

SERMON TITLE: "Starting the New Year Well: Physically"
SERMON TEXT: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James
OCCASION: January 8, 2017, at First UMC

INTRODUCTION

After having conversations with some of you and reading articles in *Consumer Reports*, my husband Steve and I finally purchased a snow blower. It came in pretty handy this past week and saved our sore backs from some of the pain and suffering we have come to associate with shoveling snow. Buying a snow blower isn't the only way we're trying to promote our physical health in this New Year, however. Steve joined a gym and has already benefitted from the advice of a personal trainer, and I re-engaged my calorie-counting account on MyFitnessPal.com. As I'm sure many of you can attest, the older we get, the more we have to pay attention to our physical well-being.

Last Sunday, we celebrated the epiphany to the Wise Men, and we talked about how their practices of observation, curiosity, and thinking outside the box are helpful for starting the New Year well mentally. Today, we're going to take this sermon series to step two. We're going to look at what the Apostle Paul wrote in First Corinthians chapter six, and discover his advice for starting the New Year well physically.

1—LAWFUL VS. BENEFICIAL

In verse 12, Paul begins by noting the difference between lawful and beneficial. Apparently, there was a saying going around that "All things are lawful for me." Sure. Paul wasn't a legalist. His ministry was about grace through faith. But even when you revel in the forgiving love of God, there's a big difference between not being judged guilty of breaking a law and actually being healthy. Just because you haven't had a heart attack YET, or developed diabetes or cancer YET, or gotten into a terrible accident YET doesn't mean you're taking good care of your body. So, here in verse 12, Paul responds to that statement "All things are lawful for me" by saying, Yes, "but not all things are beneficial." Paul wants to shift our

emphasis away from “What can I get away with?” to “What is going to help me be more healthy?” Paul says the issue is *not*, “How far can we push the limits?” but, “What is actually beneficial?”

Paul was so intent on refuting the “All things are lawful” idea that he repeated it again, with another caveat. Yes, “all things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything.” Just because you can legally overeat, doesn’t mean you should. Just because you can legally drink alcohol doesn’t mean you should do it to excess. Just because adults can legally smoke tobacco doesn’t make the nicotine and smoke any less hazardous to your lungs. Just because a doctor might prescribe legal pain medications doesn’t mean it’s a good idea to become addicted to them. Just because there’s no law that says you must get up out of your chair and walk doesn’t mean it’s a good idea to be a couch potato. Just because you have a first amendment right to view pornography and it’s not illegal to be promiscuous doesn’t make those sexual practices healthy either. Just because you have a second amendment right to own a gun doesn’t mean you should leave it out and loaded where someone can get a hold of it and shoot you. Just because doing something won’t land you in court doesn’t mean you should do it—especially if it’s a practice that could come to dominate and control your body.

Nope, says Paul. The first aspect of starting the New Year well physically is to know the difference between what’s lawful and what’s beneficial.

2—WHAT IS BENEFICIAL?

So, what is beneficial to our physical well-being? I think we know the basic answers to that question. We should eat nutritious food in appropriate quantities. We should actively exercise our muscles in reasonable ways. We shouldn’t fill our bodies with poisonous substances. We shouldn’t subject our flesh and bones to violence or unnecessary and extreme risk-taking. We should seek medical care that is preventative, as well as restorative. We should brush and floss our teeth and see a dentist regularly. We should get adequate amounts of sleep. We should regularly get our vision and hearing checked and corrected as needed. We shouldn’t drive under the influence or when we’re sleepy.

Of course, such generalizations can sometimes be too vague. What exactly is nutritious food, for example? When dietary recommendations and miracle foods seem to vary from one year to the next, we wonder if even the experts really know. But some advice is pretty consistent. The current USDA method of teaching about healthy eating is the picture of a plate that you see on the front of the bulletin. While any given meal can vary on this, overall, about half the food we eat should be fruits and vegetables. The other half or so would include grains, proteins, and dairy. To really live that way, I suspect most of us would have to increase our fruit and vegetable intake substantially, while decreasing other things. To my chagrin and probably yours, you'll notice that there's no place on that plate for foods that contain large amounts of sugar or fat.

