

The other day I came across an interesting blog entry that got me to thinking. The title of the entry is, “So why are pastors fat?” <http://www.ordinarypastor.com/?p=5158>. Written by a young man who’s been in pastoral ministry for 5 years, the entry begins as follows: “One thing that has always intrigued me is overweight pastors. If you want to get a gage on how prevalent this is, you just have to visit a pastors’ conference. I am not saying that everyone is rockin’ the elastic waist pants, but, there are a lot of [pastors] that, well, are fat.”



Having been to any number of pastors’ conferences myself over the years, I immediately knew what this blogger was talking about. The issue is more pronounced south of the border, to be sure, but it affects Canadian pastors as well. I wasn’t able to source the official stats, but I did come across a quote saying that North American pastoral obesity rates are 10% higher than those of the general population. Whatever the actual percentages may be, the point is, this is an issue people have taken notice of.

The young pastor-blogger continues his entry by listing various factors that probably contribute to this phenomenon of overweight pastors. Among them, he cites pastors’ busy schedules, and the fact that pastors often have to deal with emotionally draining situations. These realities tend to dispose pastors toward unhealthy choices and habits when it comes to eating and exercise. I can totally relate to this, especially during certain seasons of pastoral ministry. While my weight is normal for a guy my height, if my metabolism were different than it is, I’m pretty sure I would be an overweight pastor. I must confess that my eating and exercise habits are, quite often, not what they should be.

Another factor the blogger cites is a work-reward mentality. For pastors, the maxim, “Work hard, play hard,” often translates into, “Work hard, eat hard.” It’s been a long week, baby, and I’ve earned this night at the all-you-can-eat buffet.

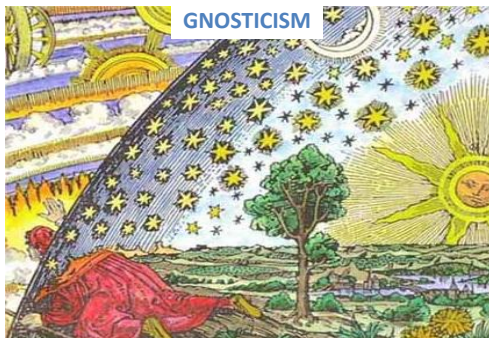
Additional factors he cites include givenness to extremes, hypocrisy, and just plain laziness. But this young pastor’s most insightful comments, in my view, are about how pastors often compartmentalize their lives to exclude food, drink, and bodily health from their understanding of what it means to live to the glory of God. “A lot of [pastors],” he says, “just don’t see their body as a stewardship.” They don’t view their bodies as particularly relevant to their spirituality, and so, many treat their bodies like people treat rental cars. Then, when they stand in pulpits and exhort their congregations to live all-out for God’s glory, some folks get disillusioned because the disconnect they see in the lives of their spiritual leaders is so obvious to them. Others—the majority, perhaps—simply accept the false premise that underlies their pastor’s example—that food, drink, and bodily health (among other areas) aren’t particularly relevant to the Christian life. They are just extraneous matters when it comes to spirituality—not all that important—so just do with them what you will.

Of course, there are any number of other reasons why a person might be overweight. There are genetics, medical issues, injuries, age, and so on. We must be very careful not to paint everyone with the same brush, and we must never, ever judge others when it comes to weight or any other matter. Our one job is to love others as Jesus loves us—unconditionally.

But as we continue in our *Made in His Image* series, these reflections on the contemporary phenomenon of overweight pastors serve as a good lead-in to the topic we’ll be unpacking this morning. The fact that we are created in God’s image, by definition, means that we are called to reflect God’s image in the *totality* of our makeup as human beings—body, mind, soul—all of it. I can only reflect the image of God, the image of Jesus, as a *whole* person. When the Bible tells us in Genesis 1:27, “*So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them,*” that image includes our physical bodies; it includes our minds, our souls. It includes every aspect, every dimension of who we are.

It’s not like there’s one *spiritual* part of me that *is* made in God’s image, but the rest of me is not. *I* am made in God’s image—all of me. *You* are made in God’s image—all of you—as is every human being. The subtitle of this *Made in His Image* series is “Becoming the Person God Intended.” The fact that we are made in the image of God as whole persons—body, mind, and soul—has tremendous implications for you becoming the person God intended you to become. It has tremendous implications for the way you live your life, and the choices you make every day.

Before long, we will look at a sampling of Bible passages along the lines of body, mind, and soul. But first, I’d like to further set up this important topic with a brief lesson in church history. Way back during the very early history of the church, orthodox Christian teachings were often challenged by a pseudo-Christian sect known as the Gnostics. Just by chance, is there anyone here—apart from those who have attended seminary or Bible school—who have actually heard of Gnosticism before?



