

How to Love God with your Body

Rich Nathan
February 6 & 7, 2021
Tune-Up
Romans 12:1

When we look at our bodies in the mirror, what do we see? Research tells us that women are much more critical of their appearances than men are. One study indicated that eight out of ten women are dissatisfied with their reflection in the mirror. People's body image is particularly hurt by social media.

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Struggling with our bodies

100-150 years ago, people would compare themselves maybe with another person in their village or community. Now folks are comparing themselves with the best looking people from the whole world – people who spend their entire lives doing nothing but focusing on their own looks.

College counselors say that the best thing that college students with body images problems could do would simply be to put down their phones.

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Photo

Of course, we learn at a very young age what the ideal body looks like in our society.

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Barbie photo

Have you ever wondered what Barbie would look like if she was adult-sized? If Barbie was a real adult woman, she would be 5'9" and have a neck twice the length of a normal human neck. She'd weigh 110 pounds – which is a pretty typical weight for a woman who is 5'9". Actually, it's only 76% of the recommended healthy weight for a 5'9" woman. Because Barbie would be so underweight, she wouldn't be able to menstruate. Her measurements, by the way, would be 39-18-33 – kind of like no person on the planet. On top of that, her feet would be so small that she wouldn't be able to walk. And that's the body image we reinforce for our daughters and granddaughters.

And for boys, action figures teach that real men ought to have bulging muscles all over their bodies. Take Batman –

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Batman doll pic

If he were a full-sized man, he'd have a 57" chest, a 30" waist and 27" biceps. Arnold Schwarzenegger –

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Arnold posing

Arnold at his prime only had 20" biceps. It's no wonder that by age 10 that 81% of American girls have dieted at least once. And before the pandemic, Americans spent over \$16 billion on non-necessary cosmetic surgery – liposuction, face lifts, breast augmentation, eye lid surgery. Plastic surgeons are performing tens of thousands of muscle implants for guys who want to look more ripped.

So, whenever a follower of Jesus sees a major cultural trend, like the majority of people being dissatisfied with their bodies – followers of Jesus should ask themselves: how should I think about this? Why are so many people so unhappy with the way they look? More than that, a follower of Jesus ought to always ask where is God in all of this? How does God want us to relate to our bodies?

We've been doing a New Year's series here at Vineyard Columbus titled "Tune Up". This series is taken from a verse in the gospels where Jesus tells us to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Today, I'm going to talk about that last phrase, "loving the Lord with all of our strength." I updated the language and titled my message, "How to Love God with your Body". Let's pray.

How do we love and worship God?

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Worshiping with our bodies

The Apostle Paul tells us that the way we love and worship God is by giving God our bodies.

Slide Romans 12:1

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

Paul makes our worship and love of God practical by saying that we need to give God our bodies. The Bible regularly tells us that God doesn't just want our hearts. We can deceive ourselves regarding how much of our hearts we have given to the Lord. Someone may say, "I don't give Jesus very much of my money, but he has my heart." To

have your heart, Jesus also has to have your money because Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” If your money isn’t going into the offering basket or – in our case, being given online – then you haven’t given the Lord your heart at all.

I’m going to use a little bit of pastoral imagination here combining what Jesus said about our money and what Paul says here in Romans 12 about our bodies, we might say: where your body is, there will your heart be also. If you haven’t given God your body, you haven’t given him your heart! I’ve often thought during an altar call that rather than calling people to give their hearts to Jesus, what I ought to do is invite people to come forward and give their bodies to Jesus. Don’t just give Jesus your heart, give him your body. Because where your body is, there will your heart be also! If you want to make loving God practical, give him your body.

Why your body? Why does Paul say to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, this is your true and proper worship? What is the connection between worship and your body? Another way to think about this is to realize that for a Christian, we spend our entire lives in a Temple.

Slide 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

¹⁹ 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.

The building where the church meets is NOT the house of God. If you are a follower of Jesus – I know everyone listening to me right now is not a follower of Jesus – but if you consider yourself to be a follower of Jesus then you, Christian, are individually and we together collectively are the house of God. In other words, rather than us going to the house of God when we travel to Cooper Road or East or Sawmill or wherever, the house of God is getting in our cars and traveling to a church building. You, Christian, your body is your meeting place with God. You, Christian, are the holy of holies on the earth. You are the walking, talking, breathing Temple of God.

In light of being God’s Temple, the Apostle Paul concludes in 1 Corinthians 6 this way:

Slide 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

¹⁹ 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.

