

PHYSICAL FORMATION

PROBABLY THE LEAST UNDERSTOOD ASPECT OF PROGRESS IN CHRISTLIKENESS IS THE ROLE OF THE BODY IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.

Dallas Willard



PHYSICAL FORMATION

PHYSICAL FORMATION

Physical formation = training our bodies with proper habits of sleep, eating, exercise & relaxation

Definition

- The opportunity to **train our physical bodies with proper habits** of sleep, eating, exercise, and relaxation for the purpose of godliness

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

DALLAS WILLARD

"So what we find, then, is that the body is the place of our direct power. It is the little "power pack" that God has assigned to us as the field of our freedom and development. Our lives depend upon our direction and management of it. But it has and acquires a "life of its own"--tendencies to behave without regard to our conscious intentions."

Psalm 63:1

God—you're my God!
I can't get enough of you!
I've worked up such hunger and thirst for
God,
traveling across dry and weary deserts.

Romans 12:1

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

What's your story?

BODY PRAYER

Giving your Body To God

This exercise is an attempt to help those attempting to live in the reality of the kingdom of God every day to see our bodies in a different way. If God created our bodies, then he can and should be given control or dominion over each and every aspect of our bodies. This begins with a realization that God created each and every aspect of our being, as well as a spirit of gratefulness for that aspect of our bodies. While God created every part of us, we often live like God has nothing to do with our bodies. This exercise prompts us to give each part of our bodies back to God for his use, asking him to redeem it and make it effective for kingdom purposes. Allow at least 10-20 minutes or longer for the exercise.

Dallas Willard on The Body

Philosopher and theologian Dallas Willard had much to say about the body and the part it plays in the kingdom of God. It is important to understand that our bodies are potential energy, available to us so that we may act (as persons with a “kingdom” or even in defiance to God), and our personalized “power packs.” Our bodies take on a life of their own and in our fallen world, they usually take on a system of tendencies away from or against God. The body is inseparable in its functioning from the context of the surrounding world and its contents (1 John 2:16). The concept of the “flesh” in Scripture is often misunderstood. Flesh is not inherently bad – it is inherently good. The problem comes from living in a fallen world. The typical error in asceticism is to regard the flesh as evil – Christianity believes that natural reality, including the flesh, is good. Our desire is to see it redeemed. The great thing about a child is that they cannot hide their soul in their body. Adults learn to do this as they grow up. There is a lot of body hatred in the world today and this must be addressed.

[See Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (Chapter 7) & *Renovation of the Heart* (Chapter 9)]

Guidelines for the Exercise:

1. Get in a comfortable position – either seated in a chair without arms or legs crossed or lying down
2. Close your eyes and eliminate as many distractions as possible
3. Take several deep breaths and be grateful to God for the air which fills your lungs and gives life
4. Treat this period of time as prayer – your life interacting with God's life
5. Slowly direct your attention to each part of your body – both internal and external – from the top of your head to the bottom of your feet.
6. You can use the Sign of the Cross, as well as the naming of “The Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” Be as general or specific as you choose. Take as much time as necessary to “give that part of your body to God.” Reflect on how each specific part has the opportunity for goodness. Each time you do this exercise, you will think of and discover different aspects of your body. The Sign of the Cross becomes shorthand as a continued dedication of your body to God.

Start by placing your hand on your head and pray,

“In the name of the Father.”

- Head – brain (mind, thoughts), eyes (sight), ears (hearing), mouth (speech), tongue (taste), nose (smell) Neck – throat, posture, thyroid gland (metabolism)

“In the name of the Son”

- Abdomen – heart, lungs, stomach/bowels, liver, kidneys, spleen, etc.

“In the name of the Holy Spirit”

- Arms – hands, fingers; Legs – feet, toes,
- Systems – circulatory, muscular, endocrine, skeletal, digestive, etc.

PRAYER OF RECOLLECTION

1 – I realize there are limitations to what I can do as one human being. Identify any barriers to God's love in the area of our physical bodies.

