

Have you heard about these people who hire themselves out to be your personal exercise trainers? Well, some of them are very successful and if you follow their advice and work real hard, then you'll get yourself in shape. Sometimes they will give you little verses to read as reminders to keep you on the right track—things that will keep you motivated while you are exercising. The problem is my personal trainer is named Mr. Bear, and he goes by the first name of Pooh. Unfortunately, this is the inspirational verse that he gave to me to encourage my exercise and diet habits:

When I up, down, touch the ground / It puts me in the mood / Up, down, touch the ground /  
In the mood . . . for food.

I am stout, round and I have found / Speaking poundage-wise,  
I improve my appetite / When I exercise.

I am short, fat, and proud of that / And so with all my might / I up, down, up-down to  
My appetite's delight / While I up, down, touch the ground / I think of things to chew  
With a hefty, happy appetite I'm a hefty, happy Pooh!

Last Christmas, my daughter gave me an Ancestry.com kit as a Christmas gift. I dutifully spit into a little tube and sent it off to a lab, and in about six weeks, I received my DNA results that informed me that I am 90% English and Welsh, 10% northwestern European (mostly German and Dutch), and 1% Swedish. But, I was reading something in the New Testament this week that made me doubt these DNA results. They can't possibly be right. After reading Winnie the Pooh's exercise song and a portion of one of Paul's letters, I am fairly certain that at least one of my bodily organs—specifically, my stomach—is actually 50% Pooh Bear and the other 50% is of Greek extraction—as in the Greek City of Corinth where the Apostle Paul ministered to the ancient Corinthians. In fact, I am pretty sure that I have a *Pooh Bear-Corinthian belly*. In his first letter to the church in Corinth, Paul might as well have been writing to me when he says: "For instance, take the matter of eating. God has given us an appetite for food and stomachs to digest it. But that doesn't mean we should eat more than we need." 1 Corinthians 6:13 (TLB) You see, I need to listen more to Paul than to my stomach. And therein lies the problem—so many times, I eat more than I need. I go to Inwood Restaurant and order a steak that I should cut in half and eat one half there, and eat the other half the next day. But, somehow, before I get around to doing that, I look on my plate and the entire steak is gone. Consequently, rather than weighing around 165 pounds as I should be, I'm hovering around 185. Losing about 20 pounds might help to get me back to my true ancestry and get rid of that Corinthian belly that I have so frequently over fed.

And that's a real problem for all of us, because we are accountable for maintaining our bodies in a godly way. Why? Well, because these bodies don't actually belong to us. Now, a lot of people would bristle at that statement. They'd ask: *"What do you mean my body doesn't belong to me—who do you think it belongs to anyway, if not to*

me?” Max Lucado gives a good illustration that answers that question. In his example, he asks you to pretend that you are going on a long vacation, but you don’t want your house to remain unoccupied for an extended period of time. So, you get a “house-sitter” to occupy your home—just to take care of things while you are gone. And with this background, Lucado describes what he refers to as two “nightmare” scenarios. He starts with this one: “The first house sitter decides to redecorate your house and has everything repainted from white paint to pink paint, also takes out your favorite carpet and replaces it with some ugly shag that you would have never picked in a million years. And when you get back and ask him why in the world he would do such a thing, all he can say is: *“The house didn’t really express me. I needed a house that communicated who I am.”* What would you say to him? Well, I think most people would respond by pointing out: *“It’s not your house! My residence doesn’t exist for your benefit! You were supposed to take care of my house, not take over my house!”* As bad as that scenario is, the second one isn’t any better.

Fortunately, this house-sitter didn’t redecorate everything. Rather, she neglected everything. She left all the dishes, pots and pans unwashed and stacked high in the sink. She never made the bed, and the trash cans in the house are overflowing, yielding the most unpleasant of aromas. And when you ask for an explanation, her only response is that: *“My time here was temporary, so I knew that you wouldn’t mind.”* And all you can stammer back is: *“What do you mean, ‘I wouldn’t mind’?”* And you’d be thinking, *“She must be out of her mind—treating my house like that?”*<sup>1</sup>

