

Body and soul: menopause and exercise

When God made human beings in Genesis 1-2, he made us to have bodies. In the season of perimenopause and menopause, our bodies may feel a bit more like foes than friends, but our fleshly outer lay is still an intrinsic part of our being. Exercise has been shown to help women navigate this season - God calls us to steward our bodies well. But what does that look like? There are a few antelope-like women who seem to be able to power through exercise in their 50s with few problems but for the rest of us, how can we motivate ourselves to exercise wisely and well?

- **Take advice:** if there is an abundance of aches and pains, then seeking medical wisdom is always a good step. It can be helpful to have someone enabling us to think through what kind of exercise might be most helpful for us.
- **Take time:** exercise isn't an event, it's part of a lifestyle so carving out regular slots – albeit short slots – where exercise can take place, is what wisdom looks like. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, they are worth looking after.
- **Take a friend:** as Christians, we are called to share lives not just the gospel, that means doing life together. Finding a friend with whom to share exercise means we are more likely to take exercise – and more likely to talk about edifying things as we go. We need each other; we really do.
- **Take pleasure:** treating the gift of our bodies well is not something that is meant to cause us distress. This is not a duty but joy. If you don't want to jog – don't. If you don't want to play a contact- sport – don't. Doing something that you enjoy – whether that's walking in a park, lifting weights in a gym, swimming in a (safe) river, or dancing is a lovely way to celebrate the body that God has given you.
- **Take care:** as we age, our bodies don't quite bounce as they once did. Taking it easy, building strength slowly, is to be recommended. This is about health, not pursuing a new personal best each week. God is not a taskmaster – he doesn't want us to treat our bodies harshly – Colossians shows us that - we can take care.
- **Take a moment to be overwhelmed with awe:** often taking exercise brings us into closer contact with the created world. Rather than just ploughing through a routine, we can take time to see the beauty – notice the petals, smell the grass, marvel at the shapes of the clouds. God's creation shouts “words” of praise – we can join in! We can let moments of exercise become moments where we worship the Lord.

And bit by bit, we can nurture body and soul in ways that build our ability to keep going in a season when our physical fitness can tend to ebb away. Together, we can look after the precious gift of the body God has knitted together for us. And we can do so honouring him.