

FOR THE
BODY

VIDEO STUDY GUIDE



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Contents

Introduction	vii
Session One: Our Bodies Are Speaking to Us	1
Session Two: Marriage Points to Spiritual Mysteries	7
Session Three: Children as a Reflection of the Trinity	15
Session Four: Singleness, Celibacy, and Same-Sex Friendships	21
Session Five: Our Sacramental Presence in the World	27
Session Six: Our Bodies in Art and Media	35
Session Seven: The Bible and Homosexuality	41
Session Eight: A Way Forward	49

Introduction

This book serves as the companion study guide for individuals and groups watching the video series by Timothy Tennent based on his book *For the Body*. The goal of this eight-session video series is to lay a foundation for Christian teaching on the human body. Though currently one of the most neglected topics in the church, by recapturing a positive view of the body, the church can once again speak prophetically to our surrounding culture on a host of issues that confront our society. But above all, a positive theology of the human body can heal and realign the experience of the church itself. By recapturing a biblical, historic, and integrated view of the body, individuals, families, and local churches can live out the compelling vision that will restore members to one another. Nothing short of this will persuade the world to look in with curiosity. But when it does, it may just discover a beautiful testimony to the merging of heaven and earth in the good news of Jesus Christ—the person to whom our bodies ultimately testify.

Some of these sessions may be more difficult to take in than others. The richness of Scripture and the theological points made herein are worth exercising patience with as you mull them over. Indeed, everything worthwhile takes time. Consider pausing the video if you need to ask questions of one another or to reflect further. Also, consider that the lengthier book, *For the Body: Recovering a Theology of Gender, Sexuality, and the Human Body* (Seedbed/Zondervan, 2020) serves as

the basis of this teaching. It is available from Seedbed and includes further explanations and footnotes for those wanting to explore this matter further.

Finally, it must be said that this work touches on several issues that relate to the stories of people in your community. Since everyone has (*or is!*) a body, there will be at least one session that challenges or comforts every individual as we open ourselves to reflect biblically on the human body. We need to exercise humility, patience, and compassion as we strive to absorb these important truths. Our posture, therefore, must be one of love, even as we strive for the holiness which God sets before us.

Each chapter has several sections:

- The first, “Summary Reading,” is a shorter, written version of the presentation by Timothy Tennent in the videos. It is worth having as a reference to see terms, concepts, or Scripture references alluded to in the video. This part may be read at home or in person before watching the video. Engaging at this level will help make sense of the presentation as it reinforces the points made there.
- The “Video Presentation Outline” also provides a guide for the points made in the videos.
- The “Discussion Guide” sets up several elements where you can reflect on a relevant Scripture, draw out theological points, or consider the practical dimensions of what is being taught. Use those as a basis for going deeper in your conversations.
- Finally, you will find “Further Reading” if you are looking for resources to deepen your understanding of the concepts in each chapter.

May you and your group be enriched as you pursue this rewarding topic together.

1 session

Our Bodies Are Speaking to Us

SUMMARY READING

Your group may choose to read this section individually at home or together at the beginning of your meeting. Consider having volunteers take turns reading a paragraph at a time.

Today's church faces a major dilemma in attempting to answer the pressing challenges to the biblical moral framework: Should it tackle these issues one by one, or is there an underlying foundation that undergirds a host of related issues? As we will discover, we have good reason to start at the beginning of the Christian story—the creation of our world. Getting this right holds the key to a proper framework for other presenting issues we face as a society.

The doctrine of creation and, in particular, the gift of our physical bodies, is one of the most neglected teachings missing in today's church. Casting a positive vision for the body will help God's people speak into many concerns that seem to multiply with each passing year. More important, it will help us understand and relate to the struggles which people from all walks of life express in our families, neighborhoods, and workplaces. Exploring the biblical vision for the body is, therefore,

an urgent need for all Christians. It promises to provide a beautiful reality in which the church can engage in worship and mission.

The first building block of a positive vision for the human body is that *creation is good*. The starting place for understanding the purpose of our bodies should be the beginning—the creation story. Following every day of creation, God observed all that he made and deemed it good. This includes the human body (Gen. 1:26–31). Our bodies, therefore, are trustworthy and invested with profound dignity. Rather than follow the modern mantra of “Trust your heart,” the Bible warns that the heart is deceitful and can lead us astray (Jer. 17:9). The body, however, remains a trustworthy gift from God. Accordingly, the Genesis creation account establishes a

The human body is God’s plan for how we express love. And not just in a romantic, or erotic sense. With our bodies we craft, we prepare meals, we offer embraces to those who are grieving. We help rebuild homes after natural disasters strike.

—Christopher West, *Theology of the Body Explained*

moral framework rooted in complementary elements. Night and day, heaven and earth, male and female, etc., establish boundaries which creation should observe in order to flourish the way God intended.

The second building block for a proper theology of the human body is that *our bodies are icons of spiritual realities*. This means that the material world is invested with purpose and reflects deeper, spiritual truths.

