

Chapter 9

Your Body Is Part of the Assignment

For much of our youth, the body is easy to take for granted. We work late, sleep too little, eat whatever is convenient, carry more stress than we should, and assume that a few days of rest will repair the damage we have done. When something hurts, we expect it to stop. When we are tired, we push through. If our bodies cooperate often enough, we can develop the illusion that they always will.

Eventually, sustaining that illusion becomes harder. Recovery takes longer than it once did. A poor night's sleep lingers into the next day. Strength that once came naturally now takes more effort to maintain, and routine medical appointments are starting to yield numbers we actually pay attention to. Knees, backs, shoulders, blood pressure, medications, and a growing list of other considerations become part of conversations we never imagined having at twenty-five.

For some men, the change is gradual. For others, a diagnosis, accident, surgery, or unexpected health crisis can upend their lives. Still others have lived with illness or disability since childhood and have never had the luxury of taking their physical ability for granted. However we arrive here, the years ahead confront us with a reality we cannot responsibly ignore: our physical capacity has limits.

Christians do not always know how to respond to that reality. Some treat physical care as less spiritual than prayer, Scripture, worship, or ministry. Others become so preoccupied with exercise, nutrition, longevity, and appearance that health becomes a consuming pursuit. Our bodies are neither gods to be worshiped nor disposable containers to be ignored. They are part of the life God has entrusted to us, so caring for them belongs in the broader conversation about stewardship.

What Is the Health For

Before making practical changes, we need to ask why we want to be healthy in the first place. There are many reasonable answers. We may want to feel better, maintain mobility, reduce pain, have more energy, or continue enjoying activities that matter to us. Most of us would welcome more years with the people we love. None of those desires is inherently wrong, and we do not need to apologize for seeking relief from pain or for enjoying a body that feels well.

Yet a person can be extraordinarily disciplined about their health and still organize their entire life around themselves. They can exercise every day, eat carefully, and devote every extra ounce of energy to their own comfort. Discipline alone does not settle the question of stewardship. We also need to ask what we want to use that capacity for.

Perhaps you want to travel with your wife or get on the floor with your grandchildren and have the strength to get back up. You may want to continue working, serving at church, mentoring younger people, or helping a neighbor. Perhaps your desire is simpler: you want to participate more fully in daily life with the people you love. Connecting physical care with love gives it a place within a purpose that goes beyond merely preserving ourselves indefinitely.

That does not mean our bodies matter only for what they enable us to accomplish. The man who needs to be lifted from his bed deserves care as surely as the man who can lift someone else. Both are people made in God's image. We care for the body because the person matters, and we offer whatever capacity we have as our response to God's love.

Present Your Bodies

Paul gives us a larger framework in Romans 12:

“Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.” —
Romans 12:1 (NASB 2020)

Paul is not giving the Roman Christians a health plan. In response to God's mercy, believers are to offer their whole embodied lives to Him. Worship is not confined to our minds or to church services. Following Jesus takes shape in the ordinary choices of people living in the physical world.

We sit beside someone in a hospital, go to work, help a neighbor, attend a grandchild's event, or meet a younger person for breakfast. Our physical capacity shapes how we engage in these acts of love. Caring for that capacity can therefore be a practical way to offer our lives to God.

Greater ability, however, does not automatically translate into greater faithfulness. A strong man may use very little of his strength in service to others. Another man living with serious limitations may show remarkable patience, generosity, and love. The question is how we respond to what God has entrusted to us, given the circumstances we face. Even then, we begin where Paul begins: with God's mercy. Physical discipline is a response to grace, never a means to earn it.

Health Is Not a Measure of Faithfulness

Health is not entirely within our control. Genetics matter. Accidents happen. Diseases develop. Bodies age differently, and conditions arise that no amount of discipline could have prevented. A man can follow reasonable medical guidance and still become seriously ill. Another may neglect his health for years and remain remarkably functional. Physical outcomes do not follow a simple formula in which good behavior always produces good health.

