



TIME OF GRACE®

A Fresh Start: For Your Body

Study Notes

Summary

“I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.” Billions of Christians have confessed these famous words from the Apostles’ Creed, admitting that God is the Creator and we are part of his creation. Yet many Christians forget this truth when it comes to their own bodies, ignoring the Creator’s guidelines as they overwork, overeat, and underestimate the necessity of rest. This message takes us back to the beginning, to physical life as God intended, and reminds us of the Father who gave us life and wants only what is best for his kids. In addition, it reminds us of the “image of God” that we have through Jesus, a spiritual reality that gives even our bodies peace and rest.

- **Proverbs 23:20,21:** ²⁰ Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, ²¹ for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags.
- **Genesis 1:27:** So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
- You were _____.
- 3 Spiritual Enemies to Your Physical Health:
 1. The _____.
 2. The _____.
 3. The _____.
- **Genesis 1:27:** So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
- You were (re)created _____.
- **Ephesians 4:21-24:** When you heard about Christ . . . You were taught . . . to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.
- Therefore, you can _____ and _____.

Points to Ponder

1. In the past, what connections have you seen between your physical fitness and your spiritual life? How did today's message adjust your view of your body?
2. Study Deuteronomy 5:12-15. How was God's salvation the key to resting from hard labor? How does Jesus' salvation of our souls save us from "needing" to work 24/7?
3. Name one change you would like to make in your physical life. Share that goal with another Christian who can remind you who you are because of Jesus.

Homework for Next Week

Read Matthew 6:19-33.

"The best news of the Christian gospel is that the supremely glorious Creator of the universe has acted in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection to remove every obstacle between us and himself so that we may find everlasting joy in seeing and savoring his infinite beauty."

—John Piper

Time of Grace Ministry
A Fresh Start: For Your Body
Proverbs 23:10, Genesis 1:27, Ephesians 4:23-24
January 12, 2020

Pastor Mike Novotny

Last summer, a guy told me I was getting fatter. True story! I was tailgating with my family at a Milwaukee Brewer's game and I had a beer in one hand and a brat in the other, which did not help the conversation that was about to happen.

Did you know back in 1910, the average American slept for nine hours every single night? But fast forward to 2013 with the invention of electricity and then the television set and then the internet and then the smartphone, that number has plummeted to 6.8 hours each night. Leading the Center for Disease Control in 2014, they say that sleep deprivation is a public health crisis in our country. Back in the 1970s, there were only a couple of fast food restaurants on the streets of America but since that time, the number has doubled. Which wouldn't be that terrible except the number of obese Americans has doubled with it, if not tripled, if not - according to some studies - quadrupled in our country.

I should take better care of my body, I should eat better, I should, you know, renew that gym membership but today, I want to ask you an interesting spiritual question: Should you? I mean, if you're not just an average American but if you're a devout Christian, should you honestly care that much about your body? The Bible says so little about it. In fact, in Colossians 2, the Bible specifically says we shouldn't judge one another by what we eat or drink. And some of you experienced Christians might say, but wait, wait, wait - doesn't the Bible say that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit? Isn't there a passage that says we should honor God with our bodies? And the answer is yes and yes, but do you know what that passage is about? Both those ideas come from 1 Corinthians 6, which is a chapter about prostitution. So don't take your body and unite it with a prostitute because it's a temple of the Holy Spirit. You were bought at a price so honor God with your body. It's not about calories and sleep and carbs and sugar; it was about sex. So back to the question - should you care?

As most Americans look in the mirror and feel guilty, should you really set resolutions or should you focus your efforts on spiritual things; the things that last forever? You know, I was about to give up my quest that the Bible said much about your body but then I stumbled on something interesting; something that God cares very much about and I have a feeling you care a lot about, too. It happened when I searched for every use of the word "glutton" or "gluttony" in the Bible. There weren't many - I think only seven total - but look what I found in Proverbs 23. God said, "Don't join with those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat for drunkards and gluttons become poor and drowsiness clothes them in rags." You know, God says if all your friends are drinking too much wine and they're going to the all you can eat meat buffet, don't join them. And did you catch his reason why? Because you get drowsy. You might be so tired, so sapped from energy, that you won't do work and you'll end up poor and in rags and that idea

struck me. Like God might not care a whole lot about your height or your weight or how many rolls, you know, flip over your belt but he does care very much about the work that we do.

