

# The Five Circles & the Nature of Humanity: Five Studies

By Allen Hamlin Jr

*A Companion Resource to*

## Designed for Relationship: Learning to Love God With All We Are

By T.J. MacLeslie

Published by Parvaim Media, 2013

## Introduction

At the heart of the Christian faith is a journey of understanding who God is and who we are, so that we might walk in intimate relationship with Him. Author T.J. MacLeslie's newest book, *Designed for Relationship: Learning to Love God With All We Are*, is a helpful guide to take us forward both in knowing God and understanding ourselves.

The dominant theme in the second part of MacLeslie's book is an exploration of the multifaceted way that God has created us. We are beings who are material and immaterial; we have bodies and spirits, we make choices, think, and express feelings. In an effort to encourage readers to explore the Bible for themselves, this series of five studies provides a framework for examining the Scriptures, launching out from the texts and ideas that MacLeslie surfaces in his book.

While we each may have a general sense of who we are and what it means to be human, few of us often dig down deep into uncovering a Scriptural understanding of how God has put us together. We hope that this set of studies will provide an opportunity for Christians of all stripes—from the newest of converts to the longest-standing church-goer—to see our majestic, amazing God with fresh eyes and to feel within ourselves the calling He has placed in each of us as He has designed us for relationship with Himself.

Each of the five studies will likely take between 20 minutes and 1 hour to complete, and they can be done either individually or in a group. The topics covered are:

- Part I: Spirit
- Part II: Mind
- Part III: Will
- Part IV: Emotions
- Part V: Body

These studies will be most effective if they are completed while reading MacLeslie's book, providing additional opportunity for reflection on many of the points raised in the chapters from the second part of his book. We might suggest that you read the related chapter in MacLeslie's book, and then follow soon after with working through the accompanying study here. If you have already read *Designed for Relationship* in its entirety, these studies will provide an excellent opportunity for you to review some of the key thoughts and to search the Scriptures for yourself to validate the ideas that MacLeslie has offered. In each case, we believe this set of Bible study materials will be valuable.

Another set of five studies focusing on the nature of God as Trinity, which MacLeslie develops in the first part of his book, is already available. Check back on the book's website [www.dfrbook.com](http://www.dfrbook.com) in order to download them.

Be blessed as you journey forward in meeting God through His Word!

Allen Hamlin Jr, May 2013  
[admitandexplore.wordpress.com](http://admitandexplore.wordpress.com)

# THE FIVE CIRCLES & THE NATURE OF HUMANITY

## PART I: SPIRIT

*Throughout this series,  
all Bible quotations and  
references are to the  
NASB version.*

*T.J. MacLeslie  
describes us this way:  
“We were all dead once,  
and lived as walking  
dead men.  
We were physically,  
intellectually,  
emotionally,  
and volitionally alive,  
but spiritually dead.”*

*“Death is failure of  
correspondence....  
[Adam] died spiritually,  
for though he continued  
to live a natural life, he  
lost his correspondence  
with God....”  
(Rees Howells,  
Intercessor by Norman  
Grubb)*

As human beings, we are wonderfully deep and complex creations of God. This series aims to understand who we are by looking from a biblical perspective at five aspects of the nature of humanity, the Five Circles described in T.J. MacLeslie’s book, *Designed for Relationship*—spirit, mind, will, emotions, and body. In this first study, we explore the *spiritual* truth of who we are and the world we live in.

### SPIRITUAL SURVIVAL

We begin with the most basic experience of our being: life and death. Even the concept of us being alive, as living beings, is something that we must understand from a Scriptural standpoint.

Have you ever heard someone refer to a person as ‘spiritually dead’? What does this mean to you? How does it contrast with ‘eternal life’?

Review the account of the fall of humanity into sin in **Genesis 2:15—3:24**, and focus on 2:16-17; 3:4-7, 22-24. In what sense was Adam & Eve’s experience of life and death to be different after they disobeyed and ate of the forbidden fruit?