We therefore need to be careful with the moral language we use to describe illness. A person living with cancer is not necessarily a worse steward than someone who runs marathons. Chronic pain, heart disease, disability, or neurological illness does not determine the quality of a person's spiritual life. We cannot look at another man's body and assume we know the quality of his faith.

Paul knew what it meant to ask God to remove an affliction and to receive a different answer. In 2 Corinthians 12:7–10, he describes a “thorn in the flesh” and says he pleaded with the Lord three times for it to leave him. Scripture does not identify the thorn precisely enough for us to diagnose it. We should not turn an uncertain detail into a claim that Paul had a specific physical illness. The Lord's answer, however, is clear: “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9, NASB 2020).

Paul's experience does not tell us what will happen with every illness or whether a particular treatment will succeed. It does show that weakness does not mean the absence of Christ's power or care. That is an important message for anyone whose body will not cooperate with the plans he had for the years ahead.

None of this discourages us from asking. Paul asked three times. James instructs the sick believer to involve the church.

“Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;” — James 5:14 (NASB 2020)

Churches practice this instruction in different ways, and Christians hold different expectations about how often God responds by healing. The passage makes clear that prayer for healing is an ordinary part of Christian life and that we are not meant to face illness alone. We can ask boldly, receive medical care gratefully, and entrust the answer to the Lord. Healing, when it comes, is His gift. When it does not come as we asked, His grace is still sufficient, and neither outcome measures the faith of the person who prayed.

Sometimes stewardship means pursuing improvement when it is reasonable. At other times, it means learning to live with a limitation we did not choose and cannot remove. We may do both in the same season, seeking treatment while acknowledging what life is like today. Neither requires us to pretend the loss does not hurt.

Limitation and Neglect Are Not the Same

Acknowledging what we cannot control should not become an excuse to ignore the choices that remain ours. There is a meaningful difference between living with an illness and refusing to consider reasonable care. A man who knows that a habit is harming him has something to address, even if changing that habit cannot guarantee a particular outcome.

We also need enough humility to recognize that an unfinished health decision is not always a sign of indifference. Cost, transportation, caregiving responsibilities, fear, exhaustion, or difficulty understanding a treatment plan may prevent someone from receiving the care they need. Before condemning ourselves or someone else for failing to follow through, we should ask what is getting in the way. Sometimes the next faithful step is to seek help in addressing that obstacle.

For others, the difficulty is more familiar. We have tried to change before and become discouraged. Health has seemed less urgent than the work immediately in front of us. Or we have assumed that paying attention to our own needs is selfish because other people depend on us. Caring for yourself and living for yourself are not the same thing. Reasonable care can be a way we love those people.

Our choices rarely affect only us. A spouse may share the consequences of a habit we refuse to address. Family members may shoulder responsibilities we could have helped prepare for. This is a reason to act considerately, not to blame an ill person for needing help. Even the most careful steward may eventually require extensive care. Receiving it is part of our life together, and no one must earn that care by proving they made every health decision correctly.

Within Jesus > Others > Self, putting self last does not mean pretending we have no legitimate needs. Love may lead us to keep an appointment, ask someone to share a responsibility, or admit that our current pace is no longer sustainable. It may also lead us to graciously accept assistance when independence is no longer possible.

Honesty About Being Human

The Gospels do not portray Jesus as untouched by the physical realities of human life. John tells us that He sat by a well because He was tired from His journey (John 4:6). When the apostles returned from their ministry, Jesus invited them to come away and rest because the demands around them had left them no time to eat (Mark 6:30–32). Luke describes growing crowds seeking His teaching and healing, while Jesus withdrew to solitary places to pray (Luke 5:15–16).

These passages are not a formula for organizing every schedule. They do remind us that genuine human need is not an embarrassment to be overcome by appearing more spiritual. Jesus took on real human flesh. We have no reason to believe that maturity requires us to deny our exhaustion, hunger, or need for rest.

