***Life Lessons***

***Taking Care of Your Body***

***So it can Take Care of You***

In some very important ways, our bodies will always be like children, and so we will always have to discipline and take care of them. For example,

* they are inherently ***self-centered***: they pay more attention to what’s going on inside their skin than what’s happening outside it. So they have trouble with *relationships*.
* They are ***now-centered***: their instinctual reflexes from the lower brain react more to the immediate situation than to the past or the future. So they have trouble with *responsibility*.
* And they are inherently ***gut-centered***: their view of the immediate situation is more colored by hormones and emotional instincts we share with animals than by the problem-solving insights of the frontal cortex that only humans have. So they have trouble with *reality*.

To be successful in life, we have to keep training our bodies to respond more adaptively to the troubling challenges of reality, responsibility, and relationships. The problem is our bodies inherently *run from pain*, and pain has three important purposes: it draws our attention to our problems (reality), motivates us to solve them (responsibility), and bonds us with others who can help us (relationships). Without pain, we lose touch with all these.

But our bodies will naturally seek out **Pain-Killing Escapes (PKE’s).** The most commonPKE’s are

* ***substances*** (like drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and junk food),
* ***habits*** (like sex, gambling, working, hoarding, spending, and all manners of screen addictions), and
* ***people***(likeour families that we want to fix or figure out, people we want to live for and through).

Our bodies become easily attached and addicted to *idols* such as these, which take away our freedoms. It’s much healthier to live instead for a higher purpose and power, ones that we dedicate our bodies to achieve. What kinds of higher powers and purposes are best for our health?

We need authority that calls us on a mission. Healthy authorities and missions, healthy powers and purposes, won’t compete with our reality, responsibilities, and relationships. They will *fulfill* them. They won’t limit our freedoms and powers, they will expand them. They won’t leave the world depleted and damaged, but a healthy power and purpose will leave the world a better place for all who live within it.

By this common-sense definition, religion can be sick or healthy. We will know pastors, churches, and religions by their fruits. We need to look around at our family of faith, and within ourselves. Does our faith inspire gluttony or physical fitness? Not only that, does it inspire laziness or enthusiasm, resentment or peacemaking, deceitfulness or honesty, selfish pride or humility?

How do we avoid pain-killing escapes, idols, and unhealthy higher powers? It helps to strengthen beliefs like this through prayer and meditation:

* **I am not my body. I am a living soul, a person who takes care of my body.**
* **I can educate and discipline myself to give my body what it needs instead of what it wants.**
* **If I take good care of my body, it will respond with obedience when I ask it to take care of me.**
* **Nobody else can take care of my body successfully unless I am doing it.**
* **My body isn’t actually mine, as it’s on loan to me for a higher purpose than my own wellbeing.**
* **My higher power is personal, a being that gives me reality, responsibility, and relationship.**
* **My higher power is present and alive, living both around me and within me.**
* **This higher being inspires all the healthy fruits, and none of the sickening ones.**
* **My higher power gives me the freedom to do anything, and will help me learn from it.**

If we are to act on these beliefs in a critical time of choice, we’ll need to have prayed and meditated on them regularly beforehand. Otherwise, our lower animal instincts will kick in to seek pleasure and safety the way it used to do as a child. And we’ll act on *sickening beliefs about our idols*, the habits, chemicals, and people we’re dependent on. It helps to weaken beliefs like this, by using prayer and meditation to see how misguided and harmful they really are:

* **My idol brings me good times, and bad times come when people take it away.**
* **My idol makes me feel strong, beautiful, and worthwhile, like nobody else can.**
* **My idol is the best thing in my life, and it gives me life.**
* **When others criticize and attack my idol, they are criticizing and attacking me.**
* **Even when everyone else pulls me away from my idol, I will remain loyal to it.**
* **Enjoying my idol is the one freedom I would give up any other freedom to preserve.**
* **The people who support my idol are my people, and I don’t trust anyone else.**

