

*The Life of the Body:
Physical Well-Being and
Spiritual Formation*

**Available January
2012**

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How are our bodies the temple of the Holy Spirit?

How aware are you of this connection between what happens to your body and what happens to your soul? Is your morning “quiet time” different when you are not feeling well than when you are rested and feeling strong? Similarly, when struggling with a problem or having a “dark” day, have you noticed a feeling of “weightiness” in your body that is not there when you are happy? Perhaps you even slouch a bit on those kinds of days.

Since God created us to be whole, integrated beings, spiritual formation happens in all seasons of life, for good or for ill. The training or disciplines in one part of our life is directly affected by the training, or lack thereof, going on in another part of our life. For example, engaging in a weight loss program with a large component of public accountability, I (Valerie) also had success in changing other areas of my life, such as negative thoughts and spending habits. Discipline in one area of life can carry over into other areas of life in significant ways, easily crossing between that which impacts the body and that which impacts the soul.




Our physical bodies play an important role in following Christ. However, we are not always aware of that fact. Plato heavily influences Western Christians. He taught that the body and soul are irreconcilable enemies. Plato conceded that we need a body to carry the soul around but believed the body to be a lower entity than the soul. He taught that our energies are best directed to matters of the soul alone and that the things of the material world are not worth bothering with.

That, however, is not the message of the Bible, which integrates body and soul in a whole and holy way. The Bible says that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and promises that it will be raised at Jesus’ second coming. Likewise, the earth and all of creation will be part of that final resurrection at the last day. God’s pronouncement of creation as “good” in Genesis 1–2 has not been rescinded; neither has the charge to humanity to be a steward of that creation. The material world, though fallen, is still redeemable. Otherwise, Jesus would not have been born a man, died on the cross, and then been resurrected with a new body that could eat fish.



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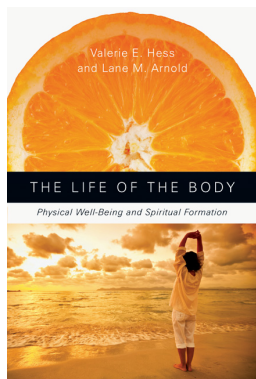
CUT

BOOK EXCERPT

Because of Jesus, the stewardship of our bodies and the care of creation have a “spiritual formation” side to them. Is exercising equally as important as Bible reading? If time is limited, isn’t it a better choice to have prayer time and neglect the exercise? Scripture actually invites us to embrace both. Plato’s insidious, subtle and pervasive notion may be why many of us have never considered the close connection between physical health and spiritual formation.

“Preach the gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words.” These words attributed to St. Francis of Assisi sum up one theme of this book: our physical presence may compel people toward or away from Christ. With our physical bodies, we bear a message of what we believe about God, the world and ourselves. Additionally, the material world is a witness to God (Psalm 19) and is worthy of care. Creation in all of its vast diversity awaits the redemption of humanity, its pinnacle (Romans 8:19-23). Just as St. Francis called the sun “brother” and the moon “sister,” so Christ-followers also show the world the real reason for living in environmentally friendly ways. We live as children of God, the Creator of the universe, loving and caring for the world in ways similar to how God does.

—From the introduction, *“Here’s the Question”*



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Importance of physical well-being and spiritual formation unite in new book

“The Life of the Body skillfully illustrates how God mediates transforming grace through the God-created body and its senses. Carefully researched and winsomely written, the book offers constructive protocols for formation into Christlikeness and optimal health. Here is an engaging contribution to vital spirituality and physical wellness, or total-person shalom.”

Bruce Demarest, senior professor of Christian formation, Denver Seminary, and author of *Seasons of the Soul*

“There are a handful of books that I couldn’t stop thinking about after I put them down. The Life of the Body is one of them. It is thought-provoking, insightful and well-grounded. We bring all of who we are to whatever we do, and compartmentalization is rationalization. If you want to push yourself toward who you are intended to be, let this book challenge your assumptions.”

Keith Eigel, Ph.D., cofounder of The Leaders Lyceum

“The risen Christ said, ‘Touch me and see.’ Valerie Hess and Lane Arnold illuminate the truth that resurrection life is lived in and through our bodies. As the authors reclaim the long-neglected relationships between spirit, mind and body, we discover grace-filled ways to discover life abundant in Christ. I heartily recommend this book.”

Karen Wright Marsh, executive director, Theological Horizons

“Do body wisdom and spiritual formation belong together? Two experienced Christian teachers of spiritual formation say yes. Valerie Hess and Lane Arnold give us an energizing workout for the weary soul, suggesting ways to discard the burden of bad ideas and false behavior in favor of energetic Christ-living that works on many levels. An encouraging book.”

Emilie Griffin, author, *Souls in Full Sail* and *Green Leaves for Later Years*



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BUZZ

ENDORSEMENTS

Valerie E. Hess is a pastor's wife, mother, teacher, retreat speaker and musician. She is an instructor in the Master in Spiritual Formation program at Spring Arbor University. She is part of the RENOVARÉ Partners in Renewal group and led a workshop at the 2005 RENOVARÉ International Conference. She is the coauthor of *Habits of a Child's Heart* (NavPress, 2004).

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Lane M. Arnold is a spiritual director with a certification in Christian formation and soul care from Denver Seminary. She offers spiritual direction to those in her local area of Colorado and internationally via Skype. She loves exploring invitations from the Holy Trinity and encourages adults to go deeper in their relationship with Christ.

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“The Life of the Body is a timely gift to the body of Christ, which, even today, stands guilty of the tendency to split off the body from the whole notion of spirituality. The authors’ work is richly informative and educational, highly practical, and—to my own embarrassment—personally convicting! A much-needed corrective to our misguided understanding of what holistic formation is about.”


Wil Hernandez, Ph.D., director of the Master of Arts in Spiritual Formation and Leadership program at Spring Arbor University

“Through the wisdom of their words, through numerous probing questions and through embodied spiritual exercises, Valerie and Lane artfully show us how, in love and obedience, to present our bodies as living sacrifices to our Lord who sacrificed his body for us. In a day when the physical body is used as a tool for selfish pleasure or neglected as excess baggage on a more ‘spiritual’ journey, The Life of the Body provides a sturdy corrective and a refreshing way forward. The hopeful result that the faithful reader can expect, along with the apostle Paul, is that ‘Christ will be exalted in my body.’”

Howard Baker, instructor of Christian formation at Denver Seminary and author of *The One True Thing*

“In a gentle, humble, yet firm way, Valerie and Lane have ventured into a subject where few authors have dared to go. I appreciate the way they challenge us as persons with individual bodies and members of Christ’s body to examine our issues and embrace the healing offered in Christ.”

Richella Parham, ImpartingGrace.com

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