The Gnostics believed that there was a very sharp divide between this earthly, material world, and the spiritual realm, which was immaterial, kind of like this image illustrates. Gnostics believed that the spiritual realm was perfect, and that the earthly, material realm—all matter—was inherently evil. The goal of Gnosticism, then, was to escape material existence, and enter this higher spiritual plane.

Gnostics taught that God didn’t really become a flesh-and-blood human being in the person of Jesus Christ. They couldn’t bear the thought of God stepping out of the perfect spiritual realm, and into what they thought was this evil material

realm. So they taught that Jesus wasn't really a man—he just *appeared* to be one.

In the ancient world, those with Gnostic-type tendencies usually lived one of two kinds of lives. They would either be total partiers, or total prudes. The partiers thought that whatever we do here on earth is unspiritual and therefore inconsequential—it just doesn't matter. So go ahead and do what you want; who cares? Eat what you want; drink what you want; sleep with whomever you want—as long as you also pursue the secret rites by which you could gain access to the perfect spiritual realm on the other side. Those who were total prudes, on the other hand, thought that because the material realm was evil and anti-spiritual, they needed to separate themselves from earthly pleasures altogether. They fasted lots; wouldn't touch alcohol; even those who were married abstained from having any kind of a sex life. So among the Gnostics you had total partiers, and total prudes, but both believed in the total separation between the spiritual and the material realms.

What we may not realize is that Gnostic-like tendencies continue to have a powerful effect on the way people understand spirituality today, including many Christians. Of course, unlike Gnostics, we affirm that Jesus is God in the flesh. Of course, unlike Gnostics, we don't believe that matter is evil, because we know God created it. Remember Genesis 1? God affirmed over and over that everything he created was *good*.

But what we often do, as exemplified earlier in our discussion about overweight pastors, is to segment the so-called “spiritual” parts of ourselves away from the so-called “non-spiritual” parts of ourselves. And we also segment the so-called “sacred” aspects of our lives—such as attending a church service on Sunday morning—away from the so-called “secular” aspects of our lives—such as working Monday through Friday. For all intents and purposes, when we treat spirituality as a separate category from “the rest of life” we become practical Gnostics.

But this is actually in direct and utter contrast to the teachings of the Bible. Take what Paul says in Colossians 3:15 as an example. Would you all read this aloud with me please? *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

Or, as *The Message* translation puts it—and let's read this aloud together as well—*Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.*

According to Bible, God cannot be relegated to some remote, self-contained department in our lives. Instead, as Christians, all that we do is to be done in the name of Jesus. The declaration of the New Testament is that Jesus is Lord, and that every aspect of our lives, and every aspect of our makeup—body, mind, and soul—is meant to be governed by His lordship. To be a follower of Jesus Christ, by very definition, involves all of me. It is an all-of-life endeavour. That is why one of our Core Values here at Cornerstone is All-of-Life Spirituality: “We grow in Jesus by offering every aspect of our lives to God.”

Let's take a few minutes now to sample some Bible passages that speak to all-of-life spirituality, starting with the care of our **bodies**. In 1 Timothy 5:23, the Apostle Paul tells his protégé Timothy, “*Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.*” Apparently, Timothy was a bit sickly, and Paul was recommending that he take some wine for his ailments. Now, if you know something about the story behind the letter of 1 Timothy, you'll know that some early Gnostics were trying to influence the church that Timothy was overseeing. And here Paul, quite deliberately tells his protégé, “... *take a little wine for your stomach.*” This may sound like nothing more than a simple bit of advice, but it's much, much more than that in the context of this letter. How so? Well, Gnostic partiers were known to indulge in wine. Do you think the partiers indulged in a “little” wine, like Paul instructs Timothy to do? No, they indulged a lot! Gnostic prudes, on the other hand—how much wine do you think they drank? None! Wine was a bodily indulgence and in their view anti-spiritual. The prudes stuck to just plain old... water. So, in the form of a health-tip to his friend, Paul actually challenges the Gnostic teaching that had begun to creep into the church. Behind his comment is the conviction that our bodies are vital components of who we are as people made in God's image. Our bodies are in no way separate from our spirituality; they are an essential part of our makeup as spiritual beings. So what do we do when it comes to wine, for example? We take wine in moderation, for our body's health and also for our enjoyment—we take a middle road between the partiers and the prudes. Why? Because when we're taking decent care of our bodies and enjoying life's simple pleasures responsibly—all for the glory of God—we're reflecting God's image, in which we've been created. Bet you didn't realize there was so much behind Paul's little comment to Timothy about taking some wine for his stomach, did you?

