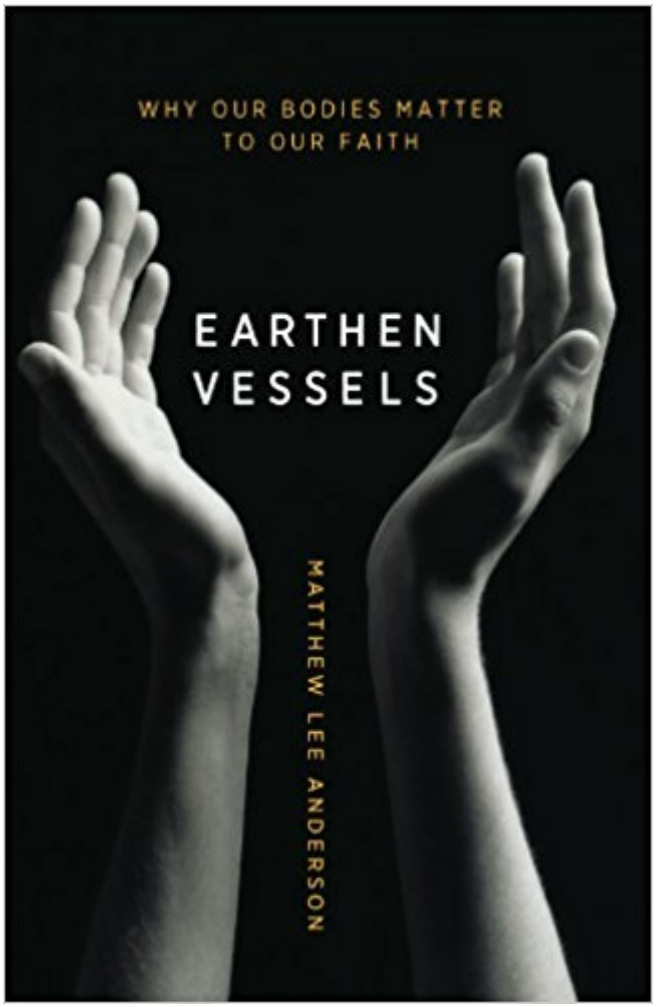
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Earthen Vessels: Why Our Bodies Matter To Our Faith



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Synopsis

Our bodies matter. Christians today sometimes forget this, dangerously ignoring the importance of their physical selves when it comes to technology, sexuality, worship, and even death. Anderson’s book will help readers learn what the Bible says about our bodies and grow to appreciate the importance of embodiment in our spiritual lives. It will also explore generational differences when it comes to how we perceive and use our bodies. Just as Christ’s body was crucial to our salvation, our own bodies are an important part of the complete Christian life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"We evangelicals don’t think we care about the body, but we really, really do. And Matthew Anderson--one of the brightest lights in the evangelical world--helps us care, ponder, think and pray more wisely as we give our bodies as a living sacrifice to Christ."Ã Â Ã Â ----Mark Galli, Senior Managing Editor, Christianity Today"Matthew Lee Anderson...is a serious student of God’s Word and God’s world, and in this book he patiently and insightfully explores a theology of the body from numerous angles...I suspect that many of us will think differently--and more biblically--about the body as a result of this very fine work." ---Justin Taylor, ESV Study Bible "On nearly every page you can find two virtues rarely combined: surprising new insights and good old common sense. Here is good counsel (solid, soulful, scriptural) about how to be humans, in bodies, under the gospel." ---Fred Sanders, Torrey Honors Institute, Biola University"This book is for the church who is in the world. It is a truth-balm for a broken culture addicted to body image. Be challenged to forsake your "quasi-gnosticism" and embrace the divine dignity of your body so that you can worship

well."---Darrin Patrick, Lead Pastor at The Journey and author of Church Planter"Matthew Lee Anderson makes an important contribution to the evangelical dialogue about the role of the human body that is both scholarly and accessible...Christians will learn from this book that the body is important, but that we are not just computers made out of meat."Ã Â --- John Mark Reynolds (Ph.D.), Torrey Honors Institute

Matthew Anderson blogs at Mere Orthodoxy and Evangel. He graduated from Biola University's Torrey Honors Institute in 2004 and spent a year studying at Oxford University. Matthew works at The Journey, a large interdenominational church where he conducts research and develops curriculum. He and his wife live in St. Louis, Missouri.