It's easy to push ourselves at the expense of our bodies. We feel weighed down by the demands on our time but we push on to accomplish as much as possible. We feel tired from the lack of sleep so we snack or gulp down caffeine in order to feel energized. Or we over-schedule our time since we feel bad saying no. We think, "if only I could finish things faster or had more time", "if only people would stop bugging me", or "if only people would take responsibility for their own stuff." Although we believe we cannot fulfill all the demands on our time, we don't always live that way. Our bodies are created with limits. Only God can meet all of our needs and the needs around us. Thankfully, we are not God.

Identifying the barriers to God's love in the area of our physical bodies may be difficult. The barriers may be subtle. Take time this week to sit in God's love reflecting on our physical limitations.

1. Take a moment to gauge what is going on with your body at the moment. Is your body feeling tired, exhausted, hungry, anxious, sore, irritated, relaxed, or whatever? Are there any ways you are not taking care of your body? Acknowledge that your body needs rest and care.
2. Look over the demands of your time and energy. Are you pushing yourself at work or school, in relationships, or with your looks in order to meet someone's expectations? On the other hand, are you slacking in any of these areas in response to someone's expectations? Are there any areas where you are people-pleasing? Acknowledge that you cannot meet everyone's wishes.
3. Reflect over your own ambitions and desires. We have limits and can only do so many tasks at once. Are there any ways you are holding on to control? Acknowledge that only God can meet all the needs that surround you.

2 – I realize that I am not just my name, my roles, and my abilities. Identify any barriers to God's love in the area of our false identities.

"As long as we continue to live as if we are what we do, what we have, and what other people think about us, we will remain filled with judgments, opinions, evaluations, and condemnations. We will remain addicted to putting people and things in their "right" place." ~Henry Nouwen

We often find our value and identity in the wrong ways. We try to find our worth in our roles and our abilities. We may even define our worth by our sin, lack of self-control, or our failures. One can also seek affirmation from others to define how they feel about themselves. Do others consider us kind, strong, attractive, giving, sacrificial, angry, etc.? Our emotions and feeling can dictate our identity as well. Our roles: father, mother, brother, sister, friend, teacher, employee, employer, student, etc. can give us a temporary and false sense of meaning and value. However, none of these things are who we are; they are idols and false identities.

At our core, we are God's beloved created to be with Him for eternity. We are loved not because of who we are but because of who God is, Love. God calls us His dearly loved children, His beloved, His friend, His bride, and heirs to His kingdom.

1. Take time to confess your idols. Start by naming whatever you may have used to define yourself. Start with your abilities and success then move on to your failures and sins. Continue on by naming the qualities you place your value in like your kindness, beauty, strength, or whatever it may be that you want others to notice about you. Then confess how you have let your own emotions dictate your identity. Finally, go through all your roles in life and confess that they are not who you are.
2. Take time to affirm your true identity in Christ. Continue to spend time in Scripture, meditate on the verses and allow yourself to be embraced and loved by God. This may be the most difficult part of this section because you may still be holding on to those false identities and not allowing God to love you as He sees you, His beloved.

3 – Identify any barriers to being loved by God dealing with our view of God and how we've approached him.

It's easy to be pulled in many different directions. We are busy people. Our time and energy may revolve around our kids' activities, our work or school deadlines, social demands, or family obligations. We try creative ways to fit in time with God. Or when we feel desperate, in need, or frustrated we'll turn to God. Our view of God and how we've approached Him may be the biggest barrier to being loved by God.

1. Are you engaged with God's heart and His work or are you asking Him to bless your work and life? What is your relationship with God like? Are you approaching God in a way that is less than He deserves? Confess any ways you've approached God less than He deserves. Confess any view of God that is false.
2. Practice this prayer of confession: I have not been praying to you as if you were really here holding me in love all day. I have not prayed to you as if you really love me as I am, your beloved. I have not sought your will or relied on you; I have relied on myself again all day. Please forgive me for my idolatry. Help me to hide in your loving embrace and seek your will and direction throughout the day. Help me become secure, abiding in that loved place with you, that I may go out from here to love and serve others without confusion about who I am or what you would have me do.
3. You may decide to meditate again in one or all of the previous passages.