

The Gift of Embodiment

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[0 : 00] Well, again, good morning to you all. My name is Tommy, and I'm a pastor here, and we've been in a series that we started last week called This Is My Body.

And this is a series focusing on embodiment. I'm getting a lot of feedback, guys. I'm not sure what that is. Maybe we can turn the monitors down. But this is a series called This Is My Body, and it's focusing on this theme of embodiment.

We have bodies, and we're asking questions about our bodies. What does it mean that we have bodies? Are they central to what it means to be human, or are they secondary? What do our bodies have to tell us about what it means to be human?

And last week, we introduced the series, and this week, we're sort of really going to start to dig in, and we're going to begin with what is arguably the most important thing that you need to know about your body.

I might say that every week, but this time, I really mean it. The most important thing that you need to know about your body is the fact that God made it. That God made it.

[1 : 13] These words in Genesis chapter 1, verse 26, Then God said, Let us make man. That can also be translated humankind. Let us make humankind.

It's so important and so foundational that I felt like it deserved a whole sermon. So what we're going to do is we're going to say a little bit more about what the Bible says about the fact that God made us.

Then we're going to consider two objections that will likely arise in some of our listeners, some of you. And then we're going to talk about two implications. So God made us, made our bodies, two objections, and then two implications.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your presence among us. There's this ancient promise that you gave to your people thousands of years ago, that one day you would be a God who dwells in the midst of your people.

And we thank you that through Jesus, you have fulfilled that promise. Through the gift of the Spirit, you have fulfilled that promise. You are fulfilling that promise.

[2 : 22] And they are in our midst. And Lord, it is your voice that we need to hear, your words that need to be spoken this morning. And so we pray that you would speak to us, that we would have, as we just sang together, open hearts and open ears to receive what you have to say.

We pray this, Lord, for our good, but ultimately for your glory. We pray this in your Son's holy name. Amen. So Bob Kramer is widely considered to be one of the greatest American bladesmiths working today.

So among certain sort of cult-following circles, he is very famous. And you can get a mass-produced version of a Bob Kramer knife for about \$400.

This is a knife that is made according to his exact process and specifications. It is sort of licensed by him to have his name on it.

And in every way, it reflects the kind of craftsmanship that he intends to put into every chef's knife that he makes. And you can get that for about \$400. But at the end of the day, that is still a factory-made knife.

[3 : 35] It just is made according to his process and it has his name on it. Now, how much do you think that you'd have to pay to get an actual handmade Bob Kramer knife? Now, for all I know, somebody in this room has one.

Does anybody know, knowing this crowd, right? Does anybody know how much you'd have to pay for an actual handmade Bob Kramer chef's knife? Probably about \$30,000.

Now, one of his knives recently sold at auction for a quarter of a million dollars. A quarter of a million dollars for a kitchen tool. Now, you may think that that's crazy. I mean, certainly nicer than anything I have ever had or will ever have in my kitchen. You may think that that's crazy. But the point is this. When something is handmade, it is far more valuable than something that is made in a factory.

And now, I want you to keep that in mind as you listen to David's words in Psalm 139. Here he says to God, For you formed my inward parts.

[4 : 39] You knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. He's thinking of his own body.

And he's thinking about the craftsmanship that went into his body. And it is moving him to worship the Lord. Wonderful are your works. He's talking about his own flesh and bone.

My soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was being made in secret. Intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw my unformed substance. In your book were written every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

Psalm 139 says that your body was fearfully and wonderfully handcrafted by God.

[5 : 36] And this is an amazing thing for us to meditate on. You know, if a handmade kitchen tool can be worth a quarter of a million dollars, what is a handmade human body worth?

You know, economists actually last year in the wake of COVID and the economic shutdown and all of that, calculated the value of a human life. Turns out it's around \$10 million per person.

That's the commonly agreed upon number. Now that's economists talking. As we read this, what is the value of a human life, of a human body, in light of the fact that we're not dealing with something that is factory made, but something that has been handmade by the ultimate master craftsman?

And these words, fearfully and wonderfully, are pretty amazing. They can also be translated reverence and awe. Now think about that.

The God of the universe, who creates, as we see in Genesis, all things. You know, he creates the stars and the planets and the sun and the moon and the universe and puts everything in perfect balance.

