation in groaning and waiting for “the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:20, 23). Even as we seek to steward these jars of clay, our hope is in their final restoration.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. What does your involvement in your church look like? Is attendance a given for you, or could you grow in this area?
2. What is your relationship to technology like? Are you able to keep it in its proper place, or does it encroach on your life in unhealthy ways?



CONCLUSION: ETERNITY

What do you think heaven is going to be like? Do you imagine a ghost-like existence, floating on a cloud while playing a harp? Or do you imagine yourself eternally existing as a spirit dwelling with God? The Bible teaches that we will be raised from the dead and enter into the new creation. We will dwell with God forever as physical beings with restored and glorified bodies. The Apostle Paul gives extended attention to this incredible truth.

When explaining what the resurrection of the dead will be like, Paul says that, “What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15:42–44).

When we die, we will go to be with the Lord. In that intermediate state, we will wait for the call of God when we will rise. Just as Jesus stood outside the grave of Lazarus and ordered him to come forth, so will he do with his people. Paul summarizes what it will be like later in the same chapter when he says that “the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:52–53).

Our bodies will be a continuation of the body we steward now, but a glorified version. We will die in our current body, and this perishable, dishonorable, weak, natural body we seek to steward will rise imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual. And there will be no sickness and sorrow, no injuries and illness, no defect in our bodies that we need to steward with care. And there will be no temptation to indulge our appetites and laziness.

How good it will be. We will dwell in our resurrected bodies forever, in the presence of our incarnate and resurrected Lord. Until then, serve him with your body.



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