

# OUR BODIES IN SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

## Making Our Bodies An Ally In Christlikeness

### INTRODUCTION

In his book *Breaking Free: Understanding Sexual Addiction & The Healing Power Of Jesus*, Russell Willingham explains that sexual addiction is more than a psychological addiction. He writes:

*Many think that sexual compulsion is only a “psychological” addiction: force of habit, weakness of character, or rebellion. Compulsion does involve these things, but the story does not end there. According to Dr. Jeffrey Satinover, repetitive sexual behavior alters the brain itself. He says, “This ongoing process embeds the emerging patterns of our choices ever more firmly in actual tissue change.” Repetitive sexual behavior, practiced through the years, creates in the brain chemical releases upon which the addict becomes dependent.*

*(Breaking Free, p.44)*

The reason I bring your attention to this state of affairs is to provoke us to think about our bodies in relationship to spiritual transformation. What researches have found is that ideas and images that we hold in our minds lead to choices and actions that eventually and actually become embedded in the tissues of our bodies. In athletics we talk about “muscle memory” that develops as an athlete repeats the same motion over and over again until it becomes automatic and she literally does not have to think about that motion anymore. The thought, choice and action have been “farmed out” to her body. Think about driving your car – many of things you do (press on the brake as you put the car in gear, check the mirrors as you are driving etc.) you do without thinking because those actions have become embedded in your body.

Now this has profound implications for spiritual transformation. Think about the person who begins to follow Jesus out of a personal history of sexual addiction. That addiction is literally ingrained in his brain tissue and neural synopsis. Does all of that neurophysiology change the instant they begin to trust Jesus? Now some will want to argue that God can instantaneously and miraculously change the sex addicts neurophysiology and I would agree that God certainly *can*. But in the vast majority of cases God *does not* instantaneously reverse the effects of sin in the body. If He did, there would be no need for much of the New Testament and its teaching on putting off the old man and putting on the new man.

Is there any hope for the sex addict or the drug addict or the food addict or the work addict that these physically embedded habits can be changed? The answer is yes, but we need to think about the body as it relates to spiritual transformation.

First, we need to have a correct understanding of our bodies.

### **POINT #1:**

**Your body is not a bad thing (especially your sexuality).**

This is very easy for us to demonstrate from the opening pages of the Bible. God made

us with bodies, in fact, a human being by definition is a bodily being. Here is where it all began:

**Genesis 1:26-31**

*<sup>26</sup>Then 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 birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."*

*<sup>27</sup>So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

*<sup>28</sup>And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."<sup>29</sup>And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.*

*<sup>30</sup>And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. <sup>31</sup>**And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.** And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*

Your body is not a bad thing; it is part of God's good creation. God created us with bodies to do good. Our bodies are the interface between us, our souls, and the physical universe. Through our bodies we were created to exercise dominion over the earth.

This leads us to the second point about our bodies:

**POINT #2**

**Your body is a good thing; your body is included in Jesus' work of salvation.**

Your body is included in Jesus' work of salvation. Notice the bodily aspect of Ephesians 2:8-10:

**Ephesians 2:8-10**

*<sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup>not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are his workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.***

With what do we do good works? With our bodies. As life in Christ deepens our bodies become channels of blessing to others as Paul describes in Ephesians 4:25-29:

**Ephesians 4:25-29**

*<sup>25</sup>Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you **speak** the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. <sup>26</sup>Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup>and give no opportunity to the devil. <sup>28</sup>Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own **hands**, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. <sup>29</sup>Let*

*no corrupting talk come out of your **mouths**, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who **hear**.*

Notice that we must move from using our bodies for evil to using our bodies for good. This makes sense to us now that we have studied our core problem.

### **POINT #3**

#### **Our bodies are infected by sin and the inclination toward self-centeredness.**

As a result of the Fall, we begin life alienated, cutoff from God. We are self-centered; self worship is our fundamental problem and this self worship becomes focused on our bodies. Our bodies become the primary instrument through which we experience pleasure. Our lives become dominated by sensuality. This is the Apostle Paul's analysis in Romans 1:26-27

#### **Romans 1:24-25**

*<sup>24</sup>Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup>because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.*

The fact that our self worship focuses on our bodies is not only found in Scripture; its plainly seen in raising our children.

Our bodies are our first kingdoms; the place where we first begin to exercise dominion. With much help from mama and papa we learn to control our legs, stand on them and make them move so we can walk and run. We learn to control our bladders and bowels much to the happiness of everyone around us. We learn to do more and more things for ourselves and we even learn how to get others to do for us the things we desire. We are self centered, but we're little and we're cute and we can get away with it for a time.

But then we run into someone who will not yield to our will and we discover that the kingdoms of others are not under our control. When this happens all sorts of destructive emotions begin to rise. Frustrated because we are not getting our way, we get angry. We see what others have that we do not have and we feel envy. We have what we want, but we fear losing it to the will of another and we begin to experience anxiety and learn to control. And on and on it goes for the rest of our lives. Unless we reconnect to God our Creator.

Little children cannot hide these emotions – they play out on their faces, their flailing arms, their kicking feet. These emotions are being “farmed out” to these various parts of their bodies. They are programming their bodies. And this carries right into adulthood. We learn as adults to hide childish behavior behind facades, but the inclinations are just the same. Our bodies are programmed to try and get what we want through our own power without regard to God. This is another way of describing “walking in the flesh”. Through our bodies, in our own little bit of strength, we live the life of self worship, seeking to satisfy ourselves.

Our bodies become instruments of unrighteousness. Think of what we are capable of doing in our bodies when we become slaves to our bodily desires. Here are just some

of the examples: domestic violence, rape, sexual enslavement, violent speech, assault and battery, murder, war, pollution of the environment, drug and alcohol abuse etc. These are all bodily in nature and many of them happen without premeditation because the body is already programmed to do these things.

So when we come to Jesus we no longer have any inclinations towards these things in our body – right? Absolutely not true. In fact, a real conflict ensues because there is new management of the body clashing with the old programming.

*When our heart (will, spirit) comes to new life in God, the old [software] 'programs' are still running contrary to our new heart, and for the most part they are running in our body and its parts or members. The spirit has become willing, but the flesh remains weak.*  
**Dallas Willard**

The Apostle Paul describes this very conflict in Romans 7:

**Romans 7:15-20**

*<sup>15</sup>I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup>Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. <sup>17</sup>So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>18</sup>For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. <sup>19</sup>For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. <sup>20</sup>Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.*

This is no cop out. This is exactly the situation we face. We have new hearts in bodies still running off the old software. The old programming is focused on satisfying our needs and our wants through our bodies without regard for God.

We need to realize that our bodies were created for spiritual life. We most enjoy our bodies when our bodies are not the focal point of our existence, but are rather in the service of God and the service of others. Just think, those of you who served in Ensenada or at the McColms, when you used your body to serve Francesca and John and MaryJo, there was a deep satisfaction that enveloped your body. Your tiredness was a good tired. You felt good about yourselves.

**Conclusion**

This morning I wanted to get you thinking about your body and the part it plays in your becoming more like Christ. There are desires and behaviors that are actually embedded in your body from which it is very difficult to break free. But it is not only possible, it is critical that we learn how to break free of these old bodily habits to embrace and embed new bodily habits of Christ.

I want to be clear that though something like sexual addiction is embedded in the brain, the sex addict is still responsible for his behavior. But this is true of the food addict and the work addict and soap opera addict as well.

This week observe yourself and think about how many things you do physically that are “automatic” both good and bad. And be encouraged that through the power of Jesus our bodies can become our allies in spiritual transformation.