And that's why today I want to talk about how we can honor God with our bodies. I want to talk about how to maximize our physical lives so we are fully charged to make every effort to love people and to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. But before I dive in, I've got to say one quick thing because I know how many of you feel about your bodies and about fitness: Not good. About a year ago, I preached on physical fitness and, you know, kind of balancing and honoring God with our bodies and I remember those conversations because of the women I talked to. And God opened my eyes to see that we live in a culture that makes this really hard for both men and women but especially women. Like the standard is just so unattainable, it's so airbrushed and unrealistic, it's so unreachable for 99 percent of women that they just learn their whole lives not to be satisfied with what they see in the mirrors. And if that's you and you kind of feel nervous about this entire topic, let me just tell you something really important right up front: This is a church and not a gym. And I'm a pastor and not a physical trainer. And we don't have a scale and there's not a tape measure and we're not just going to set goals and see if we have the willpower to get them. Instead, we get to approach this from a beautifully Christian point of view; one that's filled with grace and compassion and forgiveness and truth.

Look what Genesis 1:27 says: "So God created mankind in his own image; in the image of God he created them, male and female, he created them." I know it's not rocket science but if you're taking notes in your program, I'd love for you to write that down: The simple fact that you were created. God made you. That's why Michael Scott puked at The Office 5K. Any Office fans in church today? One of the greatest shows on television, right? Michael Scott, if you don't know, is kind of the clueless, bumbling boss from The Office and he decides to start a 5K race for all of his employees. He titles the race - I wrote this down - "The Michael Scott Dunder Mifflin Scranton Meredith Palmer Memorial Celebrity Rabies Awareness Pro-Am Fun Run Race For The Cure." And Michael really wants to win and he knows nothing about running but he's heard this rumor that the best runners carb load and so he does. He has his right-hand man, Dwight, get him a massive box of fettuccini alfredo. He puts it down right before the race. And you're grimacing because you know how this is going to go, right? He's feeling strong for the first half a mile and then things go very, very terribly and the fettuccini alfredo makes a repeat appearance in the show.

Now tell me - why did Michael Scott get sick? Because he was created. Because he didn't get to personally decide how his body would process that pasta. There were rules, there were limits, there was a way the creator made his body to work and he would either keep those rules to his benefit or he would break them to his detriment.

So how about you? The same thing that was true for Adam and Eve and Michael Scott is true for every Christian - in fact, every person today. God made you and he made your body to function in a certain way. I love how author David Murray put it. He said, "Show me how you sleep and I'll show you your theology." I like that quote. He says don't just come to church on a Sunday and say I believe in God the Father Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth. No, he says, show

me how much you sleep and I'll show you what you really believe; whether you believe he is the maker or you are. And when we honor the general sciences of what biology has taught us about the way our bodies work best, we express our faith. To pick up on Paul's language, we work out our salvation; our belief in God.

So if you remember that in the year to come, what would be different? Based on what you've heard of how our bodies work best, what would you change? If you have a passion to love people with all of your strength, all of your energy, all the way that your mind was intended to work, what would be different about your sleep or exercise or diet in the year to come? You might download the app, you might see if you're taking strides, you might find an accountability partner and get a gym membership. You might read a book, download a podcast, but I encourage you to do something; to honor God with your body. Not for the sake of looking like you did back in the days when you fit into the wedding dress or you were your strongest in high school but for the sake of good work that leads to actual love. The Bible says that the best runners take care of their body and you were called to run the race of faith. The strongest soldiers, they hydrate well before a long day on patrol and you were called to fight the good fight. The Bible says that hardworking farmers will eat a hearty breakfast before a long day of harvesting in the fields and you have been called to sow the seeds of the gospel and to bring back a harvest. So honor God with your body, remember you were created with rules, and serve God as you keep them.