All of life is worship because we’re always in a Temple. Let me work this out for you. How do we love God with our bodies?

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Love God by taking care of your body

You know, one of the most crowded places during the pandemic was Home Depot and Lowe's. People with nothing to do decided, "I'm going to fix up my house." The home improvement projects that we've been neglecting for years, now that I'm home, I'm going to do those projects. Now we don't see anybody buying tools at Home Depot to destroy a home. Yet we're constantly doing things that destroy the Holy Spirit's home. Most of us need to do some home improvement on the Holy Spirit's home – on our bodies.

We can love God practically by feeding our bodies.

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Love God by feeding your body

Think about how we market food in our culture. Easy! We have so many more important things to do than cook a meal. Cheap! We have more important things to spend money on than what we eat. Tasty! You deserve something that tastes good. Low cal! You want to look good in those jeans. Compare how we market food in our culture to what the Apostle Paul says in:

Slide 1 Corinthians 10:31

³¹ So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Have you ever seen any restaurant or any grocery store market their food by saying, "Here's food you can eat to the glory of God!" For some of us, loving God with what we eat may mean eating less sugar and salt or eating less fast food, consuming more whole food, healthy food. Or actually eating food cooked at home so we know what we're eating. For others of us, loving God with what we eat may mean less focus on every teaspoon that goes into our mouths. Some of us think so much about what goes into our mouths, so much about our diet, that our eating has become an idol for us. Our obsession with our food is not eating to the glory of God.

We can also love God by exercising our bodies.

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Love God by exercising your body

One of the most God-honoring things some of us could do is to move more! Get off the sofa and walk every evening. Start moving your body – the Temple of the Holy Spirit. For others, worshiping God with our bodies means we need to cut back on our exercise. Let's be honest, most of us are not exercising to honor God or to stay healthy for him. In fact, if I'm really honest, I rarely think about God when I'm exercising on the treadmill

– except when I think: “God, I hate this!” Often, we are exercising out of vanity – to look good in our swimsuits this summer. Or to get praise for how good we look.

We live in a culture that is body-obsessed. We live in a culture that pushes us to worship our bodies. That’s why every gym has a thousand mirrors and pictures of gorgeous bodies all over the place. We live in a culture that worships our bodies as a god. And what we need is countercultural messaging that says, “Don’t worship your body as God, worship God with your body!”

We can love God feeding our bodies. We can love God by exercising our bodies. And we can love God by resting our bodies.

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Love God by resting your body

One of the most God-honoring things some of us could do is to go to bed earlier and get more sleep. We live in a culture of workaholics. The message of our culture is to always produce more, work more, accomplish more! Self-worth is determined by how much work we do. For some of us, the best way we can acknowledge that Jesus is Lord of our bodies is by closing our laptops after 8:00 at night. Rest is a gift from God. It’s a way to acknowledge that the Lord is in control and the Lord is our provider!

As the psalmist says,

Slide Psalm 127:1-2

¹ Unless the LORD builds the house,
the builders labor in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the guards stand watch in vain.
² In vain you rise early
and stay up late,
toiling for food to eat—
for he grants sleep to those he loves.

For others, the most God-honoring thing we can do is to get out of bed. God does command us to work. In the Old Testament, the same word for work is also translated “worship”. Our work can be worship to God.

We can love God by feeding our bodies, by exercising our bodies, by resting our bodies, and, finally by protecting our bodies.

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Love God by protecting your body

In the midst of the pandemic, one of the questions that has arisen is whether we as followers of Jesus ought to get vaccinated once it becomes available for our age group. I'm not qualified to give you medical advice. I'm not an MD. But what I want to do is let you in on how I as a pastor think about getting vaccinated to protect myself and those I love from getting COVID.

Marlene and I are planning to get vaccinated as soon as we can. As followers of Jesus, a way that we love God with our bodies is to protect our bodies and also to protect those of our neighbors who because of their medical conditions may be unable to get vaccinated. We believe that is our Christian responsibility. As Jesus said, "To love our neighbors as ourselves" which means trying to protect our neighbors by not spreading COVID to them. If we don't get vaccinated and get it, we could spread that to our neighbor.

I know there's lots of skepticism regarding the safety of the vaccine and lots of different legitimate questions that people have about getting vaccinated. It's good to ask questions! Some are wondering if the vaccine is more harmful than helpful—whether the vaccine changes your DNA, or if a vaccine like the COVID vaccine causes autism, or other serious medical side effect. Others of you are wondering if you can trust the scientists and medical experts and pharmaceutical companies and the government agencies that produce vaccines. And some of you are wondering, "Should I take this vaccine? Is it really safe?"

