

# Soul Care and Body Care

*PRTS Chapel Series*

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**Bible Text:** Genesis 1:26

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Let's read together in Genesis 1, Genesis 1 verse 26.

26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. 28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

Amen. Let's pray.

*Our Creator and our Savior, we gladly and hopefully humbly bow before thee this day and pray for a hearing ear and an understanding heart. We pray that thy recreating process would continue in our lives and that you'd use even this chapel service to remake us and reshape us in thine image. We confess how far we have fallen. We confess how far we have yet to journey towards that great destination of being conformed to the image of thy Son but pray that we might take a little step in this time together. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

From what I've seen and experienced, the majority of pastoral problems like burnouts, depressions, backslidings, result from a neglect of the body. The neglect of the body doesn't usually begin with channel surfing, with a click of the mouse, with wandering eyes, or even with a shortening or neglecting of private devotions. It begins with, usually, a neglect of the body and these other issues and problems come in the train of that issue. And this isn't just a physical issue, it's not just a practical matter, it's actually a theological issue and it's a fundamental and foundational theological issue because it concerns our view of God, especially our view of God as Creator. And that's why I say it's fundamental and foundational because that truth, God as Creator, is the first truth that's revealed to us in scripture and if we go wrong there, then obviously we're going to go wrong everywhere. You might say, "Well, don't insult me. I believe God is Creator. I preach

God as Creator. I defend God as Creator. I fight those who say God is not the Creator." And that may very well be, but we can do all these things with our lips and yet deny God as Creator with our lives. We can be creationists in theory and live like evolutionists and especially in ministry, we can live as if it's all about the survival of the fittest or of the fattest or whatever.

God's Creator-hood has massive implications for the way we live and the way we do ministry. What happens when you open a book of systematic theology? Probably many of us kind of skim over the chapter on creation. We know that. It's not a big deal. Let's get to the more substantial, juicy, gospel-centered, Christ-centered theology. Yeah, I've been convinced through personal experience and through dealing with others that we cannot actually be gospel-centered or Christ-centered unless we are first of all Creator-centered. The soul and the body are so intertwined, they are so interconnected that we cannot ignore the one and expect the other to thrive. We'll make no progress in soul care unless we begin with and go on with body care.

What I'd like to do today is to try and help us recognize God's Creator-hood more widely and fully and deeply in our lives. I'd like to try and show the implications of this for our personal spirituality and also for our ministries and I think if we get that right, an awful lot else will fall into place. I hope I can prove that to you as we go on. The spiritual disciplines of Bible reading and prayer and meditation and fighting temptation, all these things will, I believe, be more established and more successful and more fruitful in our lives if we get this issue right first. Again, just from looking back, dealing with various pastors, dealing with myself, I think moral failure, spiritual backsliding, succumbing to criticism, discouragement, mental dullness, mechanical sermon preparation and preaching, predictability, results from a neglect of the fact that we are creatures.

So I'd like to give you five principles that I want to then take into some application. So five principles with five takeaways, if you like. The first principle is just very simply, we are creatures. We are creatures. If God is our Creator then that makes us creatures and therefore we have to find out from our Creator how he has designed us and how we then should live. Think of if you made a remote control car for your kids and you leave it with them and you come back the end of the day, a couple of days later, and the cars and pieces on the ground and you say, "Well, what did you do wrong?" They say, "Well, we went onto the garage roof, and we made it into a plane." And you say, "I didn't make a plane. I made a car. I gave you instructions as to how to use it. Why didn't you follow the instructions?" And I think God can sometimes say exactly the same to us and he's given us instructions how to live as creatures and yet we're trying to live maybe not as planes but as angels, as disembodied spirits with all the resulting breakdown and crashes. So really the first takeaway from this, we are creatures, is let's seek our Maker's instructions. Let's find out, delve more deeply into how he has made us and how he has instructed us to live and work in this world.

God publishes these instructions in his word and in his world. God has given us in his word many instructions as to how to care for and use and maximize our bodies, but probably most of God's revelation about this is in his world. He has given us scientists

and researchers to look into the human body and to explore it, to analyze it, to x-ray it, to scan it, to observe it, and that's a gift to us. And really we're living in a day of such scientific progress and advance and discovery that if any generation of Christians should be more careful for their bodies, it's you and I. Just yesterday, I saw a headline, "The more you sit, the sooner you will die." Well, that made me sit up. That made me stand up. The more you sit, the sooner you will die, which is pretty significant for people in our callings, isn't it? So here is God, even in this little area, and there are so many areas to explore, but even in this little area, revealing to us his instructions for how to care for our bodies and this could go on for hours, especially with somebody medical here. They'd be able to give us our Maker's instructions and that leaves us with an obligation. It's not, "Oh, that's interesting research," and we go and sit again for another 10 hours. This calls for action. It calls for us to abide by our Maker's instructions one way or another. We are creatures.

