

GROWTH PLAN

Small Group Curriculum | The Body

"Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."

- Luke 2:52

While the Bible teaches that Jesus was sinless in every way, it also tells us that Jesus walked a path of growth. Just like us, he had thoughts, feelings, complicated relationships, a body that got tired and hungry, and work to be done. As he grew, he matured in all of these areas. If we don't follow Jesus' leadership to be intentional about our spiritual growth in all areas of life, we'll end up on repeat in 2021. We'll have the same habits, which will produce outcomes. What would it look like to get intentional about spiritual growth this year? That's what this series is all about!

➤ **Breaking the Ice**

Have 1 or 2 volunteers from the group share a funny or otherwise significant story from their childhood that includes their body. (Maybe a clumsy moment, a wardrobe malfunction, or an unexpected injury.)

➤ **Getting Started**

"The aim of spiritual [growth] is the transformation of the self, and that it works through transformation of thought, transformation of feeling, transformation of social relations, transformation of the body, and transformation of the soul."

- Dallas Willard

In the quote above, Dallas Willard says that growing spiritually includes our thoughts, our feelings, our relationships, and our souls. He also includes "the body." For many of us that might sound odd. Our body seems a little bit...less spiritual, right? In fact, doesn't the bible speak negatively about "the flesh?" We'll get to that. But Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 that our bodies ARE spiritual because they are the temple of God's Spirit. He goes on to say that we can glorify God, not just in our "hearts" but in our bodies as well.

Our bodies are all different shapes and sizes. They have different genetic tendencies, various ailments, and both beautiful and awkward features (you know its true). And yet God chose to create us, not as some sort of floating spirit like Casper the friendly ghost, but out of the dirt into human flesh. Think about it, every spiritual experience you have happens in and through your body. Even the eyes you are using to read this page, or the ears you are using to hear it are parts of your body!

- When you think about spiritual growth, does it include your body? Why or why not?
- What are some bible verses you can think of that say something about your body?

➤ **Jesus and the Body**

When asked what God's most important command was, Jesus said, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength." (Mark 12:30)

The most important commandment in the Bible includes two parts of our bodies! Jesus says that we can love God with our heart and soul but also our mind and our strength. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus talks about honoring God with where we look, how we use the strength and generosity of our hands, even what do with our face if someone slaps us!

When God wanted to rescue us and invite us into his Kingdom, he didn't write a message in the clouds, he came in a body. We know that Jesus walked a LOT, he worked with wood (no power tools!), and he was strong enough to flip tables with one hand and swing a whip with the other. But most significant of all, he carried a heavy cross up a hill, and gave his life. Jesus used his body to love us and love the Father in the most perfect way, even to death.

- In the verse above (Mark 12:30) Jesus tells us the purpose of our bodies, to love God. But we can mess this up in two big ways: Neglecting or worshipping our bodies.

- What are some ways we neglect or worship our own bodies or others?

- Are you more vulnerable to neglecting or worshipping your body? Or both?

- How does Jesus' work on the cross shape our perspective about our bodies?

- Have you experienced shame about your body? Do you feel like some parts of your body is somehow "bad?" Don't be afraid to talk about sexuality. It's part of being human.

- What messages or experiences have made you feel this way? Is this how God feels?

➤ **"The Flesh"**

You may have heard someone say something that sounds like, "I'm just ready to get out of this old body and get to heaven!" Or maybe you're thinking, "Wait a minute! Doesn't the bible say that 'the flesh' is bad and 'the spirit' is good?" Well we sure want to be with God in heaven, but maybe there's a little more to the story.

First, we have to remember that when God created us, it included our bodies. So, when he is re-creating us in Jesus, it includes our body. What's the difference between our "before Jesus" body and our "after Jesus" body? Paul tells us in Romans 8:13 "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

Paul says that if we live life without God, and just do whatever our body feels like doing, it leads down a road to death. But if we fight to let that old self die and give our whole life, including our bodies, to be led by the Spirit, we find life! In another passage, Paul says that he disciplines his body and keeps it under control to obey Jesus (1 Cor 9:27).

- What is the difference between using our bodies for "the flesh" versus for the Spirit?

- What ways do you need to "put to death the deeds of the body" so that you can really live and use your body to serve God?

➤ **A Tool**

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." Ephesians 2:10

"Present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God."

- Romans 6:13

God rescued us through Jesus to be a part of his Kingdom. Jesus is the King on the throne and he has a Kingdom job for you! Your job includes a hug to a hurting friend, helping your neighbor clean their flooded house, opening your mouth with the good news of Jesus, kneeling in prayer, and lifting your hands in worship. We are his instruments, his tools. And he gave us a body.

- How can you practically present your whole body to God?

- How could you use your body to love and serve others? Get specific.

- Consider spiritual practices that use your body. (Kneeling in prayer, bold expressions of worship, sitting still for a few moments to remember God.)

A Tent

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves." - 2 Corinthians 4:7

"For bodily discipline is of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." - 1 Timothy 4:8

"And He said to them, Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while. (For there were many people coming and going and they did not even have time to eat.)" - Mark 6:31

Our life happens in "earthen vessels," but God still uses us in extraordinary ways. Paul tells Timothy that physical fitness isn't the main thing, but it does have value. Jesus taught his disciples to rest and was concerned about them when they hadn't eaten. The Testament is filled with instructions for feasting, fasting, and even what to eat. God decided that all of these things were important enough to bring up. Our bodies are his temple. They matter.

Along with our spiritual disciplines, habits for a healthy body are part of faithfulness to God. A walk or a jog, time at the gym, eating your veggies, going to the doctor, etc. All of these things are part of caring for the body that God gave you and living a spiritually healthy life.

- What are some healthy habits that you've implemented that have made a big difference? (Let's keep these answers brief. No "best" health plan pitches.)
- What are some steps you need to take towards better honoring your body?

Pray

Pray as a group that we would honor God with our bodies. Pray that we would walk by the spirit and not gratify the desires of our bodies in unhealthy ways. Pray that God would heal and convict us where we have unhealthy views of our bodies.