Was the Serpent right (3:4), or did they ‘die’? If so, in what sense did they die—since they clearly continued to live physically for quite some time after (Gen 5:3-5)?

Why would God (3:22) want to prevent them from living forever? What would have characterized Adam & Eve’s life and relationship with God if they would have continued forever in their state of disobedience?

See also  
Romans 6:4-11 & 20-23.

T.J. MacLeslie, in  
**Designed for  
Relationship,**  
modernizes  
Shakespeare's thought  
for us:  
"Our Western culture  
has not adequately  
prepared us for the  
actual world...We have  
chosen to limit our  
perception of reality in  
unhelpful ways. The  
spiritual dimension of  
our world is every bit as  
important and  
integrated as the  
physical, the part of our  
world perceived through  
our physical senses."

How does the New Testament in **Ephesians 2:1-10** help us to understand the meaning of 'life' and 'death'?

## SPIRITUAL SENSES

Shakespeare wrote, "There are more things in heaven and earth...than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (*Hamlet*, Act 1). It can be challenging for us to acknowledge that there is more to life and the universe than is readily accessible to our five senses and rational science. As beings of *both* body *and* spirit, we must consider our spiritual senses alongside our physical ones.

Read the story of spiritual and physical sight in **2 Kings 6:14-20**. What do we learn of the similarities and differences between our physical and spiritual senses?

Consider the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in **John 3:3-12**. What did Jesus mean when He said "see the kingdom of God" (v.3)? Compare with His thoughts in v.11-12.

What was the source of Nicodemus' confusion (v.4) about Jesus' statement of being born again (v.3)?

T.J. MacLeslie makes the statement: "What is clear is that when we come alive, we have a new capacity, the ability to live in new ways, the ability to experience God intimately through His Spirit." Do you agree? What new capacities, abilities, and senses do we have when we move from spiritual death to spiritual life?

*“As our eyes are opened  
to the spiritual  
dimension of life, we  
will discover that we  
have an enemy.”  
(T.J. MacLeslie)*

*T.J. MacLeslie provides  
a poignant example of  
this vulnerability in  
Chapter 7 of **Designed  
for Relationship**.*

*“Satan and his minions  
hate people because we  
are made in the image of  
God. They hate God but  
can’t destroy Him, so  
they attack His children.  
When we are not on our  
guard, we are more  
vulnerable to his  
attacks. Those who are  
not yet spiritually alive  
are defenseless against  
his advances.”  
(T.J. MacLeslie)*

## **SPIRITUAL SOLDIERS**

Spiritual life and spiritual senses yield for us a spiritual occupation as well. We have a role on the cosmic stage that goes beyond the obvious aspects of our workweek. Read the preface to the famous Armor of God passage, **Ephesians 6:10-13**. What is the purpose of these godly defensive instruments?

What kind of enemy are we struggling against?

Despite the power of God’s truth (belt), righteousness (breastplate), and salvation (helmet), **2 Corinthians 2:10-11** warns us that we can put a spiritual chink in our armor. What is this vulnerability that we must be wary of?

T.J. MacLeslie makes the connection for us between spiritual life, spiritual senses, and spiritual soldiering. He says: “Before our conversion, our ability to **perceive spiritual reality** is extremely limited and decidedly warped. We were enslaved to the **spiritually dead way of thinking**. We were in bondage to sin and death, and had **no chance for victory over spiritual opposition**.” In what ways is it crucial for us to acknowledge and understand the spiritual aspect of who we are?

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHT**

“My goal is to invite you to recognize the reality of this aspect of who you are and the world you live in. You are a spiritual being. You are either alive in Christ already or, even now, have the opportunity to choose life. If you are already a new creation in Christ, you have been entrusted with real authority to make a difference in the battle between good and evil. That battle is both within us, and around us.”

