***Capitol Hill Baptist Church Stewardship***

**Core Seminars Week 10**

**God’s Purpose for Our Health**

**PRAYER**

**I. Introduction**

Good morning! We’ve spent the last nine weeks thinking through how Christians can steward our money and our time. Well, it’s time to turn those principles to another gift that God’s given us—our health.

Now I know the principle that we stressed—that God owns our money and our time—took some getting used to. But the idea that he owns our health, as well, and can spend it however he sees fit…well, that’s probably even more countercultural. I mean, what could be more basic to who you are than your body! Certainly, you deserve to have control over your own body, right?

Well, just because we’re given something doesn’t mean we always use it for how it’s intended. As a kid, rubber bands were for shooting people, pets were wrestling opponents, and paper bags were for making loud noises. And it’s the same with our bodies—we can use them poorly. But if we use our bodies in the way God purposed them to be used, then in God’s strange design we have tremendous freedom.

So to begin, we need to ask the question, *“Why*?” We’re used to asking *“Why?”* when our health is poor. *“Why did I have to get sick today of all days?” “Why did God have to let the diagnosis be cancer?” “Why won’t God heal me?”* But have you ever asked, *“Why?”* when you’re healthy? *“Why has God given me good health?”* That’s not something that we normally think about. When we have a sore throat, we’re reminded of the pain every time we swallow. But when we’re healthy…well, we tend to take it for granted like the air we breathe. But how can we be good stewards of our health if we never ask why God gave it to us in the first place?

If we were to ask some person on the street, who’s not a Christian, why their health is important, what do you think they’d say? [*1) To live longer; 2) To be happier; 3) To be successful; 4) To be independent*]

How would a Christian’s response be different? What reasons might a Christian give for why their health is important? [*1) To be alive so we can praise God[[1]](#footnote-1); 2) To be of service; 3) Because our body is God’s temple; 4) Because heaven is full of health*]

The big difference between what an unbeliever thinks about health and what a Christian thinks about health is based on what God thinks about health. So for the rest of this morning, we’re going to think about God’s purposes for our health. And just like we did when we talked about money and time, we’re going to start with an important assumption—the assumption that our health belongs to God.

**II. Our Health Belongs to God**

Our health belongs to God. God made us…so God owns us…end of story. But it’s interesting that God’s ownership of our bodies doesn’t stop there. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul warns the Corinthians about sexual immorality. And what’s interesting is the reason he gave for *why* sexual immorality is off-limits. He says, **“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.”**

Sometimes Christians have used these verses to justify their self-serving behavior. *“Well, if my body is God’s temple, then that’s all the more reason for me to do my best to care for it. I’ll treasure it and spoil it…all in God’s good name.”* And then we’ll obsess about our diet. We’ll become fixated on shaping our body parts. We’ll undergo perpetual skin-care regimens to fight the appearance of aging. And we’ll do all sorts of things to our bodies that’s totally out of proportion to our body’s usefulness to Christ. We’ll desecrate our body, this temple of God, by turning it into an idol. But that’s not what Paul’s talking about.

The point that Paul’s making isn’t that we should care for ourbodies, but that we don’t actually own ourbodies! For the Christian, we’ve not only been created by God—we’ve been ransomed by him! And so our bodies are doubly not our own. This is why Paul tell us to **“glorify God in [our bodies].”**

Now, if God owns our bodies, then he has the right to do with them as he pleases. Deuteronomy 32:39 says, **“See now that *I*, even *I*, am *he*, and there is no god beside *me*; *I* kill and *I* make alive; *I* wound and *I* heal; and there is *none* that can deliver out of *my* hand.”** God can make us sick; God can make us well. God can make us energetic; God can make us tired. God can do all of that for his purpose because we are *his*. When God bought us with the blood of Jesus, he bought the right to spend our health in any way he chooses, even though he already had that right when he made us.

Now, of course, the wonderful thing about God is that he’s *for us*. Romans 8:28 says that he works together *all things* for our good. Praise God! There’s not even a hair that falls from our heads without his noticing. He loves us! In fact, he’s so attentive to us that David writes, **“You have kept count of my tossings; [and] put my tears in your bottle”** (Ps. 56:8). God will work to our greatest good and our greatest joy for his greater glory.

So then, the two biblical principles that are the foundation for discussing our health are:

1. **All our health comes from God**

Our bodies are God’s, and he has a purpose for everything that happens with our health. We don’t have the right to complain about poor health any more than we have a right to boast about good health. It all comes from God, just like with our money and our time. Our job is to trust God and be content with his dealings with us.