I won't take the time to explain the context of this next verse, but I think it speaks for itself well enough. In 1 Corinthians 10:31, Paul says, “*So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*” What I want to emphasize in citing this passage is that we can reflect God's glory in the way we approach eating and drinking each and every day. What we do as Christians in and with our bodies matters.

Next, 1 Corinthians 6 says, “*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? You are not your own; you were bought with a price [the precious blood of Jesus]. Therefore honor God with your body*” (19-20). These verses come at the end of a passage about our sexual behavior. So again, the point is that we are called to reflect the image of God—in which we've been created—in and through our bodies.

Paul sums it up best when he writes in Romans chapter 12 (verse 1), “*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is true worship.*”

There are dozens of other scriptural examples I could show you about how our bodies are an essential part of our makeup as human beings made in God's image—and I don't want you to forget that our bodies, like Christ's, will one day be raised from death to last forever. But at this time, I'd like to move on and talk for a few minutes about reflecting God's image with our **minds**—in the way we think. Christian historian Mark Noll wrote a book called *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, which explores how contemporary

evangelical Christians apply their minds to matters of faith and life. Noll cuts right to the chase. The very first sentence of his book reads: “The scandal of the evangelical mind [today] is that it has no mind.” He says that notwithstanding their many virtues, North American evangelical Christians in recent generations have not been known for their ability to think well.

I would say this state of affairs has improved somewhat since 1994 when Noll first wrote his book. Some first-rate thinking and scholarship has indeed come from a number evangelical Christians. However, 17 years after Noll sounded the alarm bell, today’s evangelical pulpits and pews remain filled with Christians for whom the vigorous use of the mind is neither a priority nor a strong suite.

In this market-driven world, we’re used to 30-second commercial spots, and we’ve been very well-trained to be passive sponges that for the most part uncritically absorb what the entertainment moguls and their sponsors tell us to think. An alarming number of North American Christians today prefer sound bites to sound thinking. They prefer being spoon-fed to getting a good book read. I guess I just gave you two sound bites right there, didn’t I? Oops. We’d rather have a nice, devotional thought for the day—and the warm, fuzzy religious sentimentality that goes along with it— than we would a real passion for Christ that is rooted in the rigorous pursuit of the mind of Christ. After all, it’s much easier to spout pious clichés than it is to be a serious student of the scriptures. But as the Apostle Paul reminded Timothy: *You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.* It takes the exercise of our minds to reap the benefits of knowing the scriptures.

The adult literacy rate in an area like Markham must be very, very high, I would imagine; so it’s not like most of us *can’t* read. However, trying to get today’s average Christian to read a book of decent substance all the way through is a surprisingly difficult task. And many of the faith-based books Christians do read today are little more than popularized, pre-digested drivel. [Why don’t you tell us how you *really* feel, Steve?] It’s not that we *can’t* think deeply about our faith and how it relates to our lives. It’s that we lack the time, energy, and most of all, the will to think. Christians today have become lazy thinkers. That’s not what Jesus had in mind when he said, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength*” (Mark 12:30).

It’s not that every Christian needs to become some kind of intellectual or academic—that’s not what I’m talking about— although it would be great if some of you who have the wiring for it would open yourself to the possibility of God calling you into to a life of scholarship, for example— and not necessarily just theological or biblical scholarship, but scholarship or research in any worthwhile field, because the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it (Psalm 24:1). Having said this, I believe God would challenge *all* of us become far more mindful Christians, far deeper, more active and creative *thinkers* about how to integrate faith and life.

Scripture shows us that Christian discipleship requires the continuous use of our minds. What does the Apostle Paul say in Romans 12 (verse 2a)? “*Do not conform any longer to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*” We open ourselves up to real transformation when we open our minds and submit our thoughts to Christ. This is why it says in 2 Corinthians, “*We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive, and make it obedient to Christ*” (10:5).

As your thoughts go, so your life goes. What fills your mind shapes the kind of person you become. Satan’s most potent weapon against us is what? It’s the lie. Jesus tells us that Satan’s been a deceiver from the beginning; he’s not just a liar, but the very father of lies. So spiritual warfare, more than anything else, is a truth battle. It’s a battle for the mind. And so, taking every thought captive and making it obedient to Christ is a necessary act of spiritual warfare for every Christian. If we don’t pay attention to our thoughts day in and day out as followers of Jesus, the enemy’s lies will drag us down, and we won’t grow. If the mental chatter that goes on in our minds remains unchecked and unchallenged, the world will very quickly shape us into its mold. If we don’t reflect the image of God in the way we think, do you honestly believe we can every get to the place where we increasingly reflect the likeness of Jesus in the way we live?