Secondly, we are complex. We are complex. Just think of the body itself, how many physical forces are at work in our bodies. There's physics, biology, chemistry, there's electricity, there's mechanics, there's plumbing, there's siphons, there are switches, there's lubrication, there are gases, there are liquids. It's just one big factory of production. It's incredibly complex. We're just scratching the surface, even in all that the Lord has revealed to us in recent years through science, and if anyone can say it's us surely that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. If the psalmist could say that with just such a little bit of knowledge, how much more we? Complex creatures. But then you throw the soul into the mix, a soul that's inaccessible to empirical research, that we have nothing in science to help us with. We have God's word and again, it reveals to us many things about the complexity of the soul but much remains a mystery and probably ever will. The human soul is such a depth and width and length and height and it's vast, not infinite, but it's massive and it will take us all eternity really to explore all the dimensions of our souls, of the spiritual side of our being. And then you take that complex body and that complex soul and you put them together. You join them together. What do you get then? Complexity times complexity. You just get multiple complexity. You've got massive questions. How do they relate? How do they interact? How do they impact one another? The Bible teaches us, especially in Proverbs and Psalms, that the interconnectivity between the body and the soul, between the physical and the spiritual. But we're still left with many questions. How do they link? How do they overlap? How do they interconnect? And then you think of the conscience and the will. Are they completely independent of the body? Or are they impacted by the body? Are they purely part of the soul? I don't think so. I think we all know how much our consciences are hindered when we are tired and fatigued and worn out. We know how difficult it is to choose decisively a right path when we are exhausted. So there's just this multiple complexity. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said this Christians don't understand how physical, psychological, and spiritual realms interrelate. Here's another factor, because Satan muddies the boundaries. Many of our troubles are caused because we think a problem is spiritual when it's physical, or we think a problem is physical when it's emotional or spiritual.

So what's the takeaway from this, we are complex? Well, it's simply this, the interconnectivity and complexity of the body-soul union means that the health of the

body affects the health of the soul, and the health of the soul affects the health of the body. Proverbs and Psalms, we could go through a few of these and prove that. But it's not easy to figure out the contribution of each, is it? We know these things, body impacts soul, soul impacts body, but to what degree and what proportions? That is not easy to figure out but one thing's for sure, we cannot neglect the one and expect the other to thrive. This very complex interactivity means that we cannot say, "I don't care about my body," and the soul won't suffer any consequences. It will. We are complex.

Thirdly, we are limited. Creatures by definition are limited. We are less than our Creator. He is the only unlimited one. He is the only infinite one. We are limited and finite. Hopefully none of us here think we are unlimited, but most of us think we are less limited than we actually are and we tend to overestimate our physical strength, our moral courage, our emotional stamina, our spiritual vigor, the steel in our consciences. We tend to overestimate all these things and what happens? What happens if you overestimate your abilities and underestimate your limitations? Well, ask any tow rope what happens. Ask any computer. You break down, don't you? You snap. You crash.

Now, these limitations vary from person to person. You can have people, of course, who have tremendous capacities. You have others who have less capacities. But we all have some limitations imposed by our Creator upon us. Now, sometimes you look at a person and they seem to go on and on and on and on when everyone else is sort of falling to the side of the road and sometimes we can be a bit jealous, but just remember that what happens when you stretch an elastic band? A small elastic band, it breaks quite soon. It gives you a wee snap in the finger and it's not too bad, but you take a huge, big, strong elastic band and you stretch and stretch and stretch and stretch, the stronger the band, the further you stretch, the greater force on the stretch, and therefore when it snaps, it's catastrophic, isn't it? The fallout is all the greater. The pain, the snap, the reverberation is all the more damaging. Maybe it's not worth being so jealous. Better take our wee snaps on the finger now and again than have a catastrophic breakdown.

And sometimes it's strange, isn't it, you see some people and they just have multiple troubles in their lives and yet they seem to get through a major bereavement, a major loss of work, a major illness, and they keep going. It's quite amazing. And then there may be just a little thing that comes into their lives, compared to the rest it's so small, and yet it's that that just causes them to crash and you kind of think, "Well, that's a bit strange," but not really, the straw that breaks the camel's back comes at the end of years of beating with a heavy club. All this to say that we can often be deceived as to our limitations. We can be lulled into a false sense of security and therefore again, because we're limited to takeaway, let's find out and accept our limits. They've been imposed upon as each of us individually, tailored to us by our Creator, varied, some stronger physically, some stronger emotionally, some stronger mentally, but let's find out and work within them, within these Creator-imposed limitations.