1. **We’re to use our health for God**

When it comes to our health, it’s easy to be self-focused—I mean, we’re talking about our bodies, right?!! We’re in them 24/7. They’re our bodies, not someone else’s. And so we work hard to feed and care for them. And every now and then when we have some extra energy and sleep stored up, we might use them to honor God by serving others. But this isn’t faithful stewardship! Just like with our money and time, our health isn’t split between serving ourselves and serving God. *All* the health that God gives us is his to be spent *entirely* on his purposes. Fortunately, his purposes include being faithful in caring for your health.[[2]](#footnote-2) But at the end of the day, our health is God’s, and we’re to spend it for his purposes.

**So that’s the foundation for our stewardship of our health. Are there any questions or comments?**

**III. Three Purposes for Health**

So if God owns our health, then the question we need to ask is, “What does God want us to do with it?” When we look to scripture, we can find three purposes that God has for our health.

**A. To Illustrate God’s Kingdom**

Now, this first one is important, but it’s not something we normally think about.

We know from Romans 8 that creation has been groaning because of sin and is subject to corruption, including human sickness. We live in a fallen world. So when Jesus began his earthly ministry, he did so, in part, by restoring people’s physical health.

When John the Baptist’s disciples came to ask Jesus who he was, his answer was about health. **“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.”** (Matt. 11:4-6).

Why didn’t Jesus just tell them he was the Messiah? Why did he say *this*? Well, Jesus wasn’t being secretive in answering the question. No, he was strongly testifying to himself through the scriptures.

You see, the Old Testament prophets had said that when the Messiah came, this miraculous work would be his calling card (e.g. Is. 29:18-19, 35:5-6, 61:1-2). Jesus demonstrated his power by healing because his coming was the beginning of making all things new. So if we fast forward to the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry, we see him defeating sin at the cross and defeating death in his resurrection. It all pointed to this.

Now God’s kingdom hasn’t been fully realized yet. In fact, it won’t be until Jesus returns, which is why we still groan with all creation for God to remake this world.[[3]](#footnote-3) But he’s started…and the Bible describes the restoration of health as a picture of what God’s doing with the world.

So how do we fit in to this purpose of illustrating God’s kingdom? Should we work on getting sick so that God can make us well again? Not quite. Next week, Lord willing, we’ll spend the entire time talking about stewarding sickness and poor health. But for our purposes today, when you’re sick and you recover, let that mini-picture of the redemption of your body remind you of the macro-picture of what God’s doing in your life. Your health is a gift (1 Cor. 4:7), and this should lead us to praise and thank God for his kindness to us. It should also encourage us in the hope that God will make all things new, and it should move us to tell others about the grace of God in the gospel. After all, our spiritual health is more important than our physical health.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**B. To Serve**

Philippians 1:21-26 says…

**For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith,so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.**

In this passage, Paul’s pondering the imminent threat of execution as a follower of Christ. But he’s thinking about it in the most profound way—he’s optimistic! With regards to living and dying, he says, **“I am hard pressed between the two.”** Why? Because **“To live is Christ; to die is gain.”** Far better, Paul says, to die and be with Christ, yet remaining in this world means fruitful labor on behalf of the Philippians. So seeing the work he’s needed to do to strengthen Christ’s church, he becomes convinced that he won’t be executed. He says, **“I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith.”** Isn’t it just like God to providentially do whatever is best for the church?

Well, what Paul’s wrestling with is what you might call the ultimate health question—should he live or should he die? Now, where I want to focus our attention is on his purpose for living; that is, his purpose for health. Paul doesn’t see health as the better of the two options, living or dying. After all, heaven is way more comfortable than anything Club Med has to offer! Instead, Paul’s purpose for health has to do with the needs of these Christians at Philippi. If he was looking for the most enjoyable option, or the most comfortable, or the least taxing, he’d be in glory with Christ. But for their sake, as best he can discern, he’s going to stick it out on earth.

A significant part of why God gives us health is so that we can spend it on others. If we’re not spending our health, we’re hoarding it. This idea of spending our health isn’t something we think about very often. There’s a book for moms of young kids called *Loving the Little Years* that talks about spending our health. Here’s what Rachel Jankovic writes:

**“Our bodies are tools, not treasures. You should not spend your days trying to preserve your body in its eighteen-year-old form. Let it be used. By the time you die, you want to have a very dinged and dinted body. Motherhood uses your body in the way that God designed it to be used. Those are the right kind of damages . . . We are not to treat our bodies like museum pieces. They were not given to us to preserve, they were given to us to use. So use it cheerfully, and maintain it cheerfully. When you are working hard to lose the baby weight (as you may need to), think of it as tool maintenance. You want to fix your body up in order to be able to use it some more . . . Your body is a tool. Use it.”**[[5]](#footnote-5)

How often do we see the goal of health as using our bodies instead of preserving them?!! The treasurer of the International Missions Board once said that his goal was for two events to happen simultaneously. First, he wanted the bankers to be calling saying that the IMB’s cash was all dried up. And the second event? Well, it would be the trumpet call of Jesus coming back. Of course, we don’t know when Christ is coming back, and this is the reason for making sure the IMB doesn’t get an ominous phone call from the bank. But his point is a good one—the IMB’s resources are there to be used, not preserved. And the same is true of our bodies. God gave them to us so we could use them. So use them!