—**T.J. MacLeslie, *Designed for Relationship***

# THE FIVE CIRCLES & THE NATURE OF HUMANITY

## PART II: MIND

*Gary Thomas, in **Sacred Pathways**, encourages us about “the high calling of loving God with our mind. The Bible is emphatic that our mind is one of the key elements that we can use to love God.”*

*T.J. MacLeslie, in **Designed for Relationship**, connects together the three concepts of truth, our relationship with God, and our relationship with others: “Seeking God in community is an indispensable aspect of our intellectual life. To love God with our minds and think right thoughts about Him, we must not stop with just information about God; instead, we should push through to engage in relationship with God Himself. And, we must do this work together!”*

As we continue to look at the nature of our God-given humanity, we move now to explore the mind. The thoughts we think are a significant aspect of who we are, and thinking right thoughts is necessary for us to be all that we are and to love God with all that we are.

### TRUTH IN RELATIONSHIP

As an aspect of who we are, our minds, our thoughts, the truth we accept, are critical for our relationship with God and our worship of Him. Additionally, truth also impacts our relationships with one another and forms the basis for our interactions.

Read Paul’s instructions in **1 Timothy 1:3-7**. What circumstances in Ephesus are motivating Paul to give these instructions?

What outcome is hoped for in teaching truth (see especially v.5)?

Consider how some aspect of ‘truth’ may have become a focal point for division or argument in your family, church, or other relationship. How did each person’s involvement align (or not) with the goals of teaching truth that are laid out in v.4b-5?

What was the final outcome of the situation? What harm was done, what relationships were broken, how were people were led astray into mere speculation (v.4) or fruitless discussion (v.6)?

## DOUBLE-MINDEDNESS

*Read the situations in 2 Tim 2:14-19, 23-26 for examples of the impact of people causing harm by spreading untruth. What are the instructions and remedies given to stand against these attacks from within the community?*

*Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (James 4:7-8)*

Sometimes, we do encounter ‘attacks’ on our mind from those around us speaking worthless words and pursuing ideas that are not in accordance with God’s truth. But sometimes, the struggle for our minds is more internal, as we wrestle with competing values within the world and within the Kingdom of God. We may be in danger of becoming ‘double-minded.’

The book of James is a great exploration of how our lives should reflect our faith, and it has a strong emphasis on the idea of being aware so that we do not become double-minded people. Select at least two of the following passages, identify the Kingdom value and the worldly value that are at odds with one another. Also, discuss how these opposing values were being lived out and impacting the Christian community.

**James 1:5-8, 1:12-15, 1:26-27, 2:1-6, 2:14-18, 3:8-10, 3:13-18, 4:1-4, 4:10-12, 4:13-17**

Passage:

Kingdom Value >

Worldly Value >

Impact on Community >

Passage:

Kingdom Value >

Worldly Value >

Impact on Community >

## DEFENDING THE MIND

Although as Christians we desire to be people of Truth, we can see that there is the possibility for our minds to suffer attack from untruth and unwholesome ideas and practices that come into our individual lives and communities. We must be intentional about defending our minds if they are to be a vital aspect of our right relationship with God and with others.

Consider at least two of the following passages that refer to us having a mind like Christ or the Holy Spirit. What characteristics are we to be imitating in our own lives?

**Romans 8:5-8, 1 Corinthians 2:12-16, Ephesians 4:17-24, Philippians 2:1-8**

*Be transformed by the  
renewing of your mind.  
(Romans 12:2)*

Characteristics of a godly mind >

*I was very glad to find  
some of your children  
walking in truth. Anyone  
who goes too far and  
does not abide in the  
teaching of Christ, does  
not have God; the one  
who abides in the  
teaching, he has both  
the Father and the Son.  
(2 John v.4,9)*

In addition to conforming our minds to the pattern of Jesus Christ and the influence of the Holy Spirit, another way that we can defend ourselves is by abiding in truth.

