

GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

January 10, 2016



Discussion Guide

Chin-Up Living

Connecting:

45 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a way of connecting with one another so that you might partner in the work God is doing in your lives.)

- In what ways did God move in your life this week? In what ways did you respond to him?
- What was your biggest challenge this week? In what ways, if any, did you invite God into this challenge?
- How honest have you been with us? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they state they have held back.)

Getting Started:

10 minutes

- Would you say that your body is important? In what ways?

Diving Into the Text:

60 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read 1 Corinthians 6.12-20 aloud. Pause. Read the text once more, seeking to imagine yourself as a member of the Corinthian congregation.
- According to Paul, in what ways does the body matter for the journey of faith? Seek to discover as many ways as possible in the text.
- What do you feel or experience as a member of the Corinthian congregation when you hear Paul's words? Could you elaborate?
- In what ways does Paul's theology of the body differ from that of the Corinthians?
- How might you describe the average believer's theology of the body? What are the outcomes of this theology of the body? Would you say that today we are closer in comparison to the Corinthians or to Paul?
- How might you describe your own understanding of the body? What impact, if any, does this understanding have on how you live out your faith?

- What might it look like to live out your faith as if our bodies really mattered?
- What would it take to come to believe that our bodies truly matter on the journey of faith? What, if anything, keeps you from taking steps to believe this yourself?
- Consider closing your time together by offering your bodies to God, bodies which matter to him.

Context and Background

Body

The concept of the body is an important issue. In ancient Greek thought, the term "body" was originally used to refer to a corpse but gradually it came to be identified with the physical body. Beginning with Plato (5th Century B.C.) and the stream of philosophy which came after him, the Greeks came to refer to soul and body as two distinct realities. According to Plato, the soul was the true essence of a person trapped within a physical body. While the soul gave life to the body, its truest form was found outside the body, a reality which could only be achieved through the death of the body. This Platonic concept of body and soul as separate and distinct with the soul being the truest essence of a person is often referred to as dualism, and this form of thinking has heavily influenced Western thought and its understanding of Scripture. However, in Scripture, no such dualistic thought can be found.

The Hebrew people did not understand the body to be separate from the soul. Rather, they understood the body to represent the person in a unified way. While both soul and body were realities, God had created both as a unified whole. Thus, when the Old Testament refers to the body, it has no single manner for doing so, and almost always references the person as a whole (Leviticus 15.11; 16.4; 19.28).

The authors of the New Testament carry this same thinking forward. While some authors use the term body to refer to the physical body, particularly the body of Christ (Mark 5.29; John 19.38; James 2.16; 1 Corinthians 5.3; 7.34), the intention is never to identify the body as a separate reality, but body is used to refer to the person as a whole (Romans 6.12; 12.1). In 1 Thessalonians 5.23, Paul does seem to speak of the body in a tri-partite manner, but, once again, his emphasis seems to be on the totality of the person rather than to identify distinct aspects of a person. This is not to deny

that there are distinct realities such as soul or body. However, God has created people in such a way that the spiritual and material realities have become fused into the single human person. Both are needed to be fully human. As it is impossible to imagine being human apart from the spiritual reality of a soul, it is equally impossible to imagine functioning as a human without a body. Both were meant to co-exist from the beginning, for all time, a point which the resurrection dramatically underscores (1 Corinthians 15).

Modern thinking, heavily influenced by Platonic dualism, has a tendency to discount the body, or at a minimum to undermine its importance on the journey of faith. This tendency, at best, leads one to truncate faith to a matter of doctrine, and at worst, to live an antinomian (free from any laws or morals) life. However, the body is important, an integral component in how we relate to God and an object worthy of God's redemptive movement (1 Corinthians 6.12-20). Therefore, appropriate care is to be given to our bodies, because the care we give or do not give to our bodies influences our journey of faith.

The Text

1 Corinthians 6.12-20: *The body matters*

Paul's letter to the Corinthians is an attempt to unify a divided church. Paul had started the church in Corinth (Acts 18). However, after his departure, the church rapidly fractured into a number of camps with differing theological nuances which led to widely divergent practices, many contrary to the Gospel. In his letter, Paul takes up individual issues and addresses them, beginning with an assertion of proper theology and then moving to practices based upon this theology. While several themes can be traced throughout the letter, one important theme is that of the human body, an issue which dominates the topics covered in chapters 5-10. While Paul deals with issues such as incest, prostitution, marriage, idol feasts, and freedom in Christ, each of these issues stems from a wrong-headed understanding of the body. The Corinthians, as Greeks, seem to have held to some form of Platonic dualism (1 Corinthians 6.12-13; 10.23); that is, in their mind, the spiritual was real and the body was false or unimportant. Therefore, what one did with the body became a mute issue, or so they thought. However, this thinking had led them into dangerous territory and libertine life-practices. Therefore, Paul argues vehemently for

the importance of the body, using the resurrected body of Jesus as one of his chief arguments (1 Corinthians 6.12-14; 10.31; 15.35-58). Because each of the issues Paul addresses in these chapters stems from a wrong-headed understanding of the human body, any interpretation of these passages must seek to uncover the deeper truths about the human person within which Paul's instructions are grounded.

