



THE EPISCOPAL CENTER FOR EMBODIED FAITH
PRESENTS
Theological Reflections on Embodied Faith: Body Talk

Broken into Wholeness

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The relationship I have with God has always been a tangible one. From the time I was young, I have felt God in my bones, through the fibers of my body, and in the stirrings of my soul—all the sensations that remind us that we are alive. Sitting still in a pew has never really worked for me in my understanding of God. I find God in nature, people, live music concerts, the expression in art, and in the whisperings within my body. I know God is building a relationship with me when I connect to each of these things and feel tremblings inside. I became aware of these tangible moments when I was an adolescent.

When I was a teenager, I hid from my feelings because I did not know if I could trust them. I still struggle with this. I held my emotions inside and did not know how to process or understand them. By not paying attention to my emotions, my body spoke out in rebellion: I broke out in hives every day. I went to school with welts on my body covering me from head to toe. It was embarrassing. I missed school and I tried to cover myself as much as I could, which is difficult when you are a cheerleader and have to wear your uniform. The only thing that helped my hives go away was when I danced.

Around the time they got their worst, I found a new dance studio—a place that became my sacred playground. The studio was in an old abandoned church and became the holiest of places for me. I used to lie on the wooden floor and stare at the light that would filter in from the holes in the stained glass windows. Those little pinholes of light became my glimmers of hope. Lying on the floor, I would listen to my body, and then I would move. I would dance the unspoken. This sacred space was where my body knew it could explode and rip open the pain that I was hiding from everyone around me. It was where my body roared, where my body healed, and where I met the God who made a dwelling place within me.

The relationship I had with God in the dance studio was intimate, simple, and palpable. When I danced I knew my value: I was worth something and I was made with a purpose in mind. Even if the purpose was small, it did not matter because I felt the thrill of connection that went bigger and deeper than me. When I danced, I would transform from broken into wholeness. I felt the goodness that I believe God imagined when I was created. Dancing became how I communicated to the world.

I was never much for speaking, which is humorous now because that is how I currently make my living, but instead I danced. The movement of my body to music with deep emotion was my way of understanding the world and how I centered myself within that world. I suppose it makes sense then, with the intersection of my interaction with God and my body, that I would find my way into sexual health because God is very tangible there.

For me, God and our sexuality make so much sense together. Our society and church culture tries to separate them, but to me they are very organic. In sex, we are invited into a place of reinvention, growth, and a celebration of the senses. We taste the feast God has prepared before us as a way to learn of the passion God embodied in creation. It is a place to explore, learn, and connect. As a dancer, I am very aware of the spirit and body connection. As a sex educator, I am very aware of the way the Spirit within us invites and heightens our pleasure. We have a God who operates out of connectedness and invites us, quite regularly, into this connectedness that is wished for and brought to us.

The first invitation was through creation where God created our bodies, breathed life into them, and then invited our bodies to experience pleasure through intimate touch and a sense of knowing. We have forgotten this. We have forgotten that God looked at our bodies and said they were good. We have marked the idea of sexual intimacy with sin and fear instead of a dance of transcendence that God invited us to have with one another and ourselves.

I believe that this is what God had envisioned when the idea of sexual intimacy was created. This experience is one of deep vulnerability, where we can feel the way our body can connect to the threads hidden within and reach beyond us. The way these fibers ignite allows us to be in conversation with our innermost being and the sacred that lives within ourselves and/or our partner. How beautiful is that? Our bodies are a direct line of communication to the sacred, through the experiences within our whole body.

To help understand this we need to find ways to transform our brokenness. Too many of us experienced sex that wounded us and was excruciatingly cruel. Often, God has been used as a tool of condemnation placed within that place of hurt and anguish. God has been used to shame, condemn, disconnect, and this has left us tattered. To protect from further wounding, we build up walls, shut down, and forget to listen. God becomes trapped in a box of our own making. By doing this, we limit the capacity of God's imagination and our ability to grow beyond our walls. I believe God intended sexual intimacy to be a place of pleasure and deep, deep connection; not just with a partner, but with God as well.

As a theologically trained sex educator, I want people to understand that they have the right to experience the pleasure that God imagined from creation. This pleasure is designed to draw out the best of who we are and shine light onto the people and spaces around us. This pleasure should always be fruitful, consensual, and not hurtful. Everyone should be able to experience their worth within this pleasure regardless of gender identity, orientation, ability, mental health, race, or age. God dwells within us and wants to be in relationship with us in immeasurable ways, from the dance floor to the bedroom and beyond.

Reflection Questions

- 1) Have you felt God in your body? If so what was that experience like for you?
- 2) Has the relationship you have with God and sex been a positive one or negative? How has that relationship affected your life?
- 3) Why do you believe that the topic of pleasure and the body are not widely discussed in religious settings?

For Further Exploration

- 1) Roseman, Janet Lynn. *Dance Was Her Religion: The Spiritual Choreography of Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Dennis, and Martha Graham.*
- 2) Nelson, James B. *Embodiment.*
- 3) van der Kolk, Bessel. *The Body Keeps the Score.*
- 4) Coogan, Micahel. *God and Sex: What the Bible Really Says.*

About the Author: Kara Haug is the creator of Grace Unbound. Grace Unbound is her independent Sexual Health Education Business. Kara's passion is to create safe space for people to enter into conversation around sexuality and spirituality. She believes that when you take the time to learn about your sexual history, learn to normalize conversations around sexuality, and take the time to understand yourself better, that we will all have better relationships with each other and our Creator. You can find more about Kara at www.graceunbound.com.