



# Gaining a Healthy Relationship with Food

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# "Gaining a Healthy Relationship with Food"

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## What Can I Hope to Get From this Seminar?

Whether you are here due to personal need, the needs of others, or for a general interest in the topic, we hope this seminar will benefit you. If we do our job well, parts of this seminar will speak to you personally. There will also be parts that speak to aspects of this subject that are different from your own experience. What follows are **six unavoidable facts** that should help you profit from all of the material you hear (bold faced text taken from Paul Tripp and Tim Lane *How People Change*):

**1. Someone in your life had a problem this week.** That person may be you. Even if you are here for yourself, chances are you know or will know others who struggle in this area. Because we live in a fallen world and have a sin nature, we can be certain that we will battle with sin and suffering in our lives. Because we love people, we can be certain we will be called on to love and assist others in their battle with sin and suffering.

**2. We have everything we need in the Gospel to help that person (2 Peter 1:3).** God has given us Himself, the Gospel, the Bible, and the church and promised they are effective for all things that pertain to life and godliness. Our task as Christians is to grow in our understanding of and ability to skillfully apply these resources to our struggles. These resources are the essence and source of "good advice," and we hope to play a role in your efforts to apply and disseminate this "good advice." We do not aim to present new material, but new ways of applying the timeless, eternal truths of the Gospel found in Scripture.

**3. That person will seek help from friends, family members, or pastors before seeking professionals.** Counseling (broadly defined as seeking to offer hope and direction through relationship) happens all the time. We talk with friends over the phone, crying children in their rooms, spouses in the kitchen, fellow church members between services, and have endless conversations with ourselves. We listen to struggles, seek to understand, offer perspective, give advice, and follow up later. This is what the New Testament calls "one-anothering" and something we are all called to do.

**4. That person either got no help, bad help, or biblical, gospel-centered help.** Not all counseling is good counseling. Not all advice that we receive from a Christian (even a Christian counselor) is Christian advice. Too often we are advised to look within for the answers to our problems or told that we are good enough, strong enough, or smart enough in ourselves to overcome. Hopefully you will see today how the Bible calls us to something (rather Someone) better, bigger, and more effective than these messages.

**5. If they did not get meaningful help, they will go elsewhere.** When we do not receive good advice (pointing us to enduring life transformation), we keep looking. We need answers to our struggles. This means that as people find unfulfilling answers they will eventually (by God's grace) come to a Christian for advice. When they eventually come to you, we hope you will be more prepared because of our time together today.

**6. Whatever help they received, they will use to help others!** We become evangelists for the things that make life better (this is why the Gospel is simply called "Good News"). We quite naturally share the things that we find to be effective. Our prayer for you today is that you will find the material presented effective for your struggles and that you will be so comforted and encouraged by it that it will enable you to be a more passionate and effective ambassador of the Gospel in the midst of "normal" daily conversations.

## “Where Do I Begin?”

In life and counseling, finding the starting point can be difficult. Life is fluid enough that identifying where to begin with a life-dominating struggle can feel like finding the beginning of a circle. In order to help you with this very important question, Freedom Groups have developed a progression of five levels of starting points.

A struggle in one of the higher categories may have many expressions or contributing causes in the lower categories, but unless the upper level concerns are addressed first (i.e., substance abuse should be addressed before conflict resolution skills), efforts at change have a low probability of lasting success. The degree of self-awareness usually increases as you go down the page. The level of denial usually increases as you move up the page.

1. **Safety** – When the basic requirements of safety are not present, then safety takes priority over any other concern. Safety is never an “unfair expectation” from a relationship. If safety is a concern, then you should immediately involve other people (i.e., pastor, counselor, or legal authorities).

This category includes: thoughts of suicide, violence, threats of violence (to people or pets), preventing someone from moving freely in their home, destruction of property, manipulation, coercion, and similar practices.

2. **Substance Abuse / Addiction** – After safety, the use of mind or mood altering substances is the next level of priority concern. Substance abuse makes the life situation worse and inhibits any maturation process. The consistency and stability required for lasting change are disrupted by substance abuse. **The mentoring and Freedom Group materials for the sexual sin seminar can be applied to an addiction level struggle.**

This category includes: alcohol, illegal drugs, prescription drug not used according to instructions, inhalants, driving any vehicle with any impairment for any distance, and similar activities.

3. **Trauma** – Past or present events resulting in nightmares, sleeplessness, flashbacks, sense of helplessness, restricted emotional expression, difficulty concentrating, high levels of anxiety, intense feelings of shame, or a strong desire to isolate should be dealt with before trying to refine matters of character or skill. Trauma is a form of suffering that negatively shapes someone’s sense of identity and causes them to begin to constantly expect or brace against the worst.

This category includes: any physical or sexual abuse, significant verbal or emotional abuse, exposure to an act of violence, experience of a disaster, a major loss, or similar experience.

4. **Character** – This refers to persistent dispositions that express themselves in a variety of ways in a variety of settings. Because both the “trigger” and manifestation change regularly and hide when convenient, it is clear that the struggle lies within the core values, beliefs, and priorities of the individual. Skill training alone will not change character. **The mentoring and Freedom Group materials for the sexual sin seminar can be applied to a character level struggle.**

This category includes: anger, bitterness, fear, greed, jealousy, obsessions, hoarding, envy, laziness, selfishness, pornography, codependency, depression, social anxiety, insecurity, and similar dispositions.