As one example, read **Philippians 4:6-9** and consider the various ‘defense mechanisms’ that are described. What are the various things that we are to do? What is the mindset that we are to have?

And what will be the results that we will receive?

A third strategy for us to defend our minds from both internal and external assaults is to restrict the kinds of input that we are exposed to. From a foundation of godliness and truth, we can actively oppose harmful influences that may corrupt our minds and turn them from being an asset in our relationship with God.

*“The goal of our intellectual pursuits is not just knowledge. It’s relationship. The life of the mind finds its best expression in relationship with God and in supportive community.”  
(T.J. MacLeslie)*

*And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil....  
(Romans 1:28-29a)*

The early Church struggled with how people influenced one another with untruth. Read the account in **Titus 1:10—2:1**. What activities need to be restricted or corrected in order to prevent harmful exposure?

In addition to applying correction, what things must be done to create a positive environment instead?

We are also at risk as individuals, and must take care to restrict the input we receive through our own senses which can lead to the defilement of our mind. Read **Psalm 101:2-4** and comment on the personal strategies that we can employ to defend our minds.

Finally, we must also be on guard against the attacks that originate with us. Look at **2 Corinthians 10:5-7** and describe the internal mental and spiritual battle that we must engage in to protect our minds from the flesh.

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHT**

T.J. MacLeslie says, “I believe the Word of God is the best way to introduce people to Jesus.” The printed Truth is a pointer to the Incarnate Truth, and our lives intersect with that reality through our minds. Thinking right thoughts is the only way for us to relate to God and to others from a place of love.

# THE FIVE CIRCLES & THE NATURE OF HUMANITY

## PART III: WILL

A third non-physical aspect of who we are is our will—our volition, our capacity for making choices. These choices form an integral part of who we are, our relationship with God, and our growth toward Him.

### OUR CHOICES MATTER

T.J. MacLeslie, in *Designed for Relationship*, says simply, “We are all in the process of *becoming*. Our choices have a massive impact on what we become.” There are ramifications for our choices which go beyond what we will eat or what we will wear. Our choices shape the reciprocal relationship that we share with God.

Many people are familiar with the idea of ‘you reap what you sow.’ Read **Galatians 6:7-10** and examine the truth of this paradigm. There are two sow-reap pairs that are presented here, which have eternal implications. What are they?

Sow >

Reap >

Sow >

Reap >

What encouragements are we given in v.9-10? What difficulties in good sowing do these encouragements assume that we’ll face?

*I have set before you  
life and death, the  
blessing and the curse.  
So choose life in order  
that you may live.  
(Deuteronomy 30:19)*

*“If God is for us and He  
knows all things, then  
wouldn’t it be wise to  
bring our choices in line  
with His? If God loves  
us and has good plans  
for us, then wouldn’t we  
want to be in on the  
plan? Bringing our will  
into submission to His is  
the wisest thing we  
could do!”  
(T.J. MacLeslie)*

This sow-reap idea can be found in the Old Testament as well, where we see that the reaping does not just impact eternity, but also affects our quality of life now. Read **Hosea 10:12-15**. What sow-reap pairs do you find here?

Sow >

Reap >

Sow >

Reap >

Galatians 6 provided several encouragements, and Hosea 10 gives us several warnings. What life choices are we warned against in this passage?

*T.J. MacLeslie, in  
**Designed for  
 Relationship**, connects  
 what we do and don't do  
 to our relationship with  
 God: "All our sin falls  
 into two categories.  
 Either we haven't gone  
 to God when we should  
 have (He is always  
 ready to meet with us  
 and care for us) or  
 we've gone to something  
 other than God  
 (something that will not  
 satisfy us and will  
 ultimately fail us). So,  
 we are constantly faced  
 with two basic choices,  
 the choice to pursue  
 God and the choice to  
 turn away from things  
 that compete with God  
 for our attention and  
 affection."*