This is definitely an ambitious book. The author is a friend of mine and I know he's a really smart guy, but I was still impressed and even surprised at both the breadth and the depth of the research and thought that went into this fine theology of the body. After reading the book and letting it simmer on my mental back burner for a couple weeks, I'm particularly struck by two things:1) It is thought-provoking in all the right ways. On multiple occasions, I have found myself prompted by a sign or an overheard bit of conversation to mull over again some point or other from the book. It generates conversations and thinking.2) It's actually quite pastoral in tone - humble, personal, with the edification of the Body of Christ as well as the bodies of Christians as its chief goal.Other reviews have commented more specifically about the content itself, so I won't try to reinvent that wheel (the other reviews are excellent).It isn't a perfect book, of course. In particular, I thought that sometimes Anderson's (usually self-deprecating) humor went a bit too far, so that it sometimes comes off as excessively negative toward his evangelical heritage or toward people whose views or practices he is trying to address. Fortunately, this only occurs a few times and without malicious intent, and the book as a whole is very generous.I did feel that the book took a while to really get going. In the Preface and the first two chapters, it was often difficult to follow the line of the argument and it sometimes felt like Anderson was just trying too hard to be scholarly. Chapter 3, however, was a jewel, and the rest of the book just seemed to get better and better. It's here that Anderson becomes personal and approachable, and it's here where the conversation really takes place.Overall, a really good book. It will make you think, it will build you up, and it will glorify God. A job well done!

Originally posted at my blog [...]I finished this book up the first night of my vacation at the beach. I

am vacationing with my wife’s family, including my two nieces that I nanny. The three year old came into the living room buck naked and asked where her pull-ups were. She unashamedly turned around and stuck out her bottom to show us that she did not have a pull-up on and told us that she still wears pull-ups to bed because she is not big yet.If you are not around children much, you might be surprised by this behavior, but any parent knows that children under 5 are rarely ashamed of their body. And they are often quite aware of their limitations.Matthew Lee Anderson has given us a delight of a book, one that shows us exactly how important that the physical body is to our Christian faith.Early in the book Anderson says, "The paradox of contemporary culture is that while many of us are obsessive about how our bodies look, we are not conscious of the habits of the body we’ve picked up through our practices of life." Bodies are both more important and less thought about than through most of history. Part of this is the modern way we use the body. When I go backpacking, I am aware of water all the time. Every drop I use, I (or one of the people with me) have to pump, store and carry. We plan for how long to hike and where to camp based on where the water is. When I am at home, I rarely think about water. I pay a water bill and I try to conserve it out of thrift, but I do not make plans based on water’s availability. In a similar way, when our livelihood is based on our bodies we are much more aware of our use of the body than when we primarily make a living based on our minds.My niece is aware that at 3 she is not ready to sleep through the night without a pull-up. "Part of our development as adults is discerning which limits we should push through, and which we should respect. But there is no escaping the fact that if we are going to live in the body we have to embrace some of the limits that it entails." When we have a `holy attentiveness’ to the physical needs of those around us, we know when they are present, we are concerned about their well-being. But in our modern self-centered world, that attentiveness needs to be cultivated (we have always been self-centered throughout history, but the modern world allows us to live a self-centered life as no other generation previous to us has.) Anderson points us to a spiritual dependence on God that is rooted in a physical dependence both on God and on those around us. So living the Sabbath is not only about rest, or worship of God, but acknowledgement of real dependence upon God. Prayer is rooted, not only on relationship with God, but real physical need (both our own and those around us.) The sacraments are not only about spiritual reality, but about the physical activities that point us toward God.While I am a fan of the book (I have already given it to two people), there are some weaknesses. Anderson acknowledges that he is not writing about Race or Gender. I feel both absences and I hope that in future editions or future books he can expand on these. I also wish there was more direct interaction with the Sacraments, but in this case I think the problem is with Evangelical Theology of the Sacraments as a whole, more than a

weakness of the book.I also have some frustrations with some of the results of the discussion. The marriage chapter in particular, as married couple that has consciously chosen to not have children as of this time, has a very similar weakness to Catholic conceptions of marriage that make reproduction a center point in the definition of marriage. This is in part a reaction to the rise of homosexuality, but it is a historic understanding that pre-dates that theological issue. Maybe I am just wrong on this point. But I have a problem with an understanding of marriage that requires the potential (but not the reality of children).Another area is Anderson's concern with cremation in his chapter on death. It is very similar to the concerns brought up at the end of Christianity: The First 3000 Years, but I just do not get it. Our concern for the body after death is a result of our respect for the body before death. I understand that historically Christians were concerned about burial because of their focus on the resurrection. But we know that bodies decompose and decomposition is not a barrier to the resurrection (or the power of God.) And his concern that cremation shows a lack of respect for the body seems to be disproved by many ,both in the modern West and in history.One of the real strengths of this book is his extensive research and endnotes. A full 20 percent of the book is notes, averaging about 2 per page. There is much fodder for future research. Anderson draws upon extensive theology outside the Evangelical world, especially Catholic theology. However, unlike some other writers, he is not just playing cafeteria theology, but making it a real Evangelical theology of the body.

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