[6 : 51] He creates all of these things. And yet, the only thing that even, nothing comes close to this kind of language. We never read of God sort of fearfully, you know, in a reverent way making the stars, although for us that might inspire far more reverence.

The only thing that I've come across where it uses this kind of language is your body. When it came to making the human body, God made it with reverence and awe.

It was his masterpiece. It was more glorious, more special, more precious to him than the Alps, right? Than the quasars, right?

It was the masterpiece, the masterwork of his creation. You know, I think of my mother-in-law, Nina, who just left town. She's a wonderful woman.

I think that she should be considered for sainthood, quite honestly. We call her Saint Nina all the time. And Nina took it upon herself to make an afghan, to crochet an afghan for each one of our three kids.

[7 : 57] And in her process of crocheting these afghans, it takes something like an hour per inch to make these afghans.

And so each afghan is roughly 60 hours worth of work. And she said that she would sit there crocheting these afghans and that what she enjoyed to do was to sit.

And as she was making the afghan, she would think about the child for whom she was making this afghan. And she would just think about how much she loved them and delighted in them and enjoyed them.

And so literally, each stitch was done with love for the child to whom she would give this afghan.

And I think this is similar language to how Psalm 139 talks about God's creation of us.

As he is forming you together, as he is knitting together your parts in the hidden places, he's thinking about how much he loves you.

[8 : 55] He's thinking about how much he delights in you. He's thinking about the days that are laid out for you. He's thinking about all of the experiences that you have yet to enjoy through your embodiment.

That's what it's saying here. Now, I know as I say this, this might sort of raise some questions and objections. And so I want to try to address a couple of them.

So two objections to this. Objection one, does believing what we just said, does believing that God knit us together and created us as he did, does this mean that we believe in creation rather than evolution?

Is this a sort of argument against evolution? Now, some believe there is an irreconcilable conflict between creation and evolution, that you either have to believe one or the other.

You either believe that God made us, or you believe that we were the product of chance and natural selection evolving from apes. And those are the only two options. And I think that these passages offer a bit of a corrective to some of the ways that we can go wrong in our thinking on this issue.

[10:02] For one, there is not nearly as much tension between creation and evolution as many people think there is. Part of that is because the Bible is not ultimately a scientific textbook.

It's only in very recent history that people began looking at the Bible as a source of scientific knowledge. But the focus of Genesis 1 is not really on how God made us, but that God made us in the first place.

This was a passage that was written to refute pantheism, the idea that God is in everything, everywhere, and polytheism, the idea that there are multiple gods and that the world that exists is perhaps the product of kind of divine warfare or the gods needing servants.

These were the popular ideas that were out there. Genesis is written to refute those ideas. There is one God who is outside of creation, and that one God created everything that is, including you and I.

That's the point of this. So there are many top-tier scientists who are also Christians who believe that God could have worked through evolutionary processes to create us.

[11:18] And it's beyond the scope of this sermon to sort of investigate and explore all the ins and outs of those various theories, but the approach is generally known as theistic evolution, God working through these processes.

I tend to prefer the term coined by Dennis Lamoureux, evolutionary creationism, because that puts the word creation as the focus. But again, that's sort of beyond the scope of where we are.

However, the point is simply that we don't need to make the mistake of automatically assuming that there are these polar opposite viewpoints, and you have to pick one. There are a lot of scientists who are also faithful believers who have found ways to integrate these approaches, taking into account the scientific evidence that we have.

However, on the other hand, Psalm 139 also shows us that it's not enough to believe that God merely created the conditions through which human beings would eventually arise.

That's not something that we can hold on to in light of what David writes here. Right? That idea would be like evolution is the kind of factory that God set up.

[12:25] God built the factory of evolution, and that human beings are sort of mass produced, coming off onto the factory floor of the evolutionary process, while God just sort of sits back and watches it all unfold.

That's a form of deism that doesn't really reflect Scripture. We are not mass produced. We are handmade.

Right? We are artisanal. Every single human body is individually and lovingly handcrafted by God.

So whatever else you may believe about creation and evolution and how long that took, the theological truth remains essential, that God crafts us with love and tenderness and intentionality.

Right? So that's the first objection. That gives rise to the next possible objection that some people might be thinking about. If we are handcrafted by God in the way that we've just said, how can we then explain people who are born with congenital disabilities or other issues?