*Here are some of the  
 other 'Do Not...But'  
 passages in the Bible:  
 Deuteronomy 4:9;  
 1 Samuel 12:20;  
 2 Chronicles 30:8;  
 Proverbs 3:1;  
 Matthew 5:39, 10:28;  
 Mark 13:11; Luke  
 10:20; John 6:27, 7:24;  
 Romans 6:13, 12:2,21;  
 Galatians 5:13;  
 Ephesians 5:17,18, 6:4;  
 1 John 4:1; 3 John 11*

We are also told that our choices do not matter just because of how they impact us, but also because of how they enable us to impact others. Read **2 Corinthians 9:6-15**. What sow-reap pairs do you find here?

Sow >

Reap >

Sow >

Reap >

What blessings *for us* are shown in this passage? What blessings *for others* will also result if we sow rightly?

## **DO NOT...BUT....**

Given the importance of our choices, we may be intimidated that we are left without clarity on what to do. So often we think of the Bible—and God Himself—as full of rules like ‘thou shalt not.’ We can be encouraged to see that not only does God steer us away from folly, but He also makes clear for us the good things that we are to pursue instead. He gives us instruction on replacing wickedness by choosing righteousness.

Read the following passages and identify the ‘Do Not...’ and the ‘But...’ for each: **Proverbs 23:17, Romans 12:16, Ephesians 5:11, & 1 Peter 2:16.**

Do Not >

But >

Which of these choices and instructions are particularly hard for you? Is it hardest for you to avoid the ‘Do Not’ sinful pieces, or to choose the righteous ‘But’ instead?

## SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

One of the most direct ways that our choices can impact our relationship with God is in the realm of ‘spiritual disciplines,’ intentional practices that we engage in with the aim of developing our conversational ability with God. We can *choose* whether and how we pursue God.

T.J. MacLeslie, in *Designed for Relationship*, says this: “Keeping our relational view in mind frees us from the legalistic practice of spiritual disciplines. We do not choose to pray because it earns us points with God, or because a failure to pray will see us judged by God. We pray because it is part of our relationship with God. We speak and we listen through prayer. We do not study the Bible ‘or else.’ We study it because it is part of how we grow in our relationship with God.”

In what ways do you feel like you do (or do not) have a choice in how you pursue God?

*“It’s not a question of whether or not we should be intentionally engaged in spiritual disciplines; it is a question of which ones to focus on at different stages in our journey and relationship with God.”  
(T.J. MacLeslie)*

What inhibits you from making choices to pursue God in certain ways? What fears, uncertainties, and cultural factors impact the way you do (or do not) pursue God?

What knowledge, skills, experience, or encouragement would help you to choose to pursue God in new ways? What’s one thing you can do to attain some of these in order to help you move forward with God?

## CONCLUDING THOUGHT

The choices we make form an integral part of who we are—as individuals and in our relationship with God. Considering the decisions we make about what we ‘sow,’ how we respond to God’s instructions, and how we intentionally take action to grow in our relationship with God should be a central aspect of our pursuit of becoming all that we were intended to be, so that we can engage in loving God with all we are.

# THE FIVE CIRCLES & THE NATURE OF HUMANITY

## PART IV: EMOTIONS

*“Growing closer to God cannot only involve the spirit, intellect, and will. It also requires an emotional and relational pursuit.”*  
(T.J. MacLeslie)

*1 John 4:16 tells us that God is love. Read 1 Corinthians 13 and substitute “God is...” where you find “Love is....” How does this description of God demonstrate God’s relational and emotional heart to you?*

While most people would readily agree that emotions are a significant part of who we are, how often do we consider that we are made in the image of an emotional God? What role do our emotions play in connecting us with God, and in our representing Him to others?

### GOD’S EMOTIONS

In *Designed for Relationship*, author T.J. MacLeslie says that God “has a full and robust emotional life. God experiences and expresses a full range of emotions in Scripture. He loves. He grieves. He weeps. He gets angry. He hates. He rejoices.”