Now, these two hypothetical house-sitters made a common mistake. They took for granted that they could treat someone else’s house as if they owned it. Isn’t that the silliest thing? Just because the true owner allowed them to stay there awhile, it didn’t mean these mere house-sitters owned the house and could do whatever they pleased with it . . . But, isn’t that pretty much the same attitude that we have regarding our bodies? We treat them just any old way under the mistaken assumption that they belong to us and are exclusively ours to do whatever we please. But, they are not ours to treat that way. My body doesn’t belong to me, any more than your body belongs to you. Why? Because our bodies belong to God, and He is just allowing us to temporarily reside in them until we get our resurrected bodies. Paul explains: <sup>19</sup> “Haven’t you yet learned that your body is the home of the Holy Spirit God gave you, and that He lives within you? Your own body does not belong to you.” <sup>20</sup> For God has bought you with a great price. [His Son, paid that price on the Cross.] So use every part of your body to give glory back to God because He owns it.” 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (TLB)

But note, this doesn’t only apply to what you eat. There are so many ways that we abuse this holy temple—our body—that God has loaned to us. People puff bellows of smoke into it and foul their lungs. They guzzle alcohol and destroy their liver and stomach, as well as their brain. They toked weed, and ingest, snort and inject all kinds of illicit drugs in their quest to get high, but, in the end, only lower themselves more quickly into the grave. Or, they work themselves to the bone like slaves at their jobs with little regard for their bodies, and constantly deprive their bodies of much needed sleep and rest. Or, if they don’t overwork it, they go in the opposite direction and fail to exercise their bodies in even the most moderate of ways that would keep them strong and healthy.

These are terribly bad habits for us to continue clinging to. Whether it's food or drink or whatever, all of us could likely stand a bit of improvement in these areas. And yet kicking our bad habits is not an easy task. In fact, some people won't even try and simply throw up their hands too quickly and say, *"I can't overcome the urge to over-indulge—the temptation is just too great!"* That is true if you face these challenges alone. But, if you work through these things and enlist the help of the Holy Spirit, then you can prevail. We can overcome the temptation to over-eat. Those who are plagued by the bottle can defeat the temptation of imbibing excessive alcohol. Those terrible urges brought on by years of puffing nicotine can be defeated and your cigarettes can be forever discarded. Those trapped in drug addictions can be freed from the chains of their dope induced prisons. There are no temptations too great that you can't overcome them with God's help. In this regard, Billy Graham has written: *"All of us are tempted. If you have not been tempted, you are the only one in the world. Even Christ was tempted. But the Bible teaches that temptation is not a sin. The sins come only when we yield to the temptation."* Graham goes on: *"'Ah,' you say, 'but I can't resist the temptation.' Yes, you can!" God will never allow you to be tempted beyond your ability to resist temptation. He will make a way of escape for you.*"<sup>2</sup> That is so very true. In fact, 1 Corinthians 10:13 tells us exactly that: "But remember this—the wrong desires that come into your life aren't anything new and different. Many others have faced exactly the same problems before you. And no temptation is irresistible. You can trust God to keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it, for He has promised this and will do what He says. He will show you how to escape temptation's power so that you can bear up patiently against it." (TLB)

Or, maybe your temptation is to stay in bed or lie there on the couch, rather than getting out into the freshness of a spring morning outside your window, and not only enjoying the benefits of exercise, but at the same time drink in the wonders of God's Creation. In last month's edition of *In Touch Magazine*, Kimberly Coyle recalls the depression she experienced when she had neglected the temple of her body. But, then, little by little she started walking and exercising. Gradually, she noticed a remarkable difference in the way she felt about life and how it enriched her relationship with God. She described part of her experience this way:

As I ran, I remembered the glory with which God created me, and it felt like an embodied prayer to move my muscles, ligaments, and bones in a way that honored Him. On my most strenuous long runs, I found both the pain and pleasure of it connected me to God in a way I hadn't experienced through mind or spirit alone. The grammar of the body is a language unto itself, and it is a language many of us do not speak. Our bodies are often an afterthought, temple to forgetfulness. We ignore them, sedate them, overindulge them, or deny them the goodness of rest and sound sleep. It's no surprise the flesh forgets how to speak the language of faith. My body prays a psalm of thanks. Every part of our humanity is meant for worship. I can offer Christ my skin and bones, soul and spirit because He knows what it is to become an embodied creature. On earth, He walked and ate, carved and whittled, climbed and ran. He knows the singular sacrifice of His own blood and bone is redemption for all creation—our flesh is redeemed through the death of His flesh. The body speaks a language Jesus understands, and if I listen, my body may speak the same.<sup>3</sup>

Yes, some remarkable things can happen when we start attending to our temples in a way that gives glory to God. And that is another important point. We don't take care of our bodies simply to feel better. We don't maintain our bodies just to look good. And we don't take care of our bodies in the hope of living longer. While all these things may be a by-product of our proper bodily maintenance, for a Christian they cannot be the underlying reason for taking steps to have a healthy, strong and fit body. No, we are called to take care of our bodies for different reasons. We must take care of them because they belong to God and, in taking care of our bodies, we please and bring glory to Him.

