“Physical Development”
Romans 12:1
A Sermon Delivered by
Chaplain Margaret E. Siemer
08 August 2014
United States Naval Academy Chapel

Welcome to the United States Naval Academy and especially to the parents of plebes who are in attendance. My name is Chaplain Margaret Siemer and I’ve had the privilege of serving as the plebe summer regimental chaplain to your plebes for the last 988 hours. We laughed together, cried together, sweat together and through it all, your plebes have never failed to impress me with their perseverance and motivation. Plebes, Bravo Zulu (great job)! Let’s continue to press on toward the finish line. Parents, thank you for all the hard work, long hours and sacrifice which was necessary to bring your sons and daughters to this place in their lives.

Many of you know that we are nearing the end of a sermon series which covered the various aspects of the Naval Academy mission statement. I need a little help with this so Plebes, stand up, turn around and face the congregation. Now without shouting, please recite the Naval Academy Mission Statement. Ready, go.

“The mission of the Naval Academy is to develop Midshipmen morally, mentally and physically and to imbue them with the highest ideals of duty, honor and loyalty in order to graduate leaders who are dedicated to a career of naval service and have potential for future development in mind and character to assume the highest responsibilities of command, citizenship and government.”

Thank you, please be seated.

As you just heard, the mission of the Naval Academy is, in part, to develop Midshipmen morally, mentally and physically. Today's focus is on our physical development. Truth be told, which I always like to do, especially from the pulpit, when I found out that the schedule assigned me to cover this part, I first laughed and then cringed because I am what mother used to describe as "not so athletically inclined." That's a polite way to say I am uncoordinated. But the more I got to think about this message, the more I realized that I am perfectly suited to address this topic because there is absolutely no danger of me being considered biased in this area.

There is an abundance of scripture passages to support physical development, or physical fitness. Romans 12:1 says, I urge you brothers to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship. God speaks to us as a whole person, not as separate parts unrelated to one another, but as whole men and women who are created in his image. We do damage to ourselves when we try to split the various aspects of our being into separate parts. They are interconnected. Every successful coach knows that there’s more to an athlete’s performance than just physical training. There are mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of one’s health that all play into an athlete’s success, or lack thereof.

For the purpose of this message, let’s start by taking a look at three unhealthy attitudes we can have about our bodies.

First, you can reject your body. I remember when I was about eight years old, my mother and grandmother and I were spending time together. I was looking at my third grade class picture when I said, "I'm ugly." My mom responded, "When you say you're ugly, that's offensive to me and your father because basically what you are saying is we created an ugly child." Oh. In much
the same way, when we reject our bodies, the ones "fearfully and wonderfully made" by our Creator, we are saying to Almighty God that the masterpiece he created in us wasn't worth his time and, oh by the way, the image we reflect, his image, it's not very good either.

Another unhealthy attitude is when we perfect our bodies. What I mean by this is it's unhealthy when we perfect our bodies for our own glory. Proverbs 31:30 says “beauty is fleeting.” (temporary).

2 Corinthians 4:16 says that the outward human body will perish (die).

Proverbs 11:22 says, “Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion.”

Notice that in all three of these references, beauty in and of itself is not bad, but when we focus all of our attention on outward beauty with no regard for the inward person or the God who created us, then physical appearance or performance becomes unhealthy. This is why I'm absolutely convinced God intentionally makes us aware of something about our bodies that makes uncomfortable. Otherwise, we'd become too full of ourselves.

A third unhealthy attitude is when we neglect our bodies. Okay, get out your band aids and put them on your toes because I know I am going to offend some of you, but just know I am right there with you. I'm United Methodist, we live for potlucks. I'm also one who believes chocolate is one of the four basic food groups. But when we neglect our bodies by choosing unhealthy foods or an inappropriate amount of food or fail to exercise, or rest...or care for our bodies, we are not in a position to glorify God. 1 Cor 6:19-20 says, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

Unhealthy attitudes about our bodies:

- We can reject our bodies.
- We can perfect our bodies.
- We can neglect our bodies.

Let's switch gears a bit and briefly focus on why our bodies are so important to God:

First, Luke 2:52 says that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature. If there's anyone we should look toward to set the example, it's Jesus. He grew in wisdom-mental development, but he also grew in stature which indicates physical development. And trust me every morning, every morning on the pep field, Jesus is right there with us doing thinking planks and Spider-Man push-ups. Oh Jesus….and lest you think I’m being irreverent, I am completely serious.

Second, when we care for our bodies, we are better equipped to be "instruments of righteousness" for God as indicated in Romans 6:12-13. We are able to be vessels through which God works. Is God able to work through unhealthy people? Absolutely, but we have more opportunities when we are not limited by self-imposed physical restrictions.

Third, caring for our bodies and developing them physically extends the amount of time we can glorify God in this lifetime. It also extends the amount of time we can share God's love with others. In case this isn't obvious, generally speaking, when we care for our bodies, we live longer. You might think that when it's your time, it's your time, but let's remember God gives us freedom to make our choices and we live with the consequences of those choices.

Before we finish up today, there are a couple of clarifications I feel the need to make. First, please do not interpret my message today as beating up on those who are physically challenged, either through a handicap or illness. One of my heroes is Nick Vujicic (Voy-I-chich) who was born without arms or legs. He is known throughout the world as a professional motivational speaker who has strong faith in Christ. He is married, has one child- yes, biological
- and participates in all kinds of sports. No one can accuse him of slacking off, though most would understand if he did.

Developing ourselves physically is all about doing what we can with what we've been given and the only person you have to compete with is yourself. Better that you were yesterday, but not as good as tomorrow. And when we keep that perspective - that balance - then we are whole and complete beings, reaching our fullest potential.

So what are you going to do during the next 988 hours of your life? Will you choose to use that time to develop yourself morally, mentally AND physically?

Let us pray:

Almighty and holy God in whose image we are created, thank you for creating a masterpiece in each one of us. Help all of our Plebes as they take the Physical Readiness Test on Tuesday, so that they may prove to themselves how much they’ve already developed physically. Help us to remember we are all a work in progress and to continue striving for ways in which we may glorify you. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.