When you read this statement, how does it make you feel? Do you regularly consider God as an emotional being? Is such a thought encouraging or intimidating to you? Does it make you worried or excited?

Reflect back and consider how the concept of emotions has been presented to you. Were you taught that emotions are something to be embraced or erased? Are they a great asset to fuel your action and interaction, or are they to be regarded warily and with caution? Should we seek to master our emotions, or ‘go with our gut’?

How have these thoughts impacted your view of God and your acceptance of the reality of His emotions?

As T.J. said, we do see a range of God’s emotions in the Bible, both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ emotions. Let’s look at some of the relevant passages for a few of His different emotional expressions. Start by reading **Psalm 18:6-19**, which is bracketed by God’s emotions of anger (v.7) and delight (v.19).

*T.J. MacLeslie, in  
**Designed for  
Relationship,**  
demonstrates some of  
the value of God's  
emotions. "We have a  
God who knows what we  
are going through. Jesus  
lived in this broken  
world. He was despised  
and rejected. He was  
misunderstood and  
mistreated. We have a  
God who sympathizes  
with us and who meets  
us on the road. God  
knows emotional  
torment. He knows us  
intimately, and can  
provide healing and  
protection for our  
hearts."*

*"When I talk about the  
emotional part of our  
humanness, I mean the  
source of our feelings  
and truly deep beliefs."  
(T.J. MacLeslie)*

How does this passage challenge or confirm your current thoughts about God? How does it strike you to read about our God being stirred to action as a result of His emotions?

From the following list of verses, pick at least two of God's emotions and read the associated passages. After reading, reflect on the questions below for each emotion.

**Anger** > Deuteronomy 1:37, Mark 3:5

**Hate** > Psalm 11:5, Amos 5:21

**Grief/Sorrow/Sadness** > Genesis 6:6-7, Psalm 78:40,  
Matthew 23:37-38, John 11:35

**Joy** > Isaiah 62:5, Zephaniah 3:17, Luke 10:21

**Love** > Hosea 14:4, Mark 10:21

How is God's expression of this emotion different than I would expect, or different from my expression of it?

How have I seen this emotion displayed by God in my own life?

How have I demonstrated this emotion in my life as a reflection of God's heart?

## **OUR EMOTIONS**

"Our God is relational and emotional; and He made us in His image" (MacLeslie), so it is sensible that we also should feel and display a wide range of emotions if we are going to represent Him rightly. However, it is important for us to consider expectations for our emotions, the right expression of our emotions, and the discipline of our emotions.

*“Intimacy with God can and should be experienced in the emotional part of who we are.”  
(T.J. MacLeslie)*

*T.J. MacLeslie, in **Designed for Relationship**, writes of the challenge of living rightly in regard to our emotions.  
“The modernist danger was to develop the body, the intellect, and the will while neglecting the emotions and the spirit.... The postmodernist danger is to neglect the intellect for the emotions. There is a ditch on either side of the road. We avoid the ditches by holding a robust and biblical view of God and of ourselves.”*

### ***Expectations for Our Emotions***

We may often consider some emotions to be ‘positive’ and others to be ‘negative,’ some to be appropriate and others inappropriate. Read **Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**, and focus on v.4 and v.8. What does a proper expectation for our emotions include?

### ***Expression of Our Emotions***

Living our emotions rightly is an essential aspect of our righteous living and right relationship with both God and others.

Read **1 John 4:20** and comment on the link between the display of our emotions and our love of God.

Now read **2 Corinthians 1:3-7** and discuss the impact of our emotional experience on our ability to provide care for others.

### ***Discipline of Our Emotions***

As with all facets of our being, we must be submitted to and led by the Spirit of God if we are to walk rightly. Our emotions shouldn’t dominate who we are, but neither should we seek to completely extinguish this aspect of our nature.