The first of these is the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In his divine foresight, God gave us the gift of the human body in order to foreshadow the way he would live among his people (1 Peter 1:20). If our bodies are not trustworthy, that casts doubt on the person and work of Jesus Christ, God’s Son. According to the Bible, the thread of redemption runs through creation, the incarnation, Jesus’ resurrection and ascension—all the way to the

bodily resurrection of the saints and new creation. In other words, the human body has always served as the physical icon anticipating the mystery of Christ.

Furthermore, the material body is the way in which God is unfolding his plan of salvation. This means that we participate in salvation in bodily form. We receive grace from God and extend it to others through the gift of our bodies. The ways in which God grows us as Christians, or what the church has traditionally called “the means of grace,” are all physical: reading or hearing Scripture, receiving the Lord’s Supper, praying through various postures, serving the poor with our hands, etc. These are all embodied experiences. At creation, our bodies were fashioned as an apt receptacle for receiving and extending God’s grace.

Starting at the beginning of the biblical story provides us with two valuable building blocks for understanding the human body: creation is good and our bodies are icons of spiritual realities. These truths invest our bodies with God-given, objective value. They also compel us to think of ourselves as an integrated whole.

VIDEO PRESENTATION OUTLINE

- I. Introduction
 - A. Disparate Challenges or Foundational Issue?
- II. Building Block 1: Creation is good.
 - A. Physical Creation Is Good and Trustworthy
 - B. The Creation Account and Moral Framework
- III. Building Block 2: Our bodies are icons of spiritual realities.
 - A. The Material Body as Icon of the Incarnation
 - B. The Material Body and Unfolding Redemption
- IV. Conclusion
 - A. Position vs. Posture
 - B. “Born This Way” vs. “God Made Me This Way”

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Discuss any major takeaways or memorable moments from this teaching session. Did you learn anything new? Was anything particularly challenging? How would you summarize this presentation to a non-Christian friend?

1. Biblical Foundations

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. . . . God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. (Gen. 1:27, 31)

Have you ever noticed that the biblical creation account includes complementary elements (or binaries)? What is the significance of God calling everything he makes “good”? How might these details impact your understanding of creation and our bodies acting as integrated wholes—body and spirit?

2. Theological Foundations

. . . the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world. (Rev. 13:8b)

If the incarnation is the knot that ties together heaven and earth, then contemporary attitudes about the body are

determined to untie that knot. (Timothy Tennent, *For the Body*)

Do you tend to think of your body as a symbol and reminder of the person and work of Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity? Have you ever noticed that most of the biblical disciplines for growing spiritually involve our bodies in some way—prayer postures, taking communion, etc.? Can you think of other ways we grow spiritually that implicates the human body?

3. Practical Considerations

The doctrine of creation has deteriorated dramatically in our culture, and even in the Christian community. The result has been devastating. As noted earlier, this loss has led to a new wave of increasingly gnostic views of the body. The autonomy of the “inner” or “true” self over the physical body is one of the classic motifs in this recycled gnosticism. The re-occurring theme is that “body” and “spirit” are pitted against one another, even at war with one another; whereas the creation account, as exemplified by Genesis 2:7, reveals the uniting of “body” and “spirit” with creational harmony being established between the two. (Timothy Tennent, *For the Body*)

Where do you see or hear this gnostic understanding of reality? Consider the following spheres of life: popular culture, media, political policy, education, church life, leisure time, etc. What

are some patterns of behavior in our daily lives that epitomize a rejection of the goodness of God's creation? Some subjects to consider: our relationship to food, our sleeping patterns, how we treat creation.

Further Reading

Harrison, Glynn. *A Better Story: God, Sex and Human Flourishing*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2017.

Pearcey, Nancy R. *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018.

West, Christopher. *Our Bodies Tell God's Story*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2020.

2 *session*

Marriage Points to Spiritual Mysteries

SUMMARY READING

Your group may choose to read this section individually at home or together at the beginning of your meeting. Consider having volunteers take turns reading a paragraph at a time.

We live in a time when the Bible's teaching on marriage is mostly incomprehensible to the wider culture. However, Christians will find it difficult to have a voice in larger society until we get our own house in order first. We cannot assume our culture's view of marriage and dress it up with a few Christian details. When confronted by the Pharisees on a question regarding divorce (Matt. 9:1–11 and Mark 10:2–12), Jesus called his listeners back to the created order itself, effectively moving us away from all the endless presenting difficulties and asking the deeper, more foundational question: What is God's design and purpose for marriage? This is where the Christian understanding of marriage begins.