While you're studying that picture on the front of the bulletin, I'm going to play a little song for you that might help increase your motivation. (Play song)¹

The guy who wrote and sang that song has a number of other catchy songs to teach the importance of taking care of our bodies. One song tells children that

Skeleton bones like to run and play,
don't much like sitting around all day.
Exercise in the light of the sun,
skeleton bones gonna have some fun.²

Walking, yoga, swimming, dancing, skiing, hiking, weight lifting, and a variety of other activities can help us become and stay fit. As we age and have more aches and pains, it's very tempting for us to back off our exercise routines. Obviously, there are times when we need to take it easy and let our bodies rest and heal. But, other times, we may need exercise all the more.

A friend emailed me a document this week which suggested that back, hip, and knee pains are frequently caused by something called DBS—"Dormant Butt Syndrome." The theory is that the muscles in the middle back of our body could absorb a lot more shock and protect us from injury if we would shape them up. The document included five exercises to help tighten up the rear end to help overcome the debilitating effects of our sedentary lifestyle.³

Of course, not all of us need to take exactly the same medicines to manage our health or do exactly the same physical therapy to recover from surgeries. We have different DNA, different genetic predispositions, different injury and disease experiences, and different genders and ages that require more or less attention to certain aspects of our health. But generally, we can be pretty sure that our physical safety should be a high priority. We need adequate amounts of sleep. We need to wash our hands and protect ourselves from socially and sexually transmitted viruses. You know what I'm talking about. We need to treat our bodies with care so we can live long and prosper. That's what's beneficial.

3—OUR BODIES ARE SACRED

We'll do a good job of starting the New Year well physically if we can recognize the difference between what we can do legally and what's actually beneficial for our health. But, truthfully, sometimes that isn't quite enough. We can know in our heads that it isn't good to drink a lot of alcohol, and that exercise is important, but we may still need more motivation to improve our habits. Maybe that's why the Apostle Paul wrote what he did in verses 13-20. There Paul says things like "the body is . . . meant for the Lord," "your bodies are members of Christ," and "your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit." It's possible that we'll feel more inspired to change our ways if we stop thinking about our bodies as just being *ours* to treat however *we* want, and start recognizing that *God* created these bodies for a reason. God has an important and holy purpose for us. If we claim the idea that our bodies are sacred, maybe that will help us stick with our goals of healthy living.

It's a common experience at the beginning of a new year to make resolutions about dieting, exercise, and better habits. And it's also common a couple weeks or months into the year to fall away from those resolutions. We begin with little slip ups and then we just give up. But if we fall down on the job of physical wellness, there's good news. In verse 14, Paul says that God who raised Jesus from the dead "will also raise us by his power." We don't have to wait until we die to test that truth. We can experience God's resurrecting power every day. Whenever we're feeling down and discouraged,

whenever we fail and fall, God is right there ready to help us stand up and brush off, and get going again. When we mess up a little bit, that's no reason to quit. It just means we need to accept God's help all the more. We need to unite our spirit with God's spirit and gain resolve and strength from that sacred source.

When we're out of shape and unhealthy, it's easy to get down on ourselves and think poorly of our bodies. But God doesn't see us that way. We are God's children. Red and yellow, black and white, old or youthful, flabby or tight, we are precious in God's sight. In verse 20, Paul writes that we "were bought with a price." So, let's be inspired and energized by God's love for us. Let's embrace physical wellness in this New Year by glorifying God in our sacred bodies.

CONCLUSION

The anthem that the choir sang this morning began with this verse:

Sacred the body God has created,
temple of Spirit that dwells deep inside.
Cherish each person; nurture creation.
Treat flesh as holy, that love may abide.⁴

As human beings, we have lots of reasons to cherish and care for our bodies. As Christians, we have even more. So let's distinguish between what's lawful and what's actually beneficial. And let's unite our bodies with God's Spirit for inspiration and strength. What Paul has written to the Corinthians is great advice for starting the New Year well physically.

¹"Everybody Likes Fruits and Veggies" by Jay Mankita, <https://www.songsforteaching.com/index.php?p=product&id=58836>

²"Strong Bones," by Jay Mankita, <https://www.songsforteaching.com/index.php?p=product&id=58836>

³Andrea Ungaro, PT, MS, "[Dormant Butt Syndrome: Is It Causing Your Hip and Knee Pain?](#)" updated August 18, 2016.

⁴Ruth Duck, "Sacred the Body," lyrics c. 1997, Pilgrim Press, in *The Faith We Sing* (Abingdon Press: Nashville: 2000), #2228.