Two things to avoid here. One is when we are weaker, when our limitations are not so great, we're very tempted at times to look jealously and enviously at others, and if we really believe these are God-imposed limitations, let's get rid of the jealousy and envy.

Let's accept them with gratitude. They've been tailored to fit us. But the other tendency, of course, is if we are strong and the Lord's blessed us with that kind of power, let's not despise those who are more limited. Let's not look with disdain. Let's not impose our limits on others. And again, I think the Bible's full of this, "Let him who thinks he stand take heed lest he fall." And there's many a man, I've counseled some of them, who have thought themselves indestructible and have spent years disdaining others who themselves have eventually crumbled and cracked. So we are limited.

Fourthly, we are dependent. This was true even before the fall. Adam and Eve were made dependent upon their Creator. They leaned upon him. Independence never crossed their minds until they heard, "You can be as gods. You can be independent. You can live without God. You can be your own god." We can live as gods, or try to. We can be theologically dependent, but experientially independent. We were talking yesterday about experiential preaching. Well, you know, there's no Christian experience more basic than dependence. Nothing. That's the foundation. This is the foundational truth, we are creatures, therefore we are dependent, therefore let's depend. Anything else on top of that is a bonus. If we're not leaning upon him, we are not really believing that we are creatures and we can say, "I'm leaning on the Lord," and yet he could be saying, "I never feel your weight." It's something I've learned myself in the various illnesses and afflictions I've had over the last 18 months or so, never realized quite how independently I was living. And there's much work to go and I'm expecting a few more, you know, rods on my back along the way. I need them. But I hope you don't need them. I hope it's not necessary for you. But sometimes, yes, the Lord needs to knock our legs away in order to make us lean upon him. The takeaway from this is if we do not live as dependent creatures, we are not worshipping our Creator, in fact, we are worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator.

Fifthly and lastly, we are fallen. We're fallen. We're not just creatures. We're not just complex. We're not just limited. We're not just dependent. We are fallen. By our first parent's sin, curse came in the world, "The day you eat, you shall die." Death began to die in our first parents the moment of that first sin. It's not completely worked out on day one, but it's begun. They are dying and they shall die. And ever since, every single creature is born with death. They're born dying. The moment conception occurs, the moment life occurs, dying also occurs because that conception, that embryo, that tiniest human being is imperfect, already death is mixed up in these two cells. And then death works through every part of us, every part of our bodies, every sense, every member, every fiber, every atom. There's death in every part of our soul as well. And if you thought we were complex before, what are we now with this additional factor of death?

Some of you know I'm very keen on fishing and what stunned me since I've come over here is the fishing reels that are available to purchase. Incredible complexity. And of course, the more complicated, the more successful, right? You know, the more technological it looks, then it's definitely going to catch more fish, isn't it? I mean, every angler knows that, don't they? So you buy, obviously, the more complex one, it's definitely going to work better, but when the complex one breaks, what a mess. And that's humanity, isn't it? What a mess. The most complex creature is the most messed up

of creatures. That's why you get beautiful nature programs on apes and snakes and flies, and the whole world wows at this. I mean, they're fallen, but there's still a stunning beauty. Who wants to look at human beings? That's just low viewing figures there. The most complex, the most fallen, the most messy, and the takeaway from this is a fallen creature means a rebellious creature. We are going to have a rebelliousness in us against our Creator, against our creature-hood that's innate to us. We want to be not just an angel, we want to be God.

We've got to be conscious of this, we've got to fight this, we've got to detect it in us when we're rebelling against the way God has made us, creatures, limited, complex, dependent. That is going to be a daily battle for the rest of our lives but the amazing thing is that our Creator is in the business of recreating, that he has not given up on this mess, that he's coming and by salvation he's in the process of making all things new. Our Creator has become a creature to recreate his creatures. So yes, there's rebelliousness here, but there's also an amazing redemption available, an amazing renewal that's available. He is willing to make us, to put us back together again and that's what we're in the business of, isn't it, of making this known, bringing this Creator and this re-Creator to a fallen creation and to fallen creatures.