So why don't you? I have a feeling most of the things that I've said so far in this message are not shocking news to most of you. You know, when I said you should sleep about eight hours a night, no one raised their hand and said, "What? I've never heard of that before." "Two thousand calories? Where did you get that data?" You know, we kind of know the general rules, right? So why is that so hard? Why did I throw like a church hissy fit at the start of this message and say that I don't like it that I have to take care of my body? Why, even for Christians who believe in this kind of stuff, why is this such a challenge for us? And the Bible's answer to that question, in my mind, is fascinating. You know, where the outside world might say it's just willpower, right? You've got to toughen up, you've got to make a choice, you've got to try harder, you've got to set a goal, you've got to work for it. The Bible actually has a ton of compassion on us and says, no, no, no; it's actually much, much more complicated and difficult than that. The Bible says that there are actually three, not physical, but spiritual enemies that fight against us making good changes in our physical health. If you're taking notes, I'd love for you to write these down as we think about the battle we're going to fight in the upcoming year. The Bible says the first enemy to your physical health is the flesh. Now that's kind of a loaded term in the Bible. "Flesh" doesn't mean like flesh and blood. "Flesh" is Bible slang for the part of our heart that frankly doesn't care what God wants. Unless you're Jesus Christ, because the human race fell into sin, we were born with a part of our heart that's hostile to God. It's not that it's ignorant about what God wants; it just doesn't care. And so every day when you know that you should turn off another episode of *The Office* and actually sleep eight hours, the flesh says, "But I don't care and I want to." When you're going out with friends and one slice of pizza should be enough, the flesh says, "But I want six." When your friends are ordering another round of drinks and you say, "You know what? I should really not have that; I should go home and sleep well, otherwise I'm going to skip my workout in the morning," the flesh says, "No. I

want to stay and I want to have fun right now." But the flesh will sacrifice tomorrow's obedience on the altar of today's happiness.

If that wasn't enough of a battle, here's enemy number two; what the Bible calls the world. Flip a few pages ahead from Genesis 1 and you'll find out that things got a little bit messy and complicated in our world. Ever since sin came into the world, it wasn't just spiritual things that got hard but physical things did, too. And as I think about our church family, as I think about Christians who are trying to make a physical change, you know, how many battles do we have to fight because there are things in the world that are just out of our control?

A couple days ago, I was talking to a guy who was like a ripped 240 college football player. Serious about his fitness, incredible habits, and one day he's sitting, stopped in his car, bam - he gets train wrecked by like a wrecker towing a car. He smashed his bones, he tears his labrum, all the cartilage in his knee explodes and now he can't run or walk at a brisk pace for more than five minutes at a time and it's not his fault. I think of those of you who battle autoimmune disorders and you would love it if your body felt healthy enough to worship but it's really complicated and it's really, really hard. I think of those of you who battle depression that you didn't choose and you set your alarm to get up in the morning but it's hard just to get out of bed, much less make it to the gym, and that's not your fault. I think of those of you who have been through sports injuries where you were trying to exercise your body and then your ankle turned and your knee blew out and something happened with your back and you didn't choose it but it makes this really hard. I think of those of you who battle social anxiety and you would love to go to the gym and have accountability but you just get so anxious, it's hard to take that simple step. I think of all the things that can happen to you or happen in the world around us that makes this really challenging. It's not just a simple matter of self-will; there are a thousand things out of our control.

And if that weren't enough from the world, I think about most of the people of this world. You know, the thousand people you see in the next seven days, how many of them will care that much about your long-term physical fitness? You think the fast food owners will? The managers? I mean, you could go to a bar and if you're having too much to drink, they won't serve you. But if you think you're overweight and you go through the drive through, they'll pass you the chocolate shake? Like, they will kill their customers as long as they can make a dollar. And you might have a grandma who would do the same. She honestly doesn't care about the fact that God created you with rules; she feels so good when you eat three slices of her pie. And people will push food at you and they say they love you, but they don't love your long-term health and they don't love the good works that God has planned in advance for you to do. Think about the challenge we face! Like who's going to fight for us? And there's so much fighting against us.