And what we need to say to that is this. Believing that your body is handmade by God does not mean that your body is perfect. It doesn't mean that your body is perfect.

[13:41] The gospel, which is the sort of story of the world and Scripture and salvation history, the gospel tells us that our bodies, along with the rest of creation, are inherently good because God made them and pronounced them good.

Now that is something that is very different from other religions and worldviews. Right? The gospel says your body and this world, this material world, was good before it fell.

Creation is inherently good. And yet, sin and human rebellion means that everything in the world has become twisted and broken.

So things are not the way they're supposed to be. So our bodies are inherently, originally and ultimately good, but they have become broken. They don't work the way they should work.

Things don't work the way they're supposed to work. And we see this in our bodies. Some people, many people have to deal with infertility and miscarriage.

[14 : 44] Longing for a baby. Feeling like that is the most godly desire they could possibly have.

And yet their bodies are not working properly. Something is going wrong. That's not a result of God deciding to punish people.

That's a result of our bodies being fallen. Of the world not working the way it should. Some children are born with congenital disabilities. Some people feel trapped in the wrong body.

All of us have imperfect bodies because we live in a fallen world. I have a body that produces like two to three times more cholesterol than I need. I'm like, thanks very much. I've got enough.

And my body says, how about more? How about more? And it just keeps going and going. And what I'm told is that as much as I might try to manage this through diet and exercise and other things, that I have inherited genes that make my body do that.

So I have a strong family history of cholesterol issues. That is my body not doing what it's supposed to do, right? Or overachieving, depending on how you want to think of it, right?

[15 : 47] But our bodies don't work right. And David, if you know anything about David's life, he knows better than anyone how fallen and broken our bodies can be.

David made some of the worst decisions anybody could make, including murdering his best friend because he was driven by his bodily appetites.

That is not the way things are supposed to be. And yet, knowing all of this, David is nevertheless able to say of his own imperfect and broken body, it is fearfully and wonderfully made.

And believing that God made our bodies actually determines how we respond to the brokenness of our bodies. Because if you believe that your body is handmade by the ultimate master craftsman, that's going to dramatically shape how you respond to brokenness.

When you feel things you don't want to feel. When you experience things you don't want to experience. When your body doesn't work right. Right? I told you about Nina's Afghans. I would say three of the most precious things in our entire house, right?

[16 : 51] If our house caught on fire and was burning to the ground and we had to only grab, but we could only grab a few things, we would probably try to grab those Afghans. Now, why? Because they are packed with meaning.

Because of how she made them. Right? Now, if there was just some blanket that we bought at Target, I probably wouldn't even think about it. I'd just let it burn.

Right? But they're handmade. So if they get dirty or if they get stained or if they get torn, we would never throw them out just because they're dirty or stained or torn. They have far too much meaning to do that, so we would do the best we possibly could to clean and restore and preserve them.

And it's the exact same thing with our bodies. Every single body is precious, not because of anything it can do, but because of who made it.

And because when he made it, he made it with such deep love and affection. So our approach to brokenness in the human body is never to discard it or reject it or exchange it for another body, but rather to seek the renewal of the body that we have been given.

[18 : 03] Because it's too precious. Because God made it. And this is exactly what the gospel promises, by the way.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is talking about the hope of the gospel. And he says that essentially because Jesus died on the cross, those who come to him in faith can be saved from their sin.

But then he goes on to say, you know, because Jesus rose from death, those who put their faith in him are guaranteed that they will also be raised from death and given bodies that last for eternity.

So salvation is not just spiritual. We don't one day escape our bodies. Salvation is physical.

Renewal is physical.

And in verses 35 to 41, Paul says that we should think of the body like a seed. You know, he says that you take a seed and the substance of the seed will one day be transformed when it flowers and comes into full bloom.

[19 : 08] It's the same substance that was in the seed. All of it was there, but it has flowered and blossomed into something far more magnificent. And he says, your body that you have right now is like a seed.

All of that substance and potential is there. And one day when you sow it into the ground, one day Christ comes again and that seed blossoms and flowers into something truly magnificent.

Same substance, same body, only better. The gospel promises redemption and renewal for this body that you have right now. There's a continuity between this life and the next.

So just having dealt with those, let's just turn our attention to a couple of implications of this. The first implication is simply that our bodies show us that we have a purpose.