In chapter 6, while dealing with members of the congregation who are visiting prostitutes, Paul's deeper understanding of the human person is most transparent. Paul begins by quoting a Corinthian slogan about freedom. It is easy to hear Paul saying something quite similar within a particular context. However, this slogan about freedom in Christ has been misused. Paul states that freedom in Christ does have boundaries. The unbounded understanding of freedom to which the Corinthians hold rests upon a second slogan Paul quotes regarding the stomach and food. At first, this slogan seems to be out of place. However, upon deeper consideration, one can recognize Paul's point in quoting the slogan. The Corinthians believe that all material things, including the body, will be done away with and are therefore not important for the journey of faith. This is a form of dualistic thought which separates the physical from the spiritual, deeming the spiritual as the highest or best reality. While Paul does not engage the Corinthians concerning their understanding of the material world (he saves this for the Romans in Romans 8), he is quick to note that that God is not going to do away with the body. What one does with the body is important because the body was made for the Lord and the Lord for the body. Paul's point is simply this: It is impossible to relate to God without a body. From the beginning, God had created the body and somehow meant that it be integral to the human-divine relationship. This is why, Paul argues, God is going to resurrect the body physically, just as he did with Jesus.

Paul's assertion that the human-divine relationship requires a physical body is teased out in the following verses. First, the human body is important because in a mysterious way has become united with the physical body of Christ, each believer becoming an actual member of his body, his physical presence in the world. This union of physical bodies implies that the bodily actions of the believers are in fact the bodily actions of Christ himself! Therefore, bodily actions which are not congruent with the life of Christ are to be avoided. Second, Paul notes

that while united bodily with Christ, believers retain a unique identity. However, God has chosen to physically dwell within the body of the believer, the body becoming a temple. In the ancient world, temples were the property of the gods, not the followers of that god. In the same way, Paul argues that if the body is a temple, then it belongs to God. However, Paul does not simply parrot pagan theology here. He notes that this ownership is based upon the redemptive action of God in Christ. What God has done in and through Christ extends his reign (Kingdom) over the body and not just the soul. Therefore, what the believer does with his body matters.

Real life with Blake:

It is easy to see that our culture values the human body, at least a particular version of it, a version which is young, beautiful, and unblemished. It is just as easy to see in the Church today that the followers of Christ do not value the body, unless that is on culture's terms. What matters most are spiritual things, which in the Evangelical context is usually right doctrine, doctrines which ironically cover just about everything except the body. Simply put, we have no theology of the body, and it shows, sometimes literally. Without a theology of the body, we are free to use or abuse our bodies as we see fit. The results range from obesity to sexual immorality to addiction. The first, which I personally have experienced, is typically ignored, and the latter two are often railed against, but with little effect because they rest upon a theology of the body. So do we need a theology of the body? Personally, I have found that it is of the utmost necessity.

In my own struggle with my weight, I found it was impossible to experience any freedom from food, stress, and overwork and their devastating effects upon my body. I knew, or at least culture told me, I should care for my body. . .so I could be perfect and beautiful. But, let's face it. I am anything but the next Adonis, or Arnold, or Brad Pitt. So, if you can't make the grade, why try? Culture's understanding of the body left me a slave to food, to lack of sleep, to an outright abuse of my body, and it was killing me. Literally. High cholesterol. Chest pains. Mood swings. Etc.

Slowly, I began to recognize that my body mattered, really mattered without me being beautiful or the next cover model for a power-lifting magazine. I realized that God had given me a body because it mattered for the journey of faith. God gave me a body because he intended me to have one, forever. God gave me a body, because apart from my body I could not relate to him. God gave me a body because it is in and through

my body that God relates to the world. It was only when I realized my body mattered that I began to find freedom, because suddenly it was clear. What I did with my body mattered.

Real life with you:

Does it matter what we do with our bodies? On some level, most of us would say, "Yes." But, why? Why do our bodies matter? At this point, most of us are left speechless. Some of us might mumble something about being healthy and living longer. Others of us might secretly think about what it might be like to be young, beautiful, and unblemished. But, really, beyond this, we don't have much, and it shows. Apart from an understanding of our bodies mattering, we are free to use and abuse our bodies as we see fit, and we see fit. Our bodies bear the marks and scars of over-eating, stress, over-work, lack of sleep, addiction, and the like. We are literally killing our bodies, and we don't think twice about it, because our bodies don't really matter. But what if our bodies mattered, really mattered? Well. . .that would change everything, but they don't. Or, do they? According to Paul, our bodies matter. In fact, our bodies are of the utmost importance for the journey of faith, because it is impossible to have a relationship with God apart from having a body. And, the nature of our faith relationship with God dramatically ups the ante on how we use our bodies. We don't have to be Adonis or even Arnold, but what we do with our bodies is extremely important. So, what might it look like to live as if our bodies mattered, really mattered for the faith journey? How might we even get started in that direction? Perhaps we might begin by offering God our bodies, not just our hearts. What might it look like to surrender your physical body to God? One possible way it might look is to lay on the floor and starting with your toes, work your way up your body offering God every limb and muscle, not just to do with as he pleases but because your body is integral to your relationship with him.



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