And if that weren't enough, there's a third blank on the screen. It's not just the flesh and the world; it's also the devil. And maybe you've never thought about the devil's effect on your physical health but Jesus called the devil the Father of Lies. And you know one of the biggest lies he tells you about your body? That you don't have time to take care of it. I was just thinking practically about our church family - what gets in the way of us like sleeping more and

exercising more and coming home and taking the time to cook good meals? And I think the common denominator I saw among us was time. And I thought about why we don't have time and, honestly, call me crazy and spiritual, but I think it's because the devil has lied to us and said that we have to be busy. Like if we want to be someone, if we want to make it, if we want to have like a life worth living, we have to do what other people do. You know, and so those people are like running their kids to this sport and this activity and then the next one and the next one. I mean, if our children aren't good at singing and piano, if they don't know Spanish, if they don't go through these lessons and join this club, like what kind of parents would we be? And so we run them through the drive through. We don't have time to even come home, much less read the Bible, much less get to bed on time, and why don't we change it? Well, because we wouldn't be good people. That's a lie. And you're young and the devil tells you, like, if you want to make an impact, if you want to change the world, if you want to be what you dreamed to be - because that's what we tell young people - then you've got to work for it. I mean, you better bring your work home, you better respond to the emails fast, you better text just like that, you better be the first one in and the last one out. So if you want to be someone, you've got to work. You don't have time for that.

But that's a lie. And so, we imitate what all the other families are doing and guess what we become? The average American; overworked, overeating, under-sleeping, under-exercising because we swallowed the lie that we need to live like those people. Let me take you back to Genesis 1: "So God created mankind in his own image. In the image of God, he created them, male and female, he created them." Do you know what that means? In the beginning, God didn't just make you with your body and all of its parts and all the ways that it works. God created people in his image. I want you to write this down and then I'll explain it. You were actually recreated in God's image. Look what we find in the apostle Paul, Ephesians 4. He says, "When you heard about Christ," like when you heard the gospel, believed it, "you were taught to put on the new self, created to be like God," there's the image part, "in true righteousness and holiness."

What does it mean to be in God's image? To resemble him; to be like him? Paul says it means to be truly righteous and holy. It means that when you look in the mirror, you should see way, way, way more than wrinkles and rolls; you should see someone who is actually like God. Someone, if God were looking over your shoulder, he wouldn't be counting your sins. He would say, "Zero! That's how many sins I see." But because of Jesus, I've made you holy, sinless, righteous, pure. I mean, let's ditch the American, sappy, pasted-on, self-esteem movement: I'm strong and beautiful. No, let me look in the mirror and see someone who's recreated by the blood of Jesus into the image of God. Someone who is righteous and holy and redeemed and enough because that's what Jesus did for you. He came into this world not just as a floating spirit to give you some vague spirituality but he came in flesh and blood, born of the Virgin Mary, and he took his flesh and blood body and he gave it for you on a cross. And on Easter morning, he rose from the grave. Why? So that we could become like God. So that we could have such confidence to know that we're not far from him but he is our heavenly Father. That we don't have to live with guilt and shame and low self-esteem; we are sons and daughters of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. That we don't have to go through today and try to fight the good fight for our fitness or our faith by ourselves; but the Holy Spirit himself lives in our hearts.

Some Christians miss the point. They say my body's a temple of the Holy Spirit and they think about the temple. But maybe today God wants you to think about the Spirit. Yah, God wants you to take care of this, but guess who's dwelling within you to help you? The Holy Spirit himself. And do you know the implication of this? Like if you actually believe God's spirit was within you, you were saved by Jesus, part of God's family, do you know the connection that has to do with this week and your food?

Before I say "Amen," let me tell you two things that this means for your daily life; it's our last fill in the blank. Therefore, you can rule and you can rest. If you share the image of God, this week you can rule and you can rest. Read all of Genesis 1 after church today and it will say "In the beginning, God created mankind in his image and he said, 'Now rule. Rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the beasts of the field.'" And now call this a stretch, but I thought that was pretty fitting. You get to rule. Lead. Govern. Decide with the authority of God over the fish and the chickens and the cattle. All the food that ends up on your plate; you get to rule over it. And for me, this is really, really empowering. You see, you and I are not slaves to food, right? It's not like we've been kidnapped and we're wrapped up and we just have to go through McDonald's because we're in the backseat. No, God called you to grab the wheel and to direct the course of our physical life. When my wife comes home, I'm not bound up to the chair and the sea salt caramels are throwing themselves in my mouth like, "I'm sorry, honey! I couldn't help it!" No, I have been called and given authority by God himself to make a decision. So I want to tell you Christians, that is a lifeless bag of chips and you are a child of God. That's a whole bunch of sugar with a little bit of water on top. But you have the spirit of God and there is no physical craving that is bigger than the authority that God has given you to rule so rule over it. You tell your phone what room of the house it stays in. You tell your body and your Netflix account when you're done because you're going to bed. You tell your fingers to turn the alarm off and not hit the snooze button because you are rolling out to work out the one and only body that God has given to you. You rule over it because it matters. What happens today matters.

