

Honoring Our Bodies

Scripture: Psalm 139:13-15; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Faith Link: We can care for our minds and bodies.¹

The theme of our worship this summer is Seeking God Together. We're exploring spiritual practices that can deepen and transform our relationship with God and with others. During the month of June, our focus has been on our inner lives. Praying, making time and room for God, and honoring our bodies all help us to experience God within us. They invite us to intentionally turn heart, mind, body, and spirit toward God. We can set aside time each day to connect with God. We can pay attention to our physical and spiritual needs and bring them to God.

Today's topic is honoring our bodies. We can care – we need to care – for our minds and bodies. Doing so will enhance our inner peace, our connection with God, and our relationships with each other.

I can't imagine hearing a statement like that in the church of my childhood. There the emphasis was completely on the biblical and spiritual. There was never any consideration of the physical, mental, and emotional parts of our personhood. I see the move to a wholistic approach to health – paying attention to all parts of who we are – as necessary and important.

But how do we talk about honoring our bodies? Conversations about our bodies and health can be uncomfortable or embarrassing. We'll talk about most physical illnesses and injuries pretty easily – colds, flus, broken bones, sore knees – but not all of them. Certain body parts and systems or certain physical characteristics, are not comfortable topics of conversation.

Attitudes continue to change, but for many of us it's still easier to talk about physical illness and health than about mental illness and health. I'm grateful that in this congregation we tend to be as open about our mental and emotional struggles as we are about our physical ones. Of course, some of us talk more about all aspects of our health than others do. And that's OK.

We live in a society that tells us a lot about our bodies. We're told how our bodies are supposed to look. There are hundreds of diet and eating plans available. Exercise equipment, promising quick results, is easily spotted in magazines, commercials, and ads. We've been given a lot of harmful messages about what we are "supposed" to look like or how we're "supposed" to care for our bodies. These harmful cultural messages may underscore a hidden, internal message that we are not enough.

Many people obsess about their physical nature. Some to the point where all that matters is being buff and beautiful. Others where all they see are flaws and ugliness. Still others appear to completely ignore most aspects of their health. How do we find a healthy balance? What does it mean to honor our bodies? How does this practice help us connect to God?

Today's scripture passages speak words of God's love to us. They counteract the words and images that bombard children, youth, and adults, telling us we aren't pretty enough, handsome enough, smart enough, or good enough. David's affirmation of God's creative work in Psalm 139 and Paul's letter to the believers in Corinth give a different perspective.

In Psalm 139, David affirms that he is "fearfully and wonderfully made" by God. God "knit" David together in his mother's womb—every organ, bone, muscle, vein, and artery. God wrote down all his days before they even existed. God was intimately involved in the creation of David's body. That involvement extends to each of us.

¹ The sermon is drawn from Week 4 of "Seeking God Together" from *Current*, a curriculum from MennoMedia, [Current - Menno Media](#).

We read in the first chapter of the Bible – in Genesis 1 – that humans were created in the image of God.² In some way we are a reflection of God. Realizing that we are created in the image of God, that we were formed by God and known by God from the very beginning, ought to make a difference in how we view our bodies. This spiritual understanding of our creation implies we are called to treat this physical body with honor and respect. There is a connection between body image and spiritual image.

Paul takes David's affirmation a step further. For Paul, the physical body is a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit, given to us by God. As followers of Jesus, we are no longer our own, but we belong to God. Our mind, heart, hands, feet—every part of us belongs to God. The body image here is of something holy, pure, and quite valuable. Paul challenges all believers, including us, to glorify God in the way we use and care for our bodies.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul uses a contrasting image.³ He refers to our bodies, not as temples, but as clay jars. Clay jars are crafted by the careful hands of a potter from a lump of cool, thick earth into something useful that can serve the needs of people...and of the creator. Once formed, shaped, fired, and cooled, the malleable substance becomes hard and brittle. Jars of clay are fragile and easily broken.