Read **Ephesians 4:26-27,31**, and also consider Jesus’ anger in **Mark 3:1-5** and **John 2:13-17**. What boundaries must we put on our emotions? Consider the objects of our emotions and also how we show them. For you personally, what boundaries might you need to put on some of your emotions?

*T.J. MacLeslie links the truth we believe and the emotions we express: "On an emotional level, we never act contrary to what we truly believe."*

How does knowledge of the truth impact the expression of our emotions? Read **Nehemiah 8:9-12** and consider the instructions given to, as well as the response of, the people who were gathered to hear the reading of God's Law.

What was the people's initial reaction? What was wrong with their reaction?

How were the people instructed to rein in their emotion and express a different emotion instead?

From this biblical perspective, how would you characterize healthy and unhealthy disciplining (self-control) of one's emotions?

Healthy Control >

Unhealthy Control >

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHT**

T.J. MacLeslie writes, "Seeking emotional healing and wholeness is not an optional part of the Christian journey. God wants us to love Him with all we are, including our emotions. If we remain disengaged and distant from God and people emotionally, we fail in the greatest commandment to love God with all we are." Our acceptance of God's emotions as well as our own is crucial for us to be able to walk in faith, righteousness, truth, and service. There is an opportunity for us to grow into a healthy expectation, expression, and disciplining of our emotions so that we can love God with all we are.

# THE FIVE CIRCLES & THE NATURE OF HUMANITY

## PART V: BODY

*“We can make good choices about our diet, our sleep patterns, our physical disciplines, not because we ‘should’ but because doing so puts us in the best possible position to experience God and the world from the most healthy perspective.”  
(T.J. MacLeslie)*

*“The body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Flee immorality. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you? You have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:13,15,18,19,20)*

It is often easy for us to segment life into spiritual and physical categories. We eat food. We pray. We sleep. We sing worship songs. It may be more difficult for us to see that, as part of the whole of who we are, we cannot properly separate out our bodies from the rest of our spiritual pursuits. In this final study on the Five Circles and the nature of humanity, we will explore the spiritual use of our physical bodies, as we investigate how the material aspect of our being is also essential to our pursuit of loving God with all we are.

### IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

While we often think of pursuing righteousness as a spiritual endeavor, since we are one person of body and soul it is imperative that we consider how our bodies and physical nature are important to that pursuit. Many hindrances to righteousness (sins) have a very physical basis: lust for other people (adultery), lust for food (gluttony), lust for possessions (coveting), lust for rest (sloth).

Read **Romans 6:12-19** and consider how our bodies are a necessary part of our pursuit of righteousness. How is our physical activity indicative of our overall state of righteousness or sanctification?

Can we be obedient to one master spiritually but a different master physically? What is our responsibility in the godly use of our physical nature?

What does this righteous use of our bodies look like practically? Read Paul’s comments in **1 Corinthians 9:23-27** and consider the aims and outcomes of our physical self-discipline.

Aims >

Outcomes >

*T.J. MacLeslie writes,  
“Prescription drugs can help us to reestablish the equilibrium we need, so that we are better able to address the underlying issues of the soul. Sometimes, the source of our discomfort is rooted in our biochemistry, and when treated effectively we find complete relief; but for many of us, the root cause will be elsewhere and the use of drugs can help to create the space we need to deal with the root of the problem.”  
How does this thought demonstrate the interconnection between our material and immaterial selves in our pursuit of being all that God intended us to be?*

In order to achieve righteousness, some in the church institute a variety of physical restrictions and those restrictions become the focus and aim of one’s pursuits. Paul gave some instructions about this to Timothy in **1 Timothy 4:1-10**. What categories of physical restrictions were the church trying to implement?

What errant assumptions were behind these restrictions (consider especially v.4,7-8)?

In your life, what might some properly aimed physical guidelines look like?