None of the questions being hurled at the church by the surrounding culture can be addressed properly in the current climate because the very foundation upon which marriage is designed and built has been eroded. We end up trying to make an incomprehensible case in the larger context of utilitarianism. That is to say, the cultural view of marriage typically considers it an arrangement to find personal fulfillment and happiness. Marriage is defined, so the narrative goes, as a legal arrangement which allows two people to fulfill each other's emotional needs and sexual desires. Individual freedom, personal autonomy, and one's own fulfillment are very high values in the West, and resultantly, marriage has been domesticated to fit within that larger functional framework. If we accept this view then we forfeit the divine foundation for marriage and we must acknowledge that any two people who find fulfillment in one another can be considered a marriage—and inversely, should that fulfillment ever diminish or cease, the marriage may also. Instead, we ought to look at the view of marriage presented in the Bible, from cover to cover. In doing so, we discover the third building block for a proper theology of the human body is *the divine design for marriage*.

Several characteristics and purposes of marriage emerge from the biblical story. First, marriage is unitive. Jesus, referencing Genesis 2:24, said that a man shall leave his father and his mother and become “united to his wife,” and the “two will become one flesh” (Matt. 19:5). Marriage is consummated in a sexual act which unites the two as one flesh. The definition of “unitive” is clearly a reference to sexual union. The reason for this leads to the second point.

Second, marriage is procreative. When God calls us to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28 ESV), it is a vision of fruitfulness and becoming co-creators with God. Bearing children creates a family unit which reflects the life-giving mystery of the triune God. While we know that not every marriage produces children, everyone is someone's

child and part of this glorious work of re-creation and co-creation which God has made possible through marriage.

Third, marriage is a binary between a man and a woman. The creation of man and woman is a sign that delivers Adam from his own solitude. It enters him into full communion with “another” as an icon of the intended relationship the human race is purposed to have with God. These two, separate glories coming together is fundamental to the whole structure of the created order. It is meant to symbolize all of the binaries of creation which we noted in chapter 1, such as light and darkness, day and night, earth and sky, water and land, sun and moon, culminating in male and female. The like and unlike come together in complementarity and unity.

Fourth, marriage is self-giving. Marriage on a whole is not less than discovering personal fulfillment, but it is so much more than that. The apostle Paul radically broke with the contemporary cultural narrative by saying that we are actually *not* free to do what we want with our own bodies. Rather, Paul said, “The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife” (1 Cor. 7:4 NIV 1984). We may go through seasons where personal fulfillment diminishes, but the self-giving dimension binds us to one another in a covenant before God.

In Ephesians 5:32 Paul explained the ultimate meaning of marriage: “This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ

Unlike contemporary culture, Christians do not view marriage as a consumer good. For Christians, marriage is rooted in God’s creational design. God created us male and female as icons of the relationship between Christ and his church. Marriage brings together two distinct glories, male and female, and the celebration of the otherness in that mysterious union.

—Timothy Tennent, *For the Body*

and the church.” In other words, to talk about marriage is fully meaningful only when we realize that it is the divinely appointed icon that points to Christ and his church. It is a testimony and witness to the eternal, redeeming love God has for his creation in Jesus.

VIDEO PRESENTATION OUTLINE

- I. Introduction
- II. Building Block 3: There is a divine design for marriage.
- III. Jesus’ Exposition of the Creation Account
- IV. Cultural Understanding of Marriage
 - A. Utilitarianism and Personal Fulfillment
- V. The Divine Design for Marriage
 - A. Marriage Is Unitive
 - B. Marriage Is Procreative
 - C. Marriage Is between a Man and a Woman
 - D. Marriage Is Donative
- VI. Marriage Is like Christ and the Church

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Discuss any major takeaways or memorable moments from this teaching session. Did you learn anything new? Was anything particularly challenging? How would you summarize this presentation to a non-Christian friend?

1. Biblical Foundations

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and

the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” (Matt. 19:4–6)

How do you understand the unity described here by Jesus, and how does unity relate to diversity? Compare and contrast the biblical understanding of the permanence of marriage with the common cultural understanding.

2. Theological Foundations

After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.” (Eph. 5:29–32)

How would you have answered the following question for most of your life: Why does marriage exist? How would you answer it if you only had access to Genesis 1? What about the rest of Scripture (e.g., Eph. 5:29–32)? Practice using your own words to describe the way marriage serves as an icon (or symbol) of Christ and the church.

3. Practical Considerations

Marriage creates “one body,” a new reality, ennobling the sexual union of a man and a woman by ordering it toward a common life that promotes the good of the couple, the family, and the community as a whole. (Evangelicals and Catholics Together, “The Two Shall Become One Flesh”)

Examine your average day or week. Do your routines manifest a marriage seeking self-fulfillment or self-donation? Consider your schedules, shared passions, roles and responsibilities, desires and expectations (both spoken and unspoken). If you are not married, how would you imagine a day in the life of someone being married to you?

How can your marriage promote the well-being of the other person? Do you view your marriage as an institution supporting the common good of your community? Do your resources, stability, support, encouragement, and prayers have an impact on your neighborhood?

Further Reading

Girgis, Sherif, Ryan T. Anderson, and Robert P. George. *What Is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense*. New York, New York: Encounter Books, 2020.

Keller, Timothy with Kathy Keller. *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*. New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2011.

Thomas, Gary. *Sacred Marriage: What If God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More Than to Make Us Happy?* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015.