Sermon – You Are Your Body
Sunday July 11, 2021

How many of you are glad to be here? It is SOOOO good to be back here again, worshipping with all of you!

So… anything new with you?

I actually counted (because I'm a big nerd) and it's been 518 days since I last preached up here. So I'm a little nervous. Actually very nervous. Because for over a year, I've been preaching to only a camera.

So looking out and seeing all your masked faces smiling back at me is really heartwarming… and also a little creepy!

Of course, so much has changed in the world. But aren't you glad that the one thing that doesn't change is God? God is still faithful, Jesus is still on the throne, and his spirit is working his good purposes in the world – amen?

In so many ways, Cornerstone has grown so much in our mission in the past year and a half. We give glory to God for that. But it also couldn't have happened without the dedication and faithful service of so many people.

- Our Executive Team
- Our Church Board
- Our Worship Teams
- Our Production Team
- Our Communications Team
- Our Youth Ministry
- Our Children's Ministry
- Our Group Life Ministry
- Our Admin Team
- Our Outreach Teams
- And so many other people who have worked so faithfully behind the scenes

These people have spent countless hours planning, praying and pivoting so that we could continue to pursue the mission God has given this church.

So can we praise God and appreciate his people for their faithful service!

Today, we're beginning a new summer sermon series; it's called *Who God Says You Are.* This series is about identity. It's an extremely important series, because your identity is the most important thing about you.

Awhile back, I preached on identity and said this.

Your identity is who you are. It's how you think about yourself. It's what makes you you. Your identity determines how you make sense of the world and how you'll live.

But here's the thing. You and I hear voices all the time. These voices tell you who you are and who you should be.

- *Sometimes you hear the voices in your pain.*
- *Sometimes you hear the voices in what others say about you.*
- *Sometimes you hear the voices in culture.*

Someone once said that life is about identity construction. And the sad truth is, many of us have allowed these other voices to construct our identity for us. So when it comes to your identity, whose voice are you listening to?

This is the question we're asking in this series. The series is based on a book by an author named Klyne Snodgrass.

Each Sunday in this series, we'll be exploring one of the nine factors that shape our identity.

We hope this series will help you understand how these factors shape your identity. We hope it will also help you to establish your identity more deeply not in who others say you are but in who God says you are.

Now, if you're looking for a place to about identity with others, I want to tell you about a great opportunity! This summer, we're running a semester group called Crash the Chatterbox.

[PPT: Chatterbox image from website]

In this group, you'll learn to identify the lies of insecurity, fear, condemnation and discouragement. These lies steal the life of God from you. You'll also learn to hear the voice of God above all the lies, telling you who you really are.

So how do you sign-up? Simply check out the link on the screen.

[PPT, Online Hosts: www.cornerstonechurch.ca/crash-the-chatterbox]

Today, we're going to talk about identity and our bodies.

How many of you know that our culture is obsessed with our bodies?

Through media and advertising, we're constantly bombarded with our culture's standards of "beauty." What do these standards look like? For women, it's usually a body that's young, slim and curvy. For men, it's usually a body that's big, bulky and ripped.

How many of you have ever made the mistake of comparing your body with these impossible standards? I have. And whenever I do that, I feel totally flawed and completely inadequate.

Advertisers know this. That's why they prey on our insecurities. The fitness and beauty industry is worth over a trillion dollars. Why? Because we're obsessed with how our bodies look.

We believe that if we can make our bodies look younger, thinner and more attractive, then we'll feel better about ourselves.

But I want you to repeat after me. Are you ready?

I am more than my body. If you're watching online, type that into the chat. I am more than my body.

You are more than your body. Your significance doesn't come from your looks, your size or your fitness.

How many of you know someone who was written off because of their looks?

In 2009, a 47 year-old unemployed church volunteer by the name of Susan Boyle auditioned for the show Britain's Got Talent.