Let me give you three words to go away with: safety, productivity and creativity. Safety first. Remember I said most pastoral burnouts are the result of a neglect of the body, most pastoral problems, backslidings, discouragements and so on? I hope that's making a bit more sense now. And this isn't to deny what Jesus teaches that is out of the heart of man that proceeds all evil because remember what we said, at the heart this is a theological issue, at heart this is about what we believe about God and our relationship to him. We go wrong there, we reject or we deny or we downplay or we ignore the truth of God as Creator, then our creature-hood is jeopardized, our bodies are jeopardized, and that just opens the floodgates for all sorts of sin and evil and temptation. You go wrong here, then you go wrong everywhere.

God's not just made our souls to protect our bodies, he's made our bodies to protect our souls. Again, we know something of this, do we not? I mean, let's face it, we're in week 13 of the semester, right? We are tired. We are weary. We are not sleeping well. We are not getting the time we would like in the word and in prayer and we are vulnerable as a result. These are dangerous days for us because our bodies and our minds are worn. The devil sees the gaping holes and is ready to pounce and therefore, it is our safety to care for our bodies, to get the rest, the relaxation, the recreation, the relationships that make the body thrive and healthy in order to protect also our souls. There will be a lot less predictable, dull, mechanical sermons if there are a bit more refreshed and renewed pastors around. This is our safety, personally and vocationally. Body safety results in soul safety.

Second word is productivity. You may say, "Well, if I do this, I'm just not going to get everything done." Well, everything doesn't need to be done, does it? If God's imposed limits on us and we're working within these limits, then anything outside of that is not our duty. It's not our responsibility. Remember what Jesus said, "she has done what she

could." There were lots of other things to be done and people were critical because she wasn't doing. She's done what she could. She's working within her limits. She needs a rest. She needs some refreshment. And so it is with us as well.

You say, "How can I take a Sabbath a week? I'll never get done all that I need done." Well, I read this in Thomas Murphy's book. He's an old Presbyterian minister from another generation, wrote a book on pastoral theology. He said this, "We've said that this daily routine we propose is only for five days in the week." So he's been outlining a pastoral week. "On the Sabbath, the minister should have nothing to do with any other mental efforts than those of his public exercises. All preparations should be fully made before the Lord's Day arrives. On every account, the slovenly habits of finishing sermons on the sacred day should be most strenuously avoided." I'm sure we all feel pretty convicted about that, but, "We would also earnestly recommend that Monday be observed as a day of mental and bodily rest. The minister must have his resting day as well as other men or he will suffer the consequences. His physical constitution demands it. If it is denied, in time he will break down in health, as hundreds are doing." Here's the interesting point, "Nor must it be supposed that devoting one day of the week to absolute rest will be a loss of time in the end. No. The work of the other days will be more vigorous. The physical and mental tone will be kept up and at the end of the year, far more will be accomplished. One day of wakeful, energetic work is worth three or four spent in half dreaming and forcing oneself to unattractive tasks." I can definitely put my arm into that. My wife's really forced me to take a day off every week, but there were two weeks when I just couldn't, I had just too much to do, and it was usually a Monday at that point in my ministry and by Thursday, I was done. Friday was a washout. Sermons were useless that week. I accomplished no more, far less, in fact. So it may seem like you'll produce less, but actually, again, abide by the Maker's instructions, we'll do what we're meant to do, and we'll do it better.

Just as an aside, we often look at some of the great men of the past and how they worked 30 hours a day and 400 days a year. I think the first thing is there are exceptional men for exceptional times, but they're not the norm. The other thing that's often forgotten is most of these men had years of ill health and most of them also early deaths. We don't have unlimited fuel in the tank. We've all got a limited amount of fuel and we either pour it all into 20 years or we can spread it out and maybe last a bit longer.

But my last word, safety, productivity, is creativity. Creativity. There's a lot of research into this these days, a lot of fascinating articles, want to read the book called "Imagine" by Jonah Lehrer. Fascinating insight into the creative process, how things are invented and designed, and what all this research is showing is that the greatest breakthroughs are made in people's down times. It's not made at the desk. We know this from sermons. We go a walk, bang, the sermon comes. The structure falls into place. We wake up. We're in the shower. We're, "Oh, there it is. Just spent 10 hours trying to figure that out yesterday." God's so built us that we need that downtime. We need that nothing time in order to be creative and sermon making is a creative process, or at least it should be. If we want fresh sermons, we must be fresh and refresh ourselves. If we do not live as creatures, we will not be creative.

Let's pray.

*O Lord, thou hast made us, thou hast given us plenty instructions. We pray for help to live in accordance with thy design. Forgive us our rebelliousness and help us to bow and to depend and to lean more heavily today than ever, ever before. Enable us to show by our lives that we are creationists and not evolutionists. In Jesus' name. Amen.*