You know, some of us are the product of unplanned pregnancy. I mean, some of us have parents that are very honest with us about that. Creates a lot of mixed feelings, I think. You were such a surprise.

[20 : 14] Some of us may have children who were unplanned. One of the things this tells us is that when it comes to God, no human being is unplanned. Every single one of us is the product of God's deliberate choice.

Handmade by him. No human being is an accident. Some people live their lives feeling like they were an accident. You know?

The Bible says no human being is an accident. You're here as a product of God's deliberative, creative action. And if you are here on purpose, right?

If you're here on purpose because God wanted you here, that means you are here for a purpose.

Right? And knowing that actually shapes how we live. To use the example from earlier of a kitchen knife, when you look at a kitchen knife, you automatically kind of have a sense that it was made for a purpose.

Nobody would just make a kitchen knife for no purpose. And when you look at it, just by the way it's made, you can begin to kind of figure out maybe something that you might be able to do with it.

[21 : 28] Right? It's here for a reason. And so then the question arises, well, how can we tell whether we have a good knife or a bad knife? Well, the only way I know if I have a good knife or a bad knife is to know the purpose of the knife.

What is it here to do? Right? So if I gave you a handmade Bob Kramer knife and I said, this is for cooking, and you went into your kitchen and you diced up a bunch of vegetables for a stew, you might come back and say, this is the best knife I've ever used.

This is amazing. One would hope for 30 grand. It cuts well. Right? But if I gave that same handmade Bob Kramer knife to you and I said, this is for carving marble statues, and you went out and tried it, you'd probably come back and say, this is a piece of junk.

You wasted your money. The only way you know if it's good or bad is to know the purpose for which it was made. And this is actually an argument that comes from Jean-Paul Sartre, who was an atheist, who says, the only way that you can know if a person is good or bad, right, good or evil, is if you know the purpose for which human beings were created.

If you don't know the purpose of human life, how can you possibly evaluate good versus evil? And so he is saying to all of his atheist sort of brothers and sisters, existentialists, if you reject the idea of God and you reject the idea of a creator, you can't do that and still hold on to the idea that there is some ultimate good and ultimate evil in the world, which is what many people were trying to do.

[22 : 58] He says, you got to buck up. You got to put on your big boy pants. That's kind of what he says, essentially, in his essay. And he says, if you let go of God, you have to let go of the idea that there is any objective standard, because if you let go of God, then there's no purpose for life.

And if there's no purpose for life, then we have no idea whether we're being good or bad, because goodness is essentially living in line with the purpose that you were made for. And he says those two things are connected.

Right? So he says, you know, or for us, if we look at our own bodies and we believe that God made our bodies, then he must have had a purpose in mind when he made it. It's like looking at the knife.

And this is what gives us our entire sense of right and wrong or good and evil. Goodness means living in accordance with the purpose for which God made us. And so when it comes to, there are all kinds of very controversial issues that we don't have time to get into.

Like euthanasia and terminating pregnancies and sexuality and gender and prostitution and capital punishment and all of these things. Christians can disagree on a policy level about these things.

[24 : 05] But all of the thinking that we do on issues like this flows directly out of the truth that God created us for his purposes. So ultimately, we don't have the ability to say, like a lot of people say, my body, my choice in an unqualified kind of way.

For us, we take into account the one who made us and the purpose for which he made us. And we say, God's body, God's choice, whether it's pregnancy or mask and vaccine mandates.

That's how we have to think. Right? So that's the first implication of this. The second implication is simply this. Our bodies not only show us our purpose and the fact that we have a purpose, but our bodies should inspire our gratitude.

Our gratitude. You know, your body is first and foremost a gift. And if there's anything that I want you to take away from this time, it is that. That your body is first and foremost a gift.

Maybe this year when Christmas comes around, we'll be exchanging gifts and maybe you'll have the joy and the fortune of, of having someone, maybe one of your children give you a handmade gift.

[25 : 19] And I think a handmade gift is just far more precious for all the reasons that we've said. But I also hope that you reflect on the fact that the greatest handmade gift that you have is your body.

Now, for most of us, that's not our first thought when we think about our bodies. Statistics show that 91% of women are perpetually unhappy with their bodies.