On the day that you die and when people gather for your funeral, they will talk about one thing and it's not about your size or your shape or the food you enjoyed. They will talk about the works that you did to love them well. They will talk about the sacrifice, the attention, and the love. And you can give it to them but first you have to rule. So let's give up the victim, let's stop saying "I can't change my bad habits." You are a temple of the Holy Spirit and, with God, nothing - nothing - is impossible. So rule it. You tell that plate what you're going to do. You tell your body how it's going to be treated because you are in control. You are in the image of God, created to rule.

And then you rest. I love the beginning of the Bible because God works and then he rests. He puts his all into it, he creates, and then he stops. And he makes a Sabbath and he gives it to you. And if you're a follower of Jesus, this is something you have that almost no one else in the world does. You see, there's this deep craving in the human heart to matter; to be someone special. And so all the people around us, they're working, right? They're working and working and working and they're texting and posting and filtering. They can never stop because they need that validation from the world to say, "You're someone." But if you believe in Jesus, you already are someone. This is what the Bible calls grace; a free gift that God has already said you are

eternally someone. That you can stop working; that you don't have to impress the world. You don't have to impress your boss or the coach or the teacher or the pastor. You can say no to stuff. You can get your schedule back. You can actually rest because you don't need their approval if it will cost you obedience to the law of God. And when you go home - even if you're an average employee, even if you're an average athlete, even if you're an average kid in an average school - you will not be average. You will be a brother or a sister of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So embrace your identity as a child of God. Take a deep breath and rest.

I recently read this story of an older veteran pastor who became famous for saving young pastors from quitting. Many of the young pastors would get into ministry, they would realize there was more spiritual needs than they could ever do. They would work, they would never be home to see their families. They didn't have time to sleep, they were trying to serve and serve and serve and they were burning out and ready to quit. And this older pastor became famous as a guy who was full of knowledge; a guy who had saved many churches, many ministries. And the young guys would reach out to him and they would share their sad stories and their crazy, busy lives and the pastor would always say the same thing. They'd say, you know, the problem is that you're trying to act like an angel and you're not. You're a flesh and blood person. So here's what you're going to do: You're going to exercise vigorously three times a week, you're going to take one whole day off of work, and you're going to take one extra night just to be home with your family and rest. And do you want to guess what every young pastor said? "I can't do that! Like, I'm already behind. People are already mad that I didn't show up for their thing; now you want me to take like an extra day and a half? I don't have time for that!" And the pastor would say, "Hey, you called me." He said, "I'll tell you what - you keep my three pieces of advice for the next month and if it doesn't work, call me back."

And over the years, that pastor heard the sob stories of many, many young ministers and do you know how many called him back? Zero.

And maybe today God is making the same challenge to you. You think you can't. You can't rest, you can't say no, what would happen at work what would happen at church, what would happen in my family? And God says "Put me to the test. Honor me with your body. Keep my rules. And see if I don't bless you. See if you don't get your freedom back. See if you don't get the joy that I always intended you to get...to be deep in your heart." Brothers and sisters, God created your body with rules. And then Jesus gave his body on a cross so you could actually keep them. Just remember, your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Honor God, worship him well, with your body.

Let's pray.

Dear God, thank you for waking us up and freeing us from the lie that we hear so often; the lie that we often tell ourselves - that "we can't." With you, we can and we're so grateful for that. God, I know that we're going to need each other; we're going to need each other for great encouragement. We're going to need each other for good guidance and, especially, for great forgiveness. And so, I pray that we could be a really unique community of faith that cares not just about the soul but about the body but we care for the body in uniquely spiritual ways.

God, I thank you for our church and I thank you even more for the message that you have given to us. Thank you that we don't have to live with guilt and shame. Thank you that not a single Christian has to look in the mirror and be disgusted with what he or she sees. Thank you that you have made us so much more because of the work of your son, Jesus. Help us, God. We want to honor you with energized work today. And if you will it, we want to live long lives so we can share the wisdom and faith that you have given us and that has matured over the years. We want this all for your glory and the good of your people and so we pray it all in Jesus' name, Amen.