So are human bodies: useful, but full of vulnerability, susceptible to injury and even death. The vulnerability of our bodies testifies to the fragility of physical existence. However, for Paul, the function of fragility and expendability is not to produce despair at the human condition, but to produce joy at God's superabundant power.

Paul encourages his readers to not lose heart. Listen to his words: *So we aren't depressed. But even if our bodies are breaking down on the outside, the person that we are on the inside is being renewed every day. Our temporary minor problems are producing an eternal stockpile of glory for us that is beyond all comparison. We don't focus on the things that can be seen but on the things that can't be seen. The things that can be seen don't last, but the things that can't be seen are eternal.*⁴

Imagine a clay jar, hit, kicked, or dropped, but never breaking. The contents inside it provide a protective stability that overrides the container's fragility. Chips, cracks, and smudges may show visible evidence of abuse, but the jar isn't shattered. It retains its usefulness as a vessel.

The body is fragile and ordinary; the gospel, the good news, the spirit of God living within it are a treasure. The resurrection life of Christ is already at work in us, renewing us, and continuing even as we suffer. God who created us continues to recreate us even as we age and our bodies waste away.

Paul ends another of his letters, the first one to the Thessalonians, with a benediction that stresses the faithfulness of God. He also acknowledges our complexity as human beings. This is what he writes: *Now, may the God of peace himself cause you to be completely dedicated to him; and may your spirit, soul, and body be kept intact and blameless at our Lord Jesus Christ's coming. The one who is calling you is faithful and will do this.*⁵

We are a complex creation of interconnected parts all miraculously held together in this biological and chemical collection of organs, muscles and fluids. Each part of our being influences the others. We are more than the sum of our individual parts because within it all dwells the presence of our Creator.

What should amaze us daily is how well it all works – even when individual parts may hurt or get out of balance. Being whole means being aware of interconnected internal and external, physical and mental, spiritual and intellectual, mortal and immortal aspects of our being.

Our bodies are incredibly important. They're instruments for spreading the good news of Jesus in the world. We can take care of our bodies, but we should not do so out of a sense of imperfection. Rather, we care for and use our bodies because God says we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

Thanks be to God.

² Genesis 1:26-27

³ 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

⁴ 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, *Common English Bible*

⁵ 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, *Common English Bible*

As I thought and talked with other people about honoring our bodies this week, my mind was overwhelmed with experiences, questions, and issues related to this topic. I couldn't decide what to include and what to omit, so I stuck to body images in scripture and a general reflection on how all aspects of our being are interconnected.

Here's a partial list of what I thought about this week.

How does the medical knowledge we have about genetics, body chemistry, maternal health, and fetal development interact with the beautiful image of God knitting us together in our mother's womb?

How do the words "fearfully and wonderfully made" sound to someone whose bodies or minds make it difficult to navigate in the world?

What does the belief that God took on human form in the person of Jesus affect the way we think about our bodies, spirituality, and salvation?

How does honoring our bodies connect us to God? How do we use our bodies to honor God? How do we honor each other's bodies?

What does honoring our bodies mean to someone who is told that their choices about the way they dress and the way they move make them responsible for someone else's choice to do violence to their bodies?

What does honoring our bodies mean to someone who is told that their gender identity, sexual orientation, or other aspect of their identity condemns them to a life without God and the church?

How do tattoos, piercings, hair color, and fashion choices honor or dishonor the body?

How much should government dictate what we do with our bodies and how much should the church be involved in those decisions?

Are there any limits to how someone can use their bodies to express their authentic selves and still be Christian? If so, what are the limits?

During our discussion time this morning, I'd like to hear your reflections on the topic of honoring our bodies.

Let's begin with scripture. What scriptures related to the body speak to you?

Next, we'll get a bit more practical. What does it mean to you to honor your body? How does honoring your body help connect you to God? Or, how does your body hinder your connection with God?

What questions, experiences, and issues do you have related to the topic of honoring our bodies?