Putting our bodies to good use is an act of worship. When we understand how amazing our God is, we love him. And to love him is to love those around us. In Romans 12:1, Paul tells us **“to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”**[[6]](#footnote-6) And then he spends the rest of the chapter talking about how we can serve one another in love. Serving is worshipping God!

So let’s take Paul’s example, and make this practical. What does it look like to use our bodies in service? Here are a few scenarios that might be helpful:

1. For many of us, Rachel Jankovic’s comments in her book hit the nail on the head. We’re using our bodies quite literally to raise up our kids. And the inevitable physical marks of that process are signs that we’re spending ourselves for the good of others. This is also true for those who are caregivers for their parents or other seniors.
2. For some of us, it might be the effects of a lifetime of physical labor—spending our bodies to feed our families. So often in society that old, worn down, spent body is spurned as a waste. But among Christians, it should be celebrated as an act of sacrifice.
3. Sleep, or lack thereof, has a lot to do with spending our bodies. There are times when we can enjoy being well-rested. There are other times when we’ll accept a slightly faster pace of aging in order to serve others with the time we would’ve spent resting.
4. Eventually, many of us have to make decisions about quality of life and quantity of life. Should we pursue a particular medical therapy for a terminal illness? What kind of living situation should we invest in for an aging parent? When should we shift from curative treatment to palliative[[7]](#footnote-7) treatment? Our opportunities for service should factor into these decisions. Very different from saying that life is only worth living if we can serve, of course. But as we consider more- or less-aggressive forms of treatment, we should consider their near- and long-term impact on service to others.
5. Using our bodies requires maintaining our bodies.[[8]](#footnote-8) Many of us find that, as we move from our 20s to our 30s to our 40s and beyond that, maintenance needs to be more deliberate than it used to be. Body metabolism slows, injuries take longer to heal, bodies are more worn down. Remember, you don’t know when Christ will call you home, and you have a responsibility to be faithful with every year he gives you. Caring for the gift of your body is part of being a good steward. But it’s care with a purpose. Not feeding a self-glorifying idolatry of health, but caring for your body so that you can get more out of it in the years to come. The martyred missionary Jim Elliot once wrote his mother from college saying, **“I wrestle solely for the strength and co-ordination of muscle tone that the body receives while working out, with the ultimate end that of presenting a more useful body as a living sacrifice.”**[[9]](#footnote-9)

Can anyone think of other examples of how we use our bodies in service?

A great example of putting our health into service is found in Philippians 2 with Epaphroditus. He was sent by the church in Philippi to care for Paul’s health while in prison. But in doing so, Epaphroditus risked his own life, got sick, and almost died. Yet God spared his life, and Paul writes to the church to **“honor such men”** (Php. 2:29).[[10]](#footnote-10)

Jesus was the perfect example. Being God, he took on human flesh, bore our sin, was beaten, bruised, and crushed to death. He took our punishment so that we might have eternal life with him and receive new bodies that will never wear out. Remember his words at the Lord’s Supper, **“This is my body, which is given for you”** (Lk. 22:19).

**C. To Rightly Enjoy God’s Creation**

Part of what it means to be a faithful steward is to delight in God, our master. As we just saw, Jesus *willingly* obeyed the Father by laying down his life for his people. God’s glorified when we take joy in serving him, and a joyful steward is one who makes the master’s desire his own. He’s not grumbling or complaining, selfishly wanting to do his own thing. No, he’s humble and thankful, trusting the goodness and direction of his master. Well, when it comes to our health and bodies, God wants us to rightly enjoy his creation with them.

Remember what Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:4: **“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.”** Here Paul’s addressing false teachers who said that to be more spiritual you must abstain from marriage and certain foods. Paul refutes them by saying that these things are part of God’s creation and aren’t to be rejected, if they’re received with thanksgiving. Well, our bodies were also created, and instead of rejecting God’s creation, he intends for us to rightly enjoy it. And this should lead us to giving thanks to God.

