

**An Altar in the World**  
**Chapter Three**  
**The Practice of Wearing Skin**

This study guide is formatted for a small group gathering. If you choose to use it as a small group leader or as an individual, feel free to adapt it in whatever way seems meaningful to you. Enjoy!

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**Lesson prep:**

Decide on group activity. May need to bring basins, towels, bath oil/soap and lotion. Print out song and homework assignment for next week.

**Quotes and ideas worth repeating:**

*In an age of information overload, when a vast variety of media delivers news faster than most of us can digest-when many of us have at least two e-mail addresses, two telephone numbers, and one fax number-the last thing any of us needs is more information about God. We need the practice of incarnation...*

*Wearing my skin is not a solitary practice, but one that brings me into communion with all those other embodied souls. It is what we have most in common with one another.*

**Related Scripture:**

Jeremiah 2:26-32, Jeremiah 7:3-15  
John 13:1-17 Jesus washes his disciples' feet

**Introductions:** Show the picture of Jesus that you found this week and tell us what you like about it.

**Gathering Activity:** What scars have become part of the skin you wear? Show us or (if modesty demands) tell about a scar and how you got it.

**Reflection/discussion:**

List a few traumatic events that your body survived:

Illnesses:

Surgeries:

Births:

What did your body tell you first thing this morning?

Think of a time when your body sent you clues that something was amiss. (examples: tears, aches, moans, goosepimples, fever)

*Our bodies are prophets. They know when things are out of whack and they say so, although most of us welcome their news about as warmly as the people of Jerusalem welcomed Jeremiah's.*

Read the Jeremiah passages listed in the related scripture section above for a taste of his message that the Israelites did not want to hear.

When have you tried to ignore your body's message?  
(example: motion sickness)

*Our bodies remain God's best way of getting to us. Deep suffering makes theologians of us all...Why me? Why now? Why this? These are natural questions to ask when you are in pain but they are just as relevant when you are in pleasure.*

Do you agree or disagree? Share an experience when you asked these questions.

How did Jesus spend his last night on earth with his disciples when he wanted to teach them what they needed to know in order to thrive when he was no longer around?

*Hint: Jesus said, **Do this, not believe this, in remembrance of me.** (he did concrete things: washed feet and shared supper)*

Is intellectualization of faith a danger in organized religion?

**Group activity:**

Choose from any of these activities:

Break into small groups.

Is there a physical activity or labor of love that brings you closer to God?

Act it out in charades and have others guess what activity you are acting out.

Bring Beatitudes to life in a tableau. Break into groups and allow 15 minutes to prepare. Have Bibles available to read Matthew 5:1-12.

Members of group arrange themselves in a tableau that embodies the Beatitude without using any words, then show the rest of us.

(If needed, see example on page 50: Blessed are those that mourn)

Read about Jesus washing his disciples' feet in John 13:1-17.

Break into pairs and silently wash each other's hands. Dry and massage lotion into the skin afterwards in a way that transmits care and blessing.

**Closing:**

Sing or read aloud:

Good is the Flesh that the Word has Become by Brian Wren (Hope Publishing)

*Good is the Flesh*

by Brian Wren

Good is the flesh that the Word has become,  
good is the birthing, the milk in the breast,  
good is the feeding, caressing and rest,  
good is the body for knowing the world,  
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.

Good is the body for knowing the world,  
sensing the sunlight, the tug of the ground,  
feeling, perceiving, within and around,  
good is the body, from cradle to grave,  
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.

Good is the body, from cradle to grave,  
growing and aging, arousing, impaired,  
happy in clothing, or lovingly bared,  
good is the pleasure of God in our flesh,  
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.

Good is the pleasure of God in our flesh,  
longing in all, as in Jesus, to dwell,  
glad of embracing, and tasting, and smell,  
good is the body, for good and for God,  
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.

**Materials needed:**

Song lyrics (tune?) and homework assignment

Bibles

Water basin, towels, bath oil/soap and lotion

**Homework:**

Our bodies take real beatings. That they heal from most things is an underrated miracle. After considering all the obstacles/accidents/illness that your body has survived, try saying these words in an attitude of prayer before God:

*Here I am. This is a body like no other that my life has shaped. I live here. This is my soul's address. Thank you for breathing life into these lungs, for the electrical impulses*

*that have powered millions of unnoticed heartbeats, for the chemistry taking place at my taste buds that have brought me pleasure at countless meals, for the thousands of miles these feet have carried me. For these things and more, I give thanks.*

Read Ezekiel 37:1-14 (valley of dry bones).