I’m going to share a few applications, some takeaways, with you shortly. But first, I’d like to touch on how our **souls** can come to reflect the image of God in which we’ve been created. Again, as people made in God’s image, we are called to reflect God’s image, to reflect Jesus, in the totality of who we are, as *whole persons*—body, mind, and soul. We’ve looked at some biblical examples of body and mind. And there are other components of the human makeup that we could have explored in the Bible as well— our emotions, for example, which are very closely connected to our minds or thought life. We could have talked about the human heart or spirit, which from a biblical point of view has to do the choices and decisions we make— our character.

But this morning, in addition to body and mind, I’d like to talk about the soul. What does the Bible mean when it speaks of the human soul? The term is used in various ways in scripture, different ways, and can therefore be a little tricky to define. But it’s important, so please do your best to stick with me on this. The meaning of “soul” that I’d like to focus on for our purposes this morning is as follows: The *Anchor Bible Dictionary* explains that the soul is the uniting factor for the inner powers of a person. It’s a collective term that refers to the entire inner life of a person—including all that he or she believes, hopes, and strives for. The soul is the aspect of your inner being that connects and integrates everything else going on in the various dimensions of your life. The soul is also normally beyond our conscious awareness. We are highly aware of our body, for example, but rarely our soul. And as Dallas Willard says, “It is the life center of the human being. It regulates whatever is occurring in each dimension and how it interacts with the others.”

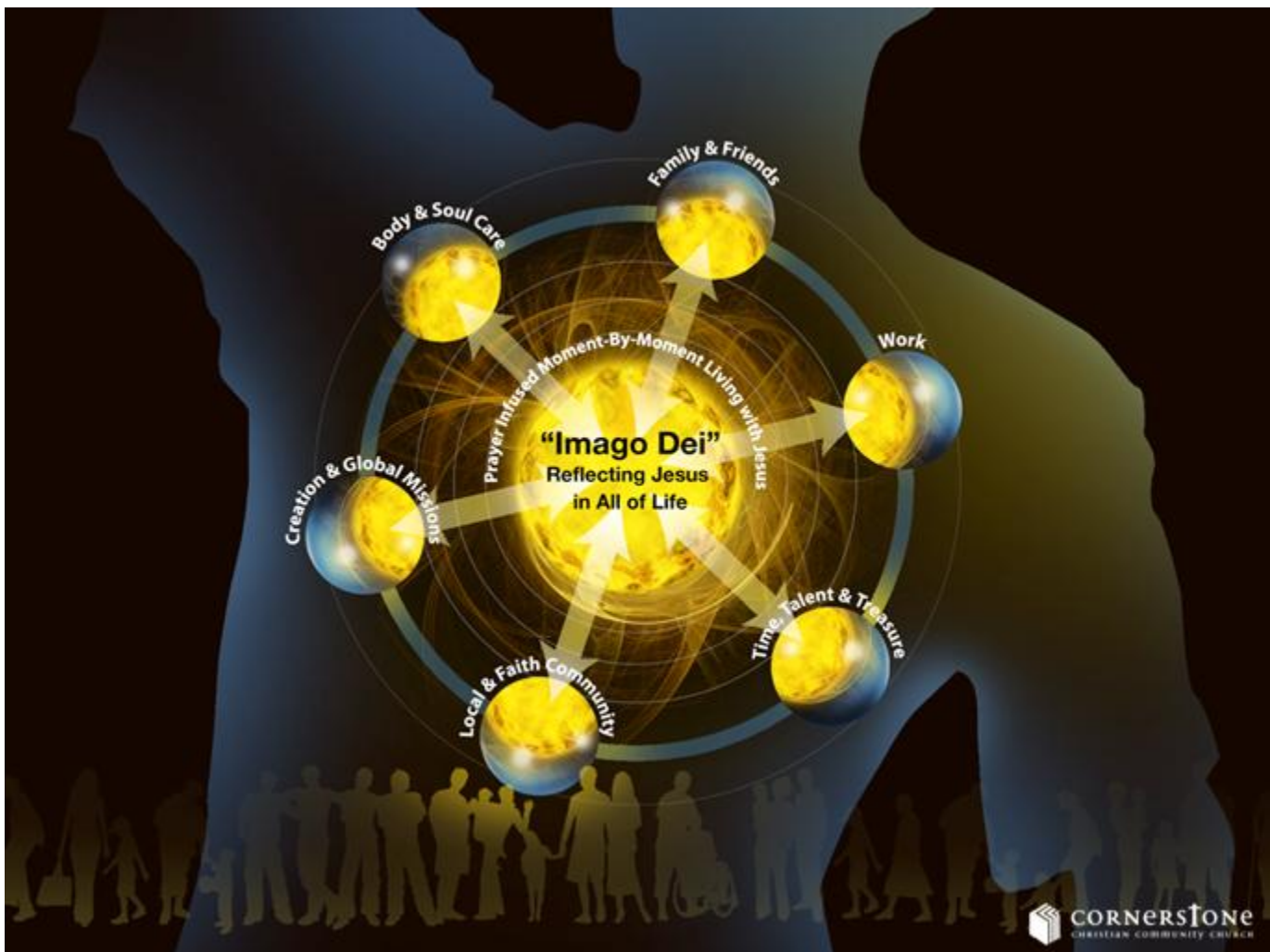
This meaning would seem to be in view, for example, in Deuteronomy 4:9, which says, “*Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which you have seen.*” This meaning would seem to be in view when Jesus

says, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29).

In Jesus, we find rest for our souls-- that central aspect of our inner being that seeks to pull all the parts of ourselves and our lives together into a coherent whole. Our soul is the essence of who we are; it is the “glue” that holds our whole self together. It is the deepest part of my inner self that—when it’s working right—is like a conductor that gets all the different aspects of my life to sing together in harmony.

So when my soul is well-ordered, my life comes together; it is harmonious and coherent. When my soul is not well ordered, my life is discordant; it isn’t very well unified; it is confused. And as this verse in Matthew suggests, in line with the whole trajectory of New Testament teaching, it is when our soul is in relationship with Jesus Christ that we will find “rest” for our souls. In Jesus, and only in Jesus, can my life become what God has always intended it to be—well-ordered, integrated, harmonious; only in Jesus does my life “come together” and “make sense.” It’s not automatic. We have to partner with Jesus, we have to relate to Jesus to move in that direction. But only in Jesus does my soul rest, does my life—in all its dimensions and aspects, come together. Follow?

When you look at Cornerstone’s theme for the year—*Imago Dei: Reflecting Jesus in All of Life*—you see an illustration of this. How does our life come together so that we can reflect the image of God in all its dimensions as we were made to do — in work, relationships, the care of our bodies, the proper stewardship of our time, talent, treasure, and so on? Our life comes together when we keep Jesus at the center of it; when we, as the image shows, pursue prayer-infused, moment-by-moment living with Jesus.



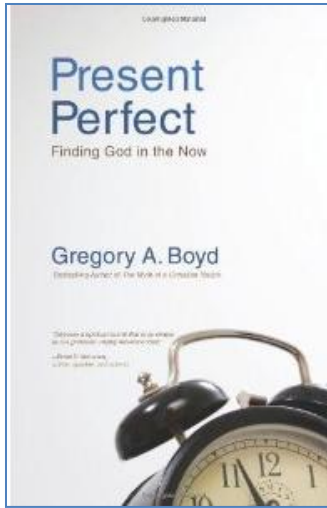
And that leads me to the first of three applications I want to share with you this morning.

SOUL: Practice prayer-infused, moment-by-moment living with Jesus.

- The classical spiritual discipline known as Practicing the Presence of God
- Invite Pastor Steve to lead “Practicing Presence of God” or “Rhythms of Prayer” study in your small group
- Some online resources are:

- Frank Laubach: *The Game with Minutes* http://hockleys.org/wp-content/uploads/The_Game_with_Minutes.pdf
- Brother Lawrence: *The Practice of the Presence of God*
<http://www.practicegodspresence.com/brotherlawrence/practicegodspresence09.html>

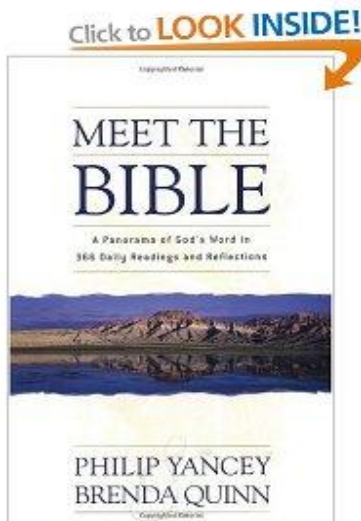
- Some helpful print resources are:



MIND: Think about the Way You Think

When it comes to your mind, my challenge to you this morning is to think about the way you think. Think about how you use your mind—about what you fill your mind with, about how active your mind is or isn't in the pursuit of Christ and in the application of his truth to your life.

- Recommended resource for engaging your mind with scripture:



BODY: “Surrendering the Parts of My Body to Christ” exercise (handout)