



# The Life of the Body: Physical Well-Being and Spiritual Formation

*Valerie E. Hess , Lane M. Arnold*

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**The Life of the Body: Physical Well-Being and Spiritual Formation** Valerie E. Hess , Lane M. Arnold  
What does exercise have to do with our souls? How do our sleeping habits relate to being conformed to the likeness of Christ? What do our bodies have to do with spiritual formation? Valerie Hess has taken up these questions with her spiritual formation graduate students. And Lane Arnold has processed them with others as a spiritual director. They have discovered that the life of our bodies has quite a bit to do with the life of our souls. Together they have written a book that helps readers explore choices about what we eat worshipping with our bodies seasons of life for body and soul caring for the planet and more Each chapter has reflection questions and creative exercises to help you engage body and soul with these themes. This is not just a book to read. It's an invitation to a new way of experiencing God.

## The Life of the Body: Physical Well-Being and Spiritual Formation Details

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## From Reader Review The Life of the Body: Physical Well-Being and Spiritual Formation for online ebook

### Clint Walker says

I have long admired the Formatio imprint at IVP. Several excellent books have been put out by this publisher and this line. I have to say though, as I read this book, I was a little disappointed. Even though the text was well-written, it did tend to focus a lot on guilt and shame to motivate people into practicing healthy living.

Part of my distaste for this book may come from my personal place in life right now. I am overweight. I don't always have the healthiest habits. And, I know this. In many ways, as an overweight minister approaching middle age I might even be this book's target audience. I agree with a lot of what was said in this book. It was convicting. The problem is, when a person is overweight, guilt and shame are probably the least effective motivators to induce life change. Yet it seems to be the book's primary way of motivating me as I read it.

For example, in the first chapter, the authors ask, "How do you currently preach the gospel without using words?" (p.16) The answer is supposed to be, by having good eating and exercise habits, and looking physically fit. And while I do believe that how we look and care for ourselves has a role in how we are perceived, these ways of making the point are laying things on a little thick. This point is further reinforced later when the authors say, "poor lifestyle choices...impact our very witness to the good news of Jesus Christ." (p. 40).

If the above example were the only example of guilt motivation I could stomach it. But it just goes on and on. If I wanted or needed to be nagged by women old enough to be my mother, I will call my mom.

Having said that, I think the authors do make several good points. In my weight-loss journeys in the past, I have seen where living healthier does effect other areas of my life, including my spiritual life, my mood, and my emotional state. I agree with them that increased discipline in one area of my life has often helped me increase discipline in others. The authors make some strong points about "food justice" issues. And they briefly discuss "eating extremes" in relation to Christian discipleship.

I think more books like this are helpful for spiritual formation, just not one that read to me like hell-fire and brimstone food and exercise Nazis. I have the Biggest Loser on TV for that--thank you.

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### Kristie says

I thought it was a very good read. I'm one who has recently began to dig deeper into my spirituality and found this book excellent food for thought.

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### James says

This review is crossposted from my blog: <http://thoughtsprayersandsongs.com/20...>

The Christian church, especially in the West, sometimes fails to give bodies their due. There are a lot of

reasons for this. An emphasis on the ‘spiritual’ has led to a denigration of the physical. In part, this is due to the Neo-Platonic influence in early Christian thought, but modern evangelicals also have done their part to denigrate bodies. And yet the Bible affirms created matter as good and draws no strong distinction between our bodies and souls. We are embodied souls and ensouled bodies. What we do in our bodies and how well we care for them has a direct impact on our spiritual life.

**The Life of the Body: Physical Well-Being and Spiritual Formation** by Valerie Hess and Lane Arnold  
Valerie Hess and Lane M. Arnold have teamed up to explore the role of the body in Christian spiritual formation. Valerie Hess teaches Spiritual Formation and Leadership to graduate students at Spring Arbor University. Lane Arnold is a spiritual director and writer in Colorado Springs. Both women bring a depth of theological reflection to our physical bodies, as well as experiential insights; however the *Life of the Body: Physical Well-Being and Spiritual Formation* is not merely a book to get you to think more carefully about our physical nature. Hess and Arnold want you and I to embody the sort of life which helps us enter more freely, and more satisfyingly into our relationship with God. This is a book about spiritual formation which invites you to consider what you eat and drink, how you care for your body and the physical world.