5. **Skill** – With skill level changes there will be a high degree of self-awareness that change is needed in the moment when change is needed. However, confusion or uncertainty prevents an individual from being able to respond in a manner that it is wise and appropriate.

This category includes: conflict resolution, time management, budgeting, planning, and similar skills.

Hopefully, after reading these five points, you will have less of a “jump in anywhere and try anything” mentality towards your struggles. Change is hard but knowing where to start helps to establish confidence. Remember, you are not alone. Christ will meet you and the church will walk with you at any of these five points.

## WHAT ARE FREEDOM GROUPS?

***Freedom groups are struggle-specific small groups where individuals commit to investing a season of their life in overcoming a particular life-dominating struggle of sin or suffering.***

**Bible-Based & Gospel-Centered:** Programs and information do not change people. God changes people through the power of the Gospel and the wisdom of His Word. The relational structure of Freedom Groups is the vehicle God has ordained to transport the Gospel and Scripture into the lives of His beloved, enslaved, and hurting children.

**Recognize the Difference Between Sin & Suffering:** Freedom Groups recognize that struggles of sin are different from struggles of suffering in terms of cause, dynamics, emotional impact, relational influence, and other ways. While every believer is simultaneously a saint, sinner, and sufferer, there are fundamental differences (practically and theologically) between a struggle an individual does (sin) and those that happen to the individual (suffering).

**Built On Honesty & Transparency:** The courage to be honest about our suffering or sin is often the essential expression of faith God calls for in overcoming a life-dominating struggle. Freedom Groups create an environment that fosters honesty and transparency by incarnating the love of God and protecting confidentiality within the group.

**Issue Specific:** We do not advocate a one-size-fits-all approach to life struggles because of the tendency of such programs to become cliché or offer generic advice. Christ bears many names, has many titles, and serves many roles. Freedom Groups uphold the breadth of Christ as greater than the complexity of life. We believe our Savior is as personal as our struggles and service to Him is the only way from bondage to freedom.

**Gender Specific:** During a time of intense struggle and personal sharing having members of both genders in a group is unnecessarily distracting and, in many cases, can exacerbate the struggle or stifle genuine sharing.

**Time Limited:** Freedom Groups have recommended durations for each group based upon the time necessary to *solidify* change on a given subject.

**Avoid Struggle-Based Identity:** We recognize that when an individual has struggled with one issue for an extended period of time that struggle begins to define them. Freedom Groups are structured in content, duration, and philosophy to alert the participants to this temptation and guide them away from it. Freedom Groups strive to teach and model what it means to live out of an identity as a dearly loved child of God.

**Embedded Within the Church:** Freedom Groups are not a "program" put on by the counseling ministry, but a part of church life. Recovery groups that become a program, tend to diminish the confidence of the participants in the ability of the church to understand and its willingness to care about their struggle.

**Blend Discipleship, Accountability, & A Guided Process:** Freedom Groups are more than a Bible study on a given subject. They develop a practical theology of their subject during the group study and guide members through an intentional process during the personal study while the members hold each other accountable.

**Transition Into Larger Small Group Ministry:** The goal is for each Freedom Group member to be in a general small group within a year. Group members may choose to be a general small group the whole time. If desired, at "graduation" the Freedom Group leader would direct the participant to a small group with a leader who has completed personal study and counseling exercises for that area of struggle. It would be the participant's choice whether to disclose that was the reason for choosing that leader's small group.

## The 9 Steps of Freedom Groups

We do not believe there is a one-size-fits-all solution to the struggles of life. Neither do we believe there is any magic in these particular steps. However, we do believe that these steps capture the major movements of the Gospel in the life of an individual. We also believe that it is through the Gospel that God transforms lives and modifies behavior as He gives us a new heart.

In Freedom Groups we attempt to walk through the Gospel in slow motion with a concentrated focus upon a particular life-dominating struggle. We do this in a setting of transparent community because we believe God changes people in the midst of relationships.

We believe that the Gospel speaks to both sin (things we do wrong) and suffering (painful experiences for which we are not responsible) to bring peace, wholeness, and redemption. We also believe that every person is both a sinner and a sufferer. However, we believe the Gospel is best understood and applied when we consider how the Gospel relates to the nature of our struggle. The nine steps below are those used by Freedom Groups to address struggles of sin.

<b>Sin-Based Groups</b>	<b>Suffering-Based Groups</b>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 1. ADMIT I have a struggle I cannot overcome without God.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 1. PREPARE yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually to face your suffering.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 2. ACKNOWLEDGE the breadth and impact of my sin.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 2. ACKNOWLEDGE the specific history and realness of my suffering.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 3. UNDERSTAND the origin, motive, and history of my sin.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 3. UNDERSTAND the impact of my suffering.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 4. REPENT TO GOD for how my sin replaced and misrepresented Him.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 4. LEARN MY SUFFERING STORY which I use to make sense of my experience.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 5. CONFESS TO THOSE AFFECTED for harm done and seek to make amends