One important aspect of physical health is a *positive body image*. Young people and especially young teens can make themselves sick comparing their bodies to those of their peers, to those of media celebrities, or worst of all, to the bodies of their friends who get more attention in real life, or in social media. Young boys can feel terribly inadequate if their abs, pecs, shoulders, biceps, height and weight aren’t what they idolize. Young girls can easily get hyper-critically obsessed about almost *any* aspect of their bodies. And teenagers’ self-image/self-worth can be way too much about their bodies, and not enough about their minds, hearts, and faith, not enough about their accomplishments, talents, or relationships. When people don’t esteem their bodies, they often punish, distract, or comfort themselves with addictive chemicals, habits, or relationships. These choices just trigger another downward cycle into lower self-esteem, and more hatred for their bodies.

Here are some strategies for reversing the curse of a poor body image:

* Listen to your recorded voice slowly affirming your version of the positive body beliefs listed above.
* While doing that, listen to instrumental praise music, and in a spirit of gratitude, look at your body in a mirror.
* While doing the three things above, work out, not to sculpt an idol, but to get stronger and healthier.
* Through prayer and meditation, pray to see yourself as God does, through God’s eyes, created just as God made you to be.
* In the same way, ask God to help you see both your positive and negative body images, as if seeing yourself in two separate mirrors, one that is real in God’s eyes, and one that’s false in your own.
* Then ask God to help you see the mirror as framed and full length, and see yourself walking through the mirror frame into your positive body image.
* Make yourself home in that body, and thank God for your new home.
* Discipline your eyes and your mind’s eye to avoid focusing on the bodies of other people, especially celebrities, and the pictures of friends on image-driven social media.
* Focus instead on people’s insides, their hearts, minds, an souls, praying for what they need.
* Create a peer group for healthy mutual support of each other’s body images, adding and subtracting members as needed by group consensus.

In taking care of your body, remember ***it needs a mission statement.*** The respect you have for your body and your motivation for taking care of it will grow in response to the calling you give for its life.

**Taking Care of the Body:**  **Gluttony vs. Physical Fitness**

In our addiction-prone society, almost all adults have some **Pain-Killing Escape from Reality, Responsibility, and Relationship**. These PKER’s can include ***substances*** (like drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and junk food), ***habits*** (like sex, gambling, working, hoarding, spending, and all manners of screen addictions), and even ***people***we want to fix, figure out, or stay attached to). **This is bondage**, and it results from both the **Gluttony** of enslavement to our desires, and the neglect of keeping our habits in balance (**Physical Fitness**).

**Constructive, temporary, moderate uses of PKER’s and ASH’s in Scripture**

Drugs and alcohol were used for **medicinal purposes,** to prevent or treat illness, and to relieve pain **(1 Tim 5:23).**

They were used to give a **temporary left of the spirits terminal illness**, or going through agonizing **losses that were major, non-routine, and not of their own doing (Prov 31: 6,7; Psalm 104: 14-15)**

**Sweet food and wine** are enjoyed by celebrating their delicious **taste and good feelings as gifts from God.** Receiving them from God with thanksgiving in worship is a means of consecrating these substances as holy (**Deut 8: 7-10, Ecc 2: 24-25 and 3:13; 1 Tim 4: 3-4**).

These substances are used to celebrate **achievements, wholesome fellowship**, **and good news,** such as when Jesus made enough wine for an all night party (**John 2: 1-11**). Other examples are found in **Matt 9: 14-15, Matt 26: 26-29, Luke 7: 33-34, and Luke 24: 29-31**.

**Destructive, harmful and immoderate uses of PKER’s and ASH’s in Scripture**

**Look at all they can take away from you:**

**Freedom to say no**: **I Tim 3:8** and your **Incentive to care, act (Matt 26: 36, 40-41)**

**Alertness (Luke 21:34) and judgment, memory (Prov 31: 4,5)**

**Your witness, and ability to lead your family and church (1 Tim 3: 1-4, Tit 1:7)**

**Your spiritual appetite for God (Mt 6:24.25, 31-33; Mt 26: 40-41; Eph 5:18)**

**Your attractiveness** (God may not be as concerned about this as you are): **1 Sam 16: 7**

**Health** (The many medical problems associated with obesity, drug abuse, smoking, and alcoholism could not have been explained to biblical listeners.)