For a man who has spent decades equating constant activity with responsibility, accepting this can be difficult. Keeping a medical appointment may matter more than another hour at work. Asking for help may be wiser than concealing how poorly we are functioning. Sometimes the most loving thing we can do is acknowledge that we are tired, hurting, or stretched beyond our limits and make room for appropriate care.

Health Can Become an Idol Too

The opposite danger is equally real. Health can take precedence over career, money, or achievement. What began as a desire to feel better can become an attempt to control every measurable aspect of aging. We may spend more time, attention, and money pursuing a future no amount of discipline can guarantee.

Careful routines, in themselves, are not evidence of misplaced devotion. A person may need a strict diet, regular treatment, or a structured exercise schedule to manage a medical condition. The question is what rules our hearts. Are we receiving these practices as useful means of care, or are we seeking physical control for the security only God can give? Are we able to love the people around us within our necessary limits, or has preserving ourselves become the purpose around which everything else must revolve?

Devices and measurements can provide useful information. Medical care and healthy practices can reduce risks and may extend life. None of them can guarantee how many years we will live or remove our mortality. Remembering that truth should put physical care in its proper place without discouraging us from receiving its benefits. We care for the body without asking it to save us. Our ultimate hope rests in Jesus.

Receiving the Body You Have

Normal aging can feel like evidence that we are doing something wrong, especially in a culture that treats youth as an achievement. Strength, recovery, appearance, and physical ability change. There is wisdom in caring for the capacity we have, but signs of aging are not a moral failure.

Appropriate physical activity can support health and physical function as we age. What is appropriate depends on our circumstances, and a qualified healthcare professional can help us understand how an illness, injury, or disability should inform our choices. Accepting age does not mean dismissing a new symptom or an unexplained change as something we must simply endure. It means facing reality honestly while seeking reasonable care.

That honesty may include grief. A man who has worked in physical labor for years may no longer be able to do the same work. Someone who traveled freely may need to stay closer to home. A person accustomed to being the strong one may struggle to accept help. These changes affect identity as well as ability, especially when we have long understood ourselves as the provider or the person others depend on.

There may be new ways to give. A man who can no longer do demanding work may be able to teach someone else. Someone whose travel has become limited may be more available to a nearby friend. Prayer, encouragement, and the sharing of wisdom may take on a different role in his life.

We can look for those possibilities without pretending that suffering is easy or that every loss must yield an immediately recognizable benefit.

We must also leave room for the man whose illness limits his possibilities. Severe pain, exhaustion, or cognitive decline may leave him unable to teach, encourage, or pray as he once did. He has not failed; he cannot replace one form of productivity with another. His worth has not diminished, and he remains worthy of love. A Christian understanding of stewardship must make room for both receiving and giving care.

Paul holds physical decline and spiritual renewal together: “though our outer person is decaying, yet our inner person is being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16, NASB 2020). Our hope extends beyond merely maintaining our bodies indefinitely. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul links the future resurrection of those who belong to Christ to the resurrection of Jesus Himself. He describes the raising of the dead and the transformation of mortal bodies (1 Corinthians 15:20–23, 42–49, 51–57). This is hope for embodied life beyond death, grounded in Christ’s victory. We can grieve what is changing now while trusting that weakness and death will not have the final word.

A Reasonable Standard

What would reasonable faithfulness look like for you now? The answer will vary widely. A healthy fifty-year-old may have different possibilities than a seventy-five-year-old living with several medical conditions. Neither man is helped by using the other’s circumstances as a standard. We need to consider the choices available to us, the help we need, and the responsibilities we carry.

Perhaps the next step is to follow through on postponed care. This may include finding a suitable way to move regularly, protecting time for sleep, discussing a nutrition concern, or seeking help with stress. If you are unsure what is appropriate, make the next step a conversation with a qualified healthcare professional who understands your situation. A book can help you examine your stewardship; medical decisions need to take into account your individual health and circumstances.