In *Designed for Relationship*, T.J. MacLeslie makes this comment: “Throughout history, and the pages of Scripture, we find God using physical suffering and deprivation as means to draw us to Himself.” Do you agree? How does this perspective impact our lives and our thoughts about the role of our bodies in our relationship with God?

## **IN WORSHIP**

Beyond pursuing a life of holiness, our physical nature is an important part of our right worship of God as well. We cannot only worship God ‘in our hearts’ or ‘in our minds’ and yet claim to be worshipping Him with all that we are.

Consider your own acts and experience of worshipping God. What role does your body or physical well-being have in contributing to, or hindering, your worship?

*“We must do all we can  
to take care of our  
bodies in our pursuit  
of God.”  
(T.J. MacLeslie)*

*Romans 12 goes on to  
say, “And do not be  
conformed to this world,  
but be transformed by  
the renewing of your  
mind, so that you may  
prove what the will of  
God is, that which is  
good and acceptable  
and perfect” (Rom  
12:2). Note the link  
demonstrated here  
between our body, mind,  
and will in light of these  
aspects of the totality of  
who we are.*

After 11 chapters of theological reflection and contemplation of the struggles with temptation and the reality of God’s work in us, Paul makes this statement: “Therefore, I urge you brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (**Romans 12:1**).

We often think of worshipping God as ‘giving Him our hearts.’ Paul broadens this notion to include our bodies. What would make our bodies “acceptable to God”? Reflect on what you may know of sacrifices in the Old Testament and the passages that we’ve looked at previously in this study.

Paul says that this physical offering is our “spiritual service of worship” which we offer in view of “the mercies of God.” How does our awareness of who God is and what He has done impact our worship? And how can we use our bodies as a component of that worship?

## **IN SERVICE**

Beyond our personal righteousness and our relationship with God in worship, our bodies are also an essential part of our service and ministry to others.

The following perspective may be familiar to many of us: “It’s my body; I’ll do what I want with it.” With such reasoning we may justify anything from the clothes we wear to our hairstyles to the ink or piercings that we apply to our skin.

Consider briefly Paul’s guideline for himself in **1 Corinthians 8:13**. What motivates Paul’s leaning toward physical restraint rather than liberty?

*Our bodies are not all we are; they are a part of who we are, and as such, they are necessarily involved in our lives.*  
(T.J. MacLeslie)

***In Designed for Relationship, T.J. MacLeslie observes, “Many of us neglect, ignore, or even abuse our bodies and assume that this doesn’t matter—that it doesn’t influence our relationship with God.”***  
*As you consider your journey through these five studies, what aspects of who you are and how they impact your relationship with God now stand out to you in a more significant way? How will this awareness impact your pursuit of God, your love for God, and your relationships with others?*

Two chapters later, Paul revisits this issue in **1 Corinthians 10:23-33**. Paul’s concern for the conscience of others is clear, and the mundane physical choices that we make—even about what we eat—can have significant impact on others.

Consider the choices that those around you make, whether family members, co-workers, or anonymous people that you pass in the street. Can you think of any primarily physical choices that they make which have an impact on your own heart, mind, will, emotions, or faith?

Now consider your own physical habits and choices. What sort of impact might your own use of your body be having on others? Are there any choices that you need to change as you consider how you may be challenging others’ conscience, faith, righteousness, or worship?

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHT**

In this series, we’ve explored the role of our spirit, mind, will, emotions, and body in forming the reality of who we are. Each part is essential to our right relationship with God and with others. Love of God or submission to God which only comes from one of these places will be incomplete and less than what we have to offer, as well as less than what He is worthy of. But as we give attention to developing all five of these aspects, we will be in a place to offer to God the whole of who we are, and also able to encourage others in their ability to love God with all that they are.

If you have not already done so, I encourage you to read ***Designed for Relationship: Learning to Love God With All We Are***, by T.J. MacLeslie (Parvaim Media, 2013) for insight into the Five Circles of who we are and many practical tools to help us grow in our ability to love God the way He intended.