**The faith, trust, respect, peace, and joy of companions weaker in their faith.** Before indulging in ASHes or PKER’s around people who consider your behavior offensive, read **Rom 14**, especially verses **3, 21, and 23.** It closes this way: If you’re not sure, don’t do it.

Saving the best for last, for a great, colorful picture of the glutton, feast on **Prov 23:29-35**. And whatever you do, remember **Romans 14.**

**RAISING CHILDREN WHO USE FOOD,**

**DRUGS, AND ALCOHOL FOR BODILY HEALTH**

***Preschool and Elementary Years***

Children of all ages need to hear words like this repeatedly: ***You are not your body. You are a soul, a person who takes care of your body.*** *Nobody else can do it. It’s* ***like your personal pet,*** *who can’t take care of itself, and trusts you to do it. Give it what it needs, not what it demands. Then like a good pet, it will obey and serve you, and be a pleasure to you and others. But* ***if your body bosses you around****, you will be a nuisance to others. You may even act like a whiny dog demanding treats. If you are indulged now with food, later you’ll demand worse things, like* ***alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs*** *to make you feel OK. Do we know somebody like that? Do you want to end up like \_\_\_\_\_\_* (name people you both know, including yourself)?

For kids to learn self-control from you, you’ve got to **be consistent** with them. These one-liners can reinforce your consistent consequences:

* *If you want your* ***dessert*** *that much, you’d eat the* ***vegetables*** *your body needs so you can have it.*
* ***When you act bossy and rude,*** *I won’t give you any sweets, or even my attention.* [walk away]
* *Too much sugar and you act like* ***you can’t listen or control yourself*** *well. So that’s enough.*

***Middle and High School***

At this age, hormones, peer groups, and love interests can make teens feel uncomfortable in their bodies. Besides, they no longer look like cute children, and don’t yet look like powerful, independent adults. From all these influences, they may sometimes give eating, smoking, vaping, drinking, and drugging *credit* for the good times they’ve had, and then even make them a *requirement* for good times they want to have in the future. Adjusted for your child and for the situation at hand, you might ask your kids things like this:

* ***Would those kids [you use with] really like you****, just the way you are, even without drugs? Why do you think so?*
* ***What do your friends do for fun*** *naturally, without (drugs)? How healthy does that look to you?*
* *How are* ***their lives helping others****? What makes you think so? Does that matter to you?*
* *How healthy are* ***their relationships*** *with their families? with others who don’t (drink/use)?*
* *You seem to be trying to prove that* ***this is* your *body****, but is it really? Is it your own, or is it on loan?*
* *How is* ***your body image****? How does your body look and feel to you right now? What would fix that? How do you know that would satisfy you?*
* *Are others making you feel ugly? How so? What could make you feel* ***good-enough looking*** *around them?*
* ***Is your body minding you****, or does it seem to have a mind of its own sometimes? When is that?*

Draw them out in accepting, calm, curious conversation. If that’s hard, maybe include a third person they trust. Find out which people they most want their bodies to look like and why (their idols). Ask what they long for in life, what they think these other people have that they don’t (their invisible idols). Ask how they think these people have used their bodies to get these things.

Then help them see the *real, lasting* versions of what they long for. *Where does genuine beauty/wealth/power/confidence/intimacy/peace come from? Don’t you also want to feel these things coming up in you from within, so you always feel you have enough to share, so that others are drawn to you for it?*

Help them discover that these powerful assets come from God, given through people who share them freely, needing nothing in return, people who make you feel beautiful, strong, and worthwhile. Be one of those people. Once you are, they’ll want to know how you found your beauty, strength, contentment, etc., how you get yourself refreshed when you get run down. Remember they won’t care what you know until they know that you care.