There is no need to overhaul your entire life this week. Choose one reasonable first step. A modest practice that becomes part of daily life may serve you better than an ambitious plan you cannot sustain. If the first attempt reveals an obstacle, address it and adjust the plan. Grace gives us room to begin honestly and to return when we have wandered; it does not require us to pretend that change is effortless.

The following exercise brings reflection and action together. You will consider the main areas of physical stewardship, then choose one priority. The purpose is to prepare a usable section of your Remaining Years Plan, including a next step you can identify and review.

Your Remaining Years Plan

Physical Stewardship Commitments

This part of the plan brings acceptance and responsibility together. Complete it here or in a notebook. A trusted person may help you write, think through the questions, or arrange practical support. Set aside questions that do not fit your circumstances. You are examining your choices, not grading your body.

What I Need to Receive Honestly

Name the physical realities you are living with today. Acceptance does not mean refusing treatment or giving up hope for improvement. It means acknowledging your present circumstances without treating them as a verdict on your worth.

The physical realities I need to acknowledge without condemning myself are:

A loss I need to grieve or a fear I need to bring honestly to God is:

Help I need to receive or ask for in this season includes:

The people, responsibilities, and ordinary joys I hope my available capacity can serve are:

Receiving love and care belongs here, too. You do not need to justify your place in others' lives by listing what you can still do for them.

The Physical Stewardship Audit

Consider each area briefly. Record what is already serving you well, what needs attention, and where you need guidance. An appropriate response may be to continue a good practice. You do not need six new commitments.

Medical care — Is there an appointment, a treatment question, or a preventive-care recommendation I need to discuss or follow up on? What has made this difficult?

Physical capacity — Which movement or activity fits my circumstances? Where do I need guidance to maintain strength, mobility, or balance?

Rest and recovery — Is my pace allowing enough rest? Which responsibility, habit, or health concern needs attention?

Nutrition — What is one practical concern about eating that I could address or discuss with a qualified professional?

Stress — What pressure am I carrying, how is it affecting my daily life, and what support could help me respond to it?

Purpose — How can caring for myself express gratitude to Jesus and love for others while allowing me to enjoy the life He has given me?

One Thing I Will Begin

Choose one priority from your audit. Commit to an action within your responsibility, with a first step within the next seven days. If you need medical guidance, arranging that conversation may be the action. You are not promising a particular result or a body free of limitations.

The area I will give attention to first is:

My next reasonable action and the date I will take it are:

Guidance, practical help, or an arrangement I need before proceeding is:

An obstacle I can anticipate and how I will address it are:

This matters to the people I love and to me because:

My Physical Stewardship Commitment:

Bring these answers together in two or three sentences. State what you will do, why it matters, and what help you will receive. Medical goals may have a useful place in your care, but your commitment here concerns your response, not a guarantee of health.

I will review this commitment on this date, alongside the rest of my plan:

During that review, ask what happened, what helped, and what needs to change. A change in your health may require a change in your commitment. Evaluate the action and its fit with your circumstances, without turning a health outcome into a judgment of your faith.

Available Without Being Invincible

Jesus > Others > Self gives physical care its proper place. We receive the body under His lordship, consider how our choices affect those around us, and attend to our own needs without guilt. We can rest, enjoy movement, seek treatment, and appreciate feeling well. We can also accept help when we no longer have the strength to do so ourselves.

I think there is a word that captures the posture we seek: available. We offer Jesus the life we have today, with its strengths and limitations, rather than waiting for a body we may never have. That availability may look like serving others. It may also look like accepting care and allowing another

person to serve us. It does not require us to remain constantly active or to prove we are still useful enough to matter.

Our responsibility is to care reasonably for what has been entrusted to us and to trust the Lord with what we cannot control. We will need grace for both. We can begin with the body we have, the help available to us, and the next faithful step.

For many men, changes in physical capacity also raise questions about work. The pace we once kept may no longer fit, or the prospect of retirement may prompt us to consider how to use our time and abilities differently. Having considered the body through which we work, we now turn to work itself: what it has been for, what place it should hold, and what faithfulness may look like as that relationship changes.