There is so much about this book which I heartily affirm. In eleven chapters, Hess and Arnold cover a range of issues which relate to the body and physical reality: the incarnation, the church, worship, having a balanced life, having a theology of food, extremism (i.e. eating disorders and unhealthy habits), when bodies don’t ‘work’ like they should, aging, raising children to care for their bodies and care for creation. In addition, four appendices provide a look at ‘Holy Habits for the Whole Body,’ scriptural passages which discuss ‘the body,’ a list of suggested resources relating to each chapter, as well as a small group discussion guide.

By rooting their reflections in Jesus’ incarnation, they are able to affirm the essential goodness of our embodied life. Their reflection on the church, names it as an embodied institution—the physical expression of the Kingdom of God, which is made up of a bunch of people with bodies. They challenge us to think of ways as a church that we can help one another make healthy choices and engage in appropriate self-care.

Yet it would be wrong to think that being aware of our physical needs in spiritual formation means that we should focus solely on ourselves. Hess and Arnold talk about ‘your body’ but they also talk about physical life in general. They move easily between addressing issues of self-care to advising justice in food consumption, concern about agricultural practices, offering a sociological critique of how bodies are ‘imaged’ in our culture and advocating for environmental care. They are not just suggesting people ‘take care of themselves.’ They are urging us to thoughtful engagement with our physical world as we seek to grow in our relationship with God.

This is an accessible book with many practical suggestions. Each chapter closes with a prayer and reflection exercises which help to put the chapter into practice. The authors share vulnerably about their own struggles with their bodies and offer advice and challenges in a gracious way. This is not the sort of book which will ‘guilt’ you in to dieting or an exercise program (though the authors advocate this). Rather they offer a gentle challenge to be more vigilant with what we do with our bodies.

Hess and Arnold have an important message for the church and I happily commend to you. Several years ago I changed some dietary habits and got into a regular exercise routine (which I am now struggling to get back into). I was amazed to discover how much this affected my prayer and devotional life positively. If we are serious about spiritual formation and growing in our faith, than appropriate self care is a must. Hess and Arnold are good guides on the journey to spiritual health. I give this book four stars: ★★★★★?

Thank you to InterVarsity Press for providing me a copy of this book in exchange for this review.

### **Christopher Brown says**

A helpful exploration of an under-discussed issue. My full review of *The Life of the Body* is available here.

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### **David Anderson says**

Picked this up for Chizzy and Me to read together. I like Renovares resources and am intrigued to see how this will be.

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### **Mike Jorgensen says**

Very good and helpful book on a topic that goes shamefully unaddressed in most Christian circles. If you're looking for a theological exposition of the body then you'll want to look somewhere else, but if you've already been convinced of the importance of physical well-being as a spiritually formative process then this book will be tremendously helpful.

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### **Bob says**

Valerie Hess and Lane Arnold address an important and oft not addressed subject--how our bodily life relates to our spiritual formation. The authors explore Christ's embodied life, how our physical presence and health affects the body of Christ, and how our self-care affects our spiritual growth. There is helpful material on rest, body-image, exercise, and most of all, our diets. Much of the book seemed focused on this and encouraged diets rich in unprocessed foods, those purchased from the perimeter of most grocery stores. There are also chapters on our seasons of life and bodily changes and how our own choices contribute (or not) to the health of our physical world.

Recently I reviewed Rachel Marie Stone's *Eat With Joy* at <http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/697594152>. Although Stone's book did not explore the spiritual formation dimensions of food, I found hers a much better book on the spirituality of food because of her infectious joy. By contrast, while the authors of this book have many good ideas (many of which are similar in content)the book lacked for me the infectious joy that made me want to try these in my own life--it felt more like "you should do these things because they are good for you and position you to love God better." While I found myself helpfully challenged at various points by this book, I found myself excited about trying the ideas (and even recipes) in the other.

Each chapter concludes with several practical exercises and there is also a guide for small groups in the end. One of the most interesting parts of the book for me was an appendix on "The Bible and the Body."

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### **Susan says**

Very much valued this book's "food for thought" on the disciplines of the body and the spirit. I am challenged to press into these truths.

"We press into resolve, allowing the Holy Spirit to move us toward a well-balanced life, with rhythms of rest and work, creativity and stillness, quiet and fellowship, that we might find more freedom. We take Jesus' yoke as described in Matthew 11:29 because as humans we will always be following a master of some kind. Jesus has promised us rest when we are yoked to him." (p.96)

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