That's something that so many people who become "health-nuts" don't understand. They don't engage in healthy habits to honor God for giving them the bodies they have, rather they do it to feed their own vanity and pride, or in the hopes of extending their life expectancy. If you don't think so, then just turn on the TV and see all the commercials about exercise equipment and the latest diet plans you can invest in. Or, go into a Barnes & Noble where there are shelves upon shelves filled with books addressing these subjects. Outside of the Christian book section, you will be hard pressed to find any of them motivating you to exercise or diet in order to bring honor to God. Rather, they are all based upon preying upon your natural urge to serve your own self-interests or to build your own self-esteem.

The sad thing is that people who become such health or fitness nuts not only fail to honor God, but they unwittingly set up their own god by making health or fitness an earthly idol. Their lives and sense of self-worth become dedicated to how they look and feel as they worship themselves<sup>4</sup>—and so, they worship the creature and not the Creator.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, that is not what God intended. Rather, Paul tells us: *"Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God."* Romans 6:13-14 (NLT2) Your body is God's creation. As such, it is intended as His instrument, for His work and for His glory.<sup>6</sup>

Now, if your body isn't quite up to peak form, don't look at it and be disheartened. And, don't fret about the temptations that face you every day—all designed by Satan to pull the state of your body down. Focus first on something else, and then the issues regarding your body will be resolved according to God's intended purpose. What, then, are we to focus upon first? What should our primary aim be? Again, Max Lucado's comments are helpful. Max tells us: *"Yes, your belly may be a bit soft, but so is your heart. Soft for Christ. Soft for others. Stay that way. 'Workouts in the gymnasium are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both today and forever.'* 1 Timothy 4:8 The Message. *If forced to choose, take the soft heart over the hard body."* And then Max goes on to say: *"But, I don't think a choice is required. Maintain God's instrument. Feed it. Rest it. When [God] needs a sturdy implement, let Him find one in you."*

So, maintain the temple in which you live—that body of yours that is "fearfully and wonderfully made."<sup>7</sup> But, at the same time, realize that our spiritual appearance is what matters most. Give priority to it, for as 1 Samuel 16:7 reminds us: "For the Lord sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the

heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7 (AMP) Our spiritual states and our bodily states are both important. But, spiritual maintenance *first*—bodily maintenance *second*. This is why Paul taught Timothy: “Train yourself to be godly.”<sup>8</sup> ‘Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come.’<sup>9</sup> This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it.<sup>10</sup> This is why we work hard and continue to struggle, for our hope is in the living God, who is the Savior of all people and particularly of all believers.” 1 Timothy 4:7-10 (NLT2)

In the end, maybe that’s the best *food for thought* for my *Pooh Bear-Corinthian belly* . . . and maybe yours as well. Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church  
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<sup>1</sup> Max Lucado, “Temple Talk: Honoring God with Your Body,” – *Discipleship Journal* 24, no. 3 (May-June, 2004), WORDsearch CROSS e-book: Under: “Sidebar: Temple Talk: Honoring God with Your Body”.

<sup>2</sup> Billy Graham, “The New Morality,” *Decision*, Feb. 2019, pp. 24-25 (©1965 Billy Graham Evangelical Association).

<sup>3</sup> Kimberly Coyle, “Body Over Mind,” *In Touch Magazine*, March, 2019, pp. 20-21.

<sup>4</sup> “Should a Christian exercise? What does the Bible say about health?” [www.compellingtruth.org](http://www.compellingtruth.org).

<sup>5</sup> Romans 1:25 (KJV) Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

<sup>6</sup> Max Lucado, “Temple Talk: Honoring God with Your Body,” – *Discipleship Journal* 24, no. 3 (May-June, 2004), WORDsearch CROSS e-book: Under: “Sidebar: Temple Talk: Honoring God with Your Body”.

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 139:14 (ESV) I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.