And actually, recent studies show a dramatic increase in body image issues among men as well. I think with the advent of social media and, and, and so many, so much visual stimulation in the form of photos and videos circling around our, our sort of ability to compare ourselves to others, has just sort of been radically enhanced.

And so I think for men and women, this could be a source of constant insecurity as we think about our own bodies. You know, I, I, over the course of my life when I was younger, was very insecure about my body.

I mean, in your mid forties, it's hard not to just kind of accept that your body, you know, you have pants that don't fit anymore and things like that. Cholesterol issues. I used to be really insecure about my forehead.

[26 : 26] I used to think that I had like a really big forehead. And my little brother, as little brothers do, would, would make fun of me and say, well, yeah, because you don't have a forehead. You have a five head, you know? And, uh, so this used to be the kind of thing that I was really insecure about.

And we all have those things about our bodies that we're insecure about. We don't tend to think of our bodies as gifts. They're sources of shame and insecurity. Eight million people have eating disorders in the U.S.

One in four college age women. And I know, because I know your stories, I know there are people in this room who have or are struggling with this right now. Weight loss is a \$55 billion industry. But Psalm 139 drives home this powerful truth that God loves your body even if you don't. God delights in your body.

He delights in your physicality. Probably those parts of you that you're most insecure about bring God the greatest joy. Right? In God's eyes, every fold, every wrinkle, every blemish is as beautiful as the ocean at sunset, is as beautiful as the flowers in the field, as wondrous as the Alps, and worthy of reverence, because he made you.

[27 : 45] So here's the challenge that I want to leave us with this week. You know, we're going this next week into Thanksgiving and all of that. And for some people, that's a joyous occasion.

For others, all of your bodily anxiety and issues just come to the fore, because it's a holiday that is completely built around the idea of feasting. Right? And so here's what I want to encourage you to do in this.

We've all heard of spiritual disciplines like fasting or solitude or prayer. And I know many of you are striving to cultivate a contemplative life of spirituality. That's a value that we hold pretty deeply in our church.

But I want to encourage you this way. I believe that we should add to the list of spiritual disciplines, the discipline of practicing gratitude for our bodies. So what I mean by that is, the next time that you are in front of a mirror, stand and look in the mirror, and take a moment to look at yourself.

If you have a full-length mirror, stand in front of the full-length mirror. Take a moment to look at yourself, and then pray and give thanks to God for the body that He's given you. And if there are parts of you that you're insecure about, I want you to specifically look at those parts of yourself and pray to God and give thanks for the body that He's given you.

[29 : 06] You know, we often think, and you often hear in popular culture, that pride is the root of all evil. And I, you know, I think pride is very important. But if you look at Romans chapter 1, it doesn't actually talk about pride being the root of all evil.

Paul actually talks about ingratitude being the root of all evil. That it all started with ingratitude. And I think that at least when it comes to our relationship with our bodies and how disordered our relationship with our bodies can be, I think pride obviously plays a big role.

But I think the real issue, at least for me, is ingratitude. So is it a sin to wear nice clothes or put on makeup or get a tummy tuck or a little Botox?

No, not necessarily. Not necessarily. Here's the real issue though. You know, if we start saying you can do this and can do this, we're going down the road of legalism and that leads to death.

That's not the right road we want to be on. It's more of a question. If on a daily basis we were regularly giving thanks to God for our bodies, if that was something that was folded into our spirituality, how would it change the way we think and feel about these things?

[30 : 15] How would that practice change our sense of necessity around certain things? The God who sculpted the Alps, the God who painted the sky and forged the stars, considers you to be his masterpiece.

What would it look like to begin to see yourself through his eyes? You know, if we spent even a fraction of the time that we stress over our appearance meditating instead on God's love for our bodies, how different would our lives be?

Let's pray. Lord, I know that even as we consider these things that, Lord, this can inspire a whole mix of feelings in people.

And I know that for some of us these are areas of great pain, trauma, sadness, hurt, insecurity, shame.

Lord, I pray that your spirit would do with your word what only your spirit can do, which is to offer comfort in the specific ways that we need to be comforted right now, to maybe challenge or convict us in the ways that we need to be challenged out of our complacency, that your spirit would minister to us, do your surgery in us, Lord, that we might come to see our bodies as you see us, that like David does, that when we consider our bodies, that it would move us to praise you, for we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

[31 : 52] And we pray this in your son's holy name. Amen.