I want to encourage you to listen to an interview that Eric Pickerill did on this week's podcast

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The In Between logo

episode with two experts. Dr. Darrell Gray is a doctor here in Columbus at OSU's Wexner Medical Center, who is also a member of this church. He went to Med School at Howard University and did his undergraduate work at the great Morehouse College, the alma mater of our own Dr. Charles Montgomery. He is an advocate for public health and policy, in particular for African Americans and minorities who have often felt neglected or used by the medical system.

Also on the podcast was Dr. Craig Story, a professor of Biology at Gordon, a great Christian college. He did his post doc training at MIT and Harvard where he worked on virus immunology. He addresses technical questions about the effectiveness or dangers of the COVID vaccines in language that a regular person like you and me can understand. So, listen to that interview.

Add links to the chat

Some of you have asked, “What guidance does Vineyard provide on the COVID vaccine?” Vineyard Columbus has put together a brief FAQ on some of the common questions that people have, and the pastoral guidance that we are giving in response to questions. You will see a link for that in the chat, and can find it on our social media. Bottom line, check with your doctor. Check the FAQ and podcast that I dropped into the chat. Listen to the medical experts like Dr. Gray and Dr. Story. Don’t rely on random articles from who knows who. Love God by caring for your body.

And, finally,

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Love God by worshiping with your body

Let’s read Romans 12:1 again:

Slide Romans 12:1

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

You know, in the Bible, worship is not just words! God’s people in both the Old and New Testaments used their bodies to worship. What we do with our bodies matters in everything. Here, I want to focus on the posture of your body. Our body posture matters. When I asked Marlene to marry me, I literally got down on one knee and looked up into her beautiful blue eyes and I said, “Marlene, will you marry me?” I didn’t stand there with my arms folded. “Yo, are you interested in hooking up with me?” No, I took on the posture of a beggar. When my granddaughter was little and we’d walk together and she got tired, she would stand and lift her arms up. Her body communicated, “Pick me up!” Body posture matters. And body posture matters when we worship God. I know that many of you have come from churches where no one expressed worship with their bodies. The only posture anyone ever had was to sit in the pew with your arms folded across your chest as you mumbled the first, third and fifth verses of the hymn. It’s especially difficult for us to use our bodies at home. You may be sitting in a soft chair right now with a bowl of cereal on your stomach.

In the Bible, people use their whole bodies to worship. In fact, the words that the Bible uses for worship involve the body. **Shachad** in the Old Testament is translated worship and literally means to bow, to bend low. Another word for worship is **yadah** which literally means to stretch out the hands. **Proskuneo** literally means to draw near so as to kiss. In the Bible, we see people using their bodies to worship God. People knelt down before the Lord in their worship.

Slide Psalm 95:6

⁶ Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;

They clapped and they lifted their hands.

Slide Psalm 63:3-4

³ Because your love is better than life,
my lips will glorify you.

⁴ I will praise you as long as I live,
and in your name I will lift up my hands.

Men are specifically told to lift their hands to God in worship. This is not just a female thing because women are “so emotional”. The Apostle Paul tells men specifically that we should hold up our hands when we worship.

Slide 1 Timothy 2:8

⁸ Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.

Let me close with a couple of thoughts. Why does the Scripture tell us to worship the Lord by using our bodies? Two reasons.

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Because our bodies communicate our feelings

Communication specialists say that the majority of our communication is nonverbal. It's not the content of our words, but our body posture and our tone that makes up most of our communication. When you kneel down, if you're able to physically, when you lift your hands – you are communicating the way you feel to God. And our body posture doesn't just communicate our feelings, it changes our feelings.

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Because our bodies change our feelings

I mentioned earlier in the talk Jesus' statement that where your money is, there your heart will be also. In other words, if you want to care about some cause, some institution, if you want to care about the church – if you give money somewhere, you will start caring about that place. Your heart follows your money, Jesus says. The same is true with your body. What you give your body to will change the feelings of your heart.

When I wrap my arms around Marlene and kiss her, my feelings of love increase. When I hug one of my kids or my grandkids, my feelings of love increase. So, if I have a cold heart towards God, I need to look at my body posture in worship. Am I standing with my arms folded, mumbling the words of a song? Am I looking down at my phone? You know what the easiest way to heat up your heart towards the Lord, brothers and

sisters? It is to engage your body. Raise your hands. Get down on your knees. Love the Lord with your whole body!

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Romans 12:1

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