It’s like when you’re given an unexpected raise at work. You’re excited about it, right? Your heart swells with appreciation. But does it end there? No, to complete your joy, you go and thank your employer and work hard for them. Well, God’s blessed us with bodies that are intended to experience the sensual, temporal pleasures of his creation. But this pleasure can’t be an end in itself. No, this pleasure should point us to God, giving thanks to him. Our giving thanks is an act of worship that praises God as the source of what we enjoy.

So how does this look practically? Well, Jesus thanked the Father before eating a meal and so should we. Our bodies have needs and we should thank God for not only giving us energy but also for making food tasty and eating such a pleasurable experience. Did you ever struggle thinking through a problem and then solved it? Well, we can thank God for our mental health and the pleasure—and relief—to come up with the answer. Have you ever ran a race? We can thank God for our muscular health and for the satisfaction of finishing such a painful event! Those who are married can thank God for their sexual health, as they enjoy the pleasure and intimacy[[11]](#footnote-11) with their spouse that God designed.

Friends, we can acknowledge God for our health in so many ways as we enjoy his creation. This can be done in the mountains, or at a restaurant, or at the doctor’s office. The key is to be thankful for what God’s given us in creating our bodies and as they interact with the rest of creation.

But also remember that our health exists for God, not us. Notice that God’s purpose isn’t just enjoying his creation, but *rightly* enjoying his creation. Just like everything God created, we, as stewards, can use our bodies and health for good or ill. There is a wrong way to enjoy God’s creation. This can happen when we don’t thank and acknowledge God. It can also happen when we give our bodies to sinful pleasures and abuse God’s good creation.

Such pleasures will never give us the kind of joy that satisfies and can harm our bodies. Case in point is addiction. Addiction is idolatry, but it’s more than that. Addiction often delivers a bodily experience that makes us feel good for a while. Such addictions can be to alcohol, drugs, such as heroine or marijuana or any pain killer, sexual sin, or food. Addiction gives physical pleasure, relieves physical tension or pain, and soothes physical desires. So instead of just feeding idolatry, the addict becomes a slave to the physical desires of the body and this may jeopardize our health. **“The wages of sin is death”** (Rom. 6:23).[[12]](#footnote-12) And we’re not just talking spiritual death. There’s real physical danger that comes by sinning, as well.[[13]](#footnote-13)

And it’s not just indulging in sinful pleasures that’s harmful. Our bodies can also be harmed by neglect and ignoring our physical needs. Things such as extreme undereating, or self-infliction, or laziness in not doing what’s good for our bodies may also be sinning. If we don’t use our bodies in the way God intended, we’ll suffer for it.

Yet, as we’ve seen, God gives us instruction for how we’re to use our bodies to obtain true enjoyment. When we use our bodies in the way God intended and obey him, we not only acknowledge his goodness, but we find freedom to enjoy things as God intended.[[14]](#footnote-14) We both enjoy the health he gives our bodies AND the ability he gives us to enjoy the rest of his creation.

So a healthy body enables other experiences that teach us about God. With a healthy body, we can climb a mountain that God built. Or listen to a beautiful symphony because God invented music. Health has purpose to God because he uses it to show us his creation—and his creation loudly proclaims his praise.[[15]](#footnote-15)

**IV. Conclusion**

So to conclude, the wonderful thing about the Christian faith is that, while we’re called to spend our bodies for God’s kingdom, we know that in God’s kingdom we’ll receive new bodies. It’s not that we spend ourselves because our bodies are unimportant. No, we spend ourselves because we know that they’re just version 1.0! We can lean into heaven because of Paul’s wonderful words in Philippians 3:21, **“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.”** That’s our future!

**PRAYER**

1. Isaiah 38:18 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Ephesians 5:29, 1 Timothy 4:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Romans 8:23-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Matthew 5:27-30, Luke 12:4-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Loving the Little Years*, pages 58-59 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See also Romans 6:13 – “Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Pronounced pal-lee-uh-tiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For example, in 1 Timothy 5:23 Paul tells Timothy to take wine to alleviate illness and care for his body. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. E. Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor*, p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Another example is the Apostle Paul. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul likens his life as “being poured out as a drink offering” (2 Tim. 4:6). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The fact that God created man and woman to be united together and to become one flesh (Gen. 2:24) shows God’s benevolence in purposing pleasure for those made in His image. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See also 1 Corinthians 11:29-30 where Paul says that eating the Lord’s Supper without recognizing Jesus’ body drinks judgment on himself that has resulted in sickness and death. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For example, a toddler who doesn’t obey his parents to not put his hand on the stove will burn his fingers. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. A train is built to run on its tracks and it can go anywhere on them, but if the train is placed on some other foundation, it is stuck and can’t go anywhere. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See Psalm 19 and Psalm 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)