



Faith Embodied: Glorifying God with Our Physical and Spiritual Health by Stephen Ko. Zondervan, 2024

Keith W So^a

^a MD, MPH, MDiv, Lawndale Christian Health Center, Chicago, IL, USA

Abstract

This is a review of the book published by Dr. Stephen Ko in 2024. It is only highlighting certain sections of the book, and is not meant to be exhaustive, but to provide a little introduction to certain portions.

Ko's book is meant to help healthcare professionals with a deep mature Christian faith appreciate their understanding of the human body and how it is crucial to the link between physical and spiritual health. At the same time, written by a pastor, it is also meant for pastors and church planters who can see this connection.

Dr. Stephen Ko, physician, former CDC officer, professor, and now senior pastor of New York Chinese Alliance Church in New York City brings together a wealth of knowledge, experience, and wisdom to the table with this book that addresses the intersection of faith, medicine, and public health.

From the introduction, Ko underscores the inseparable link between physical and spiritual health. He highlights incarnational health first by pointing out the after-effects of the Fall in Genesis 3. Based on “death spreading to all man because all sinned” (Rom 5:12), consequences include both those that are macroscopically visible (violence, murder, wars) and those that are microscopically visible (infectious viruses and cancer). At the same time, as “jars of clay” (2 Cor 4:7), Ko explains that our bodies are to be preserved as pure, undefiled temples of God, fleeing from sexual immorality, the lust of the eyes, and temptations of the heart. Being aware of this, we learn to glorify and worship God with our bodies. Whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we do all to His glory (1 Cor 10:31).

There are many insightful lessons, shown through individual stories.

Gaze

Ko illustrates a wonderful example of a young girl named Madeline, becoming disabled with blindness from optic nerve atrophy... Despite many reasons to be angry, bitter, and resentful towards God, she and her family, instead, choose to trust in the sovereignty of God, wanting to help people as much as she could, tagging along with her mother to Francophone Africa with a makeshift walking stick — to translate for American doctors. She valued the needs of others above herself (Philippians 2:3-4) and saw their poverty more significant than her own desires. “Suffering led to perseverance instead of hopelessness.” (Rom 5:3-4).

Touch

Ko brings a powerful story — through a set of twins. Born prematurely, they were soon separated and placed into separate incubators to reduce the risk of infection while allowing their organs to mature. In the next month, one twin

thrived while the other struggled to breathe and grow. The latter's heart climbed, and her limbs turned blue. In a desperate act, the nurse, after obtaining permission from the parents, placed the infants together in the same incubator. In a few seconds, Brielle moved close to her twin sister and wrapped her arm around her. Within minutes, the baby's vital signs stabilized, with the heart rate decreasing and the temperature normalizing. The gentle touch was healing.

The parallel drawn between this story and the many instances of Jesus' touching those with whom he engaged (lepers, outcasts, children) is a remarkable insight into the power of touch as a method of encouragement, blessing, and healing.

Breathe

In this chapter, Ko relates his experiences with babies born premature with respiratory distress syndrome to the importance of breath in the human body. He also shares about the dysfunctional breathing associated with anthropophobia and hyperventilation and how diaphragmatic breathing helps to restore the state of the body to a more relaxed disposition. But he also adds how breath is established by the Spirit of God hovering over the face of water (Gen 1:2) and how Christians receive the breath of life from the Father (Act 7:25) and the gift of the Spirit (Jn 7:39). He also is careful to draw a fine line between the ascetic practices of prayer, fasting, and meditation and the syncretistic association with stereotypic Eastern religious practices.

Savor

The chapter about flavor and taste underscores the intricacies of the human taste buds, the connection between God's creation, His provision of healthy food to man (Gen 1:28-29; 9:3) as well as prohibited foods (Dt 14). He makes an interesting transition to Paul's warning (in Rom 14:20-23) to believers not to judge other believers, but to allow room for the conscience of each person to dictate what they eat.

Move

In this chapter, Ko highlights how God has designed humans to move so purposefully, while showing the contrast between the nearly one billion people in the world whose movements are "fractured" (e.g., via cerebral palsy) and those whose movements are redeemed (e.g., via prostheses). He reminds the reader that "in him we live and move and have our being" (Act 17:28) and that our bodies are a habitation for the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19-20).

Rest

Even extrapolating from his near-death experience from a car accident, Ko points out the necessity of rest and how believers need to "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." (Ex 20:8-11) He brings in not only the Hebrew word for rest (*shabbat*), but also reminds the reader that "the Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath." (Mk 2:27) An interesting sidebar is his delving into the science of REM sleep, how health makes people "more patient, kind, and understanding" with our family and neighbors, and how "proper sleep is vital to the physical and mental development of adolescents, children, and newborns."

Summary

Ko brings a fresh perspective on Scripture, highlighting a comprehensive view of God through the lens of physical and spiritual health. For Christians who are not as familiar with medical terminology, the contents related to health and disease are not difficult to grasp. Instead, they add more color and depth to our understanding of the Scriptures. And for Christians in healthcare, the readings offer an enormous affirmation of the important role healthcare workers can add to God's Kingdom work. By understanding that disease and healing are intertwined through the spiritual and physical realms, Ko equips believers to process these concepts through reflection questions at the end of each chapter — questions that can be used in small group studies.



One minor section difficult to understand was the statement “our bodies crave discipline and regular schedules.” (p. 195, in chapter on Rest) While it is understandable that the Holy Spirit can equip the believer with the sense of responsibility and create more discipline and a sense of consistency with managing time, there is the struggle with sin that Paul reminds us in Romans 7:15 (“I do not do what I want, but I do the very

thing I hate.”) Such a struggle can either lead to a simple default sin nature of disobedience, or it can lead to a Spirit-led obedience and producing fruit of the Spirit (Ephesians 5), leading to healthier choices for the body.

For anyone interested, from those involved in the profession of healthcare to those who are in pastoral ministry, this is a must read.

Submitted 5 Aug 2024, Accepted 9 Aug 2024, Published 19 Aug 2024

Competing Interests: None declared.

Cite this article as: So KW. *Faith Embodied: Glorifying God with Our Physical and Spiritual Health* by Stephen Ko. Zondervan, 2024. Christ J Glob Health. 2024 Aug; 11(2). <https://doi.org/10.15566/cjgh.v11i2.358>

© Author. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are properly cited. To view a copy of the license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