[PPT: Image of Susan Boyle]

When she said that her dream was to become a singer, the audience smirked and mocked her. Even the judges were cynical. But then she sang.

Her performance was so powerful that people couldn't believe what they had just seen. They couldn't believe that someone who looked like that could sing so beautifully.

Our world will judge you on your looks. But you are more than your body. Your identity doesn't come from your appearance.

You are more than your body. But at the same time, you are not less than your body.

You and I are embodied beings. In other words, God made us to have bodies. Everything you do, you do through your body.

- You play and work through your body.
- You connect with people through your body.
- You think and experience the world through your body.
- You experience pleasure and pain through your body.
- You worship, serve and pray through your body.

Dallas Willard, the late Christian philosopher and author says that **"my body is the original and primary place of my dominion and my responsibility. It is only through it that I have a world in which to live… [it] is part of who I am and essential to my identity. My life experiences come to me through… my body."**

[PPT]

But here's the problem. When it comes to our body, people tend to fall into two extremes. Either they place *too much* importance on it - obsessing over their bodies. Or they place *too little* importance on it, neglecting the body to focus on spiritual things.

So what's the proper way to understand your body? How can you appreciate the value of your body without falling into either extreme?

What I want to do today is look at what the Bible says about the body and how it relates to who we are. Why is this important?

It's important because **Your body is integral to your identity**.

[PPT, Online hosts – Main Point #1]

God made you to have a body. And your body is a vital part of who you are. How do we know this?

In Genesis 1, God creates human beings. Everything God creates is good because God is a good God. In fact, there's a refrain that runs through Genesis 1 that drives home this point: *And God saw that it was good.*

But after creating man and woman in his image, there's an important shift. He looks at the man and the woman and the bodies he's made for them, and what does he say? He says that it is *very good*.

Turn to your neighbour and say, Your body is very good! If you're online, type into the chat, Your body is very good!

Quick side note, I'm currently doing premarital counselling with a couple. And they have a really cool story. The first time they met was when they sat together during one of my sermons. And the first time they talked to each other was when I asked everyone, just like I did now to turn to their neighbour and say something.

So I guess what I'm saying is, who knows who you might meet today!

Anyway, back to the message.

God created human beings, including their bodies to be *very good*.

But throughout church history, many Christians have believed that the opposite.

In the late first century, a heretical movement called Gnosticism was spreading through the church. It claimed that the physical is evil and that only the spiritual is good. The goal for human beings then is to escape from your bodily prison to become a purely spiritual being.

That was two thousand years ago. But even today, we still see this thinking in the church. We see it:

- When Christians prioritize the soul over the body
- When prayer is more important than taking a meal to a neighbour
- When we don't worship with a local church because we prefer to worship on our own
- When we don't care what happens to our planet because we think we're all going up to heaven anyway

But according to the Bible, your body isn't evil and something to escape. Your body is good and integral to your identity.

In Romans 12, Paul says,

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. (Romans 12:1)

[PPT]

What does it mean to offer your body to God? To offer your body to God doesn't mean giving him just your physical body. To offer your body means giving him your *entire* being, *all* of you!

Your body is part of your spirituality.

In fact, the Bible doesn't look at human beings as just physical beings or spiritual beings. It looks at human beings as a combination of both.

Jesus commands us to "love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength." (Mark 12:30)

In other words, we love God with our whole being, with all of who we are.

Your body isn't evil. It's not something to neglect or minimize. Your body is part of your spirituality. It's integral to your identity.

And think about it, God himself took on a body!

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. (John 1:14)

[PPT]

Jesus became fully human. And to do that he lived in a physical body. He taught and healed through his body. He walked from town to town with his body. He got hungry and tired in his body.

Jesus lived out his identity in his body. Even after he died, he didn't come back as a spirit. He came back with a new body – a resurrected body.

In fact, when Jesus returns again, he'll come back in his resurrected body. The Bible also says that when he returns, he will give all of us new resurrection bodies as well.

Paul says,

It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. (1 Corinthians 15:42)

[PPT]

You and I won't exist as disembodied spirits in heaven. We will worship God and rule the world with him in the new heavens and the new earth with new restored bodies.

Our bodies are integral to our identity. So how should we treat them?

The Bible says that we are to treat them with honour. Not just because God made them. Not just because they're part of our spirituality. But because our body is where God's spirit dwells.

In the Old Testament, where did the people go to meet God? In the temple. Why? Because that's where God's presence was. Later when Jesus came to earth, where was God's presence then? Wherever Jesus was. And now that Jesus has ascended into heaven, where is God's presence now?

God's presence is *with* you. God's spirt dwells *in* you.

Paul says,

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; [20] you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

[PPT]

God's presence no longer dwells in a tent. God's presence no longer dwells in a temple. Your body is that temple. God dwells in you, that's why we honour God with our bodies.

Your body is integral to your identity. But **You are more than your body**.

[PPT, Online Hosts – Main Point #2]

Our staff and prayer teams pray weekly over the prayer requests that come in. And I don't know but I don't remember *so many* people going through *so many* health challenges! So many people are also *supporting* a loved one who's sick or aging.

- Maybe it's cancer or diabetes.
- Maybe it's depression or anxiety.
- Maybe it's a developmental issue that affects their learning or social interactions.
- Maybe it's a chronic health issue that impacts your quality of life.

And I know it's tough.

- Living daily with the symptoms and the pain
- Not being able to do things you used to do
- Watching your body deteriorate
- Perhaps not knowing what the problem even is
- Worrying about what this means for the future

One Bible scholar says that our body is "the earliest gift of our Creator to us."

But what if you don't like your gift? What if your body isn't working the way it's supposed to work?

Unfortunately, this isn't Costco. You can't just go to Customer Service, do an exchange and get a new body. It doesn't work like that.

How do you live with hope even when your body's not working the way you want it to?

This was the question one teenage girl had to wrestle with. Growing up, she was always active and athletic. She rode horses, swam and played tennis.

But at the age of 17, she broke her neck in a diving accident.

Her spinal cord was severed and she was paralyzed from the shoulders down. Her name is Joni Eareckson Tada.

[PPT: Image of Joni Eareckson Tada]

How do you live with hope when your body is broken?

Joni was depressed and angry that she couldn't live a normal life. Some of you know about that.

She would drive her power wheelchair into walls until they cracked. She turned to alcohol. She had suicidal thoughts.

She raged at God. Asking, Why did you let this happen? Why can't you heal me? But it felt like God was silent.

After months of staring at the ceiling and feeling sorry for herself, she had a spiritual awakening. What she realized was that God was with her.

This new hope helped her to accept her physical limitations.

- She began rehabilitation programs.
- She learned to live with her disabilities.
- She became passionate about Jesus.
- She asked him to show his plans for her.

What happened to her next?

- She began to paint and draw – holding the instruments in her teeth.
- She used voice recognition software to write over 40 books and record several music albums.
- She starred in a movie about her life and advocates for those who have disabilities.

Four years ago, on the 50th anniversary of her accident, she was asked to reflect on how she could live with hope despite her disabilities. Listen to what she said,

"I don't think you could find a happier follower of Jesus than me. I thank God every day for my wheelchair. How did I make it despite my physical condition? It has everything to do with God's grace – not just grace over the long haul, but grace in tiny moments, like breathing in and out, like stepping stones leading you from one experience to the next. The beauty of such grace is that it eclipses the suffering until one day, you look back and see five decades of God working in a mighty way."

How could she hope despite her disability? One word – grace.

The Apostle Paul knew about this as well. He struggled with what he called a "thorn in his flesh" which many scholars believe was some kind of physical affliction.

He even prayed three times for God to take it away. And remember, this was Paul. Possibly the greatest apostle and missionary who ever lived. But God didn't answer this prayer. Instead he gave him something else.

He said, **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9)**

[PPT]

As much as your body is a gift from God, it's also affected by the Fall. Accepting your physical limitations is part of what it means to live with your body.

Yes, continue to pray and get healing. And we'd be privileged to pray for you as well. But as much as we take care of our bodies, all our bodies will age, deteriorate and eventually die. And even though one day we'll get new bodies at the resurrection, we still need to live within the limits and brokenness of our bodies until then.

But here's the thing. You are more than your body. Why? Because God's grace is sufficient for you.

- His grace will help you live with peace that passes understanding, one day at a time.
- His grace will help you live within and even beyond your physical limitations.
- His grace will lead you into deeper experiences of his love for you.
- His grace will redeem the pain and help you discover his purpose.

Whatever health challenges you're going through, whoever you're supporting, if God's grace was sufficient for Joni Eareckson Tada and the Apostle Paul, do you think it can it be sufficient for you?

We've been talking today about identity and our bodies. Your body is integral to who you are. But you're also more than your body.

So how do you live into your identity with your body? Here are three things you can do.

First, **Take Care of Your Body**.

How do you do that? You exercise, stay active and eat healthy. This will look different for everyone, depending on their situation.

But the point is to care for your body by keeping it healthy. Not so you can rock 6-pack abs.

For a Christian, the primary motivation for taking care of your body isn't to have a beach body. It's to live a more productive life for him.

At Cornerstone, Baha runs our Strengths Workshops and learning labs. Many of you know him. Often he'll work 60 hours a week teaching, coaching and writing. And by his own admission, this is perhaps the most fruitful season of his life.

Guess what? Baha will be turning 80 this year. How does he find the energy and strength to serve so faithfully and make such a big impact?

Baha takes good care of his body. He eats healthy, gets lots of sleep, does 30 minutes a day on the treadmill and is constantly learning to keep his mind sharp.

How many of you would love to see your impact grow as you get older?

Taking good care of your body isn't just for the sake of your body. It's so you can live a more productive life for God.

Second, **Ask yourself, Has my body become an "idol"?**

While some of you need to do more to take care of your bodies, some of you may actually need to do less.

Because our culture is obsessed with the body. So many people

- Compare their looks with celebrities.
- Spend too much time on their appearance.
- Get extreme with their exercise and dieting.

It's possible to actually *overidentify* with your body. That's when it becomes an idol.

Dallas Willard says, “The body *should* be cherished and properly care for, not as our master, however, but as a servant of God.”

If you find you’re spending maybe too much time on your body, you may need to ask yourself, Has my become an idol? Do I need to dial it back?

Third, **Use Your Body in Prayer and Worship**.

Throughout the Bible, people are encouraged to engage their whole bodies in worship. God knows that our bodies naturally express how we feel. And that when we engage our bodies, it helps to engage our hearts.

Today is the first Sunday back for in-person worship. At the moment, public guidelines encourage no singing to prevent the spread of aerosol emissions.

But there are many other ways the Bible encourages us to worship. We’re encouraged to raise our hands, bow, kneel, stand, clap and dance.

Whether you’re more expressive like Pastor Steve, or you’re less expressive like me, how can you stretch yourself to engage your body during our worship times?

Can you use your body during your personal prayer life? Kneeling in prayer, going on prayer walks, placing your palms up – to receive something from God, placing your palms down – to surrender something to God?

I’d like to invite the Worship Team to come back up.

Jesus took on our humanity by becoming flesh. He lived out his identity in his body. He died on the cross not only to redeem our souls but our bodies as well. And when he rose from the dead, God glorified his body just as he will glorify your body and mine one day as well.

Your body is integral to your identity. As one author puts it, “You are not going anywhere in this life your body does not take you. Your identity is fused to your body.”

But you are also more than your body. You’re not defined by your health challenges, your looks or your physique.

Who are you? You are who God says you are. You are a beloved Child of God. How do we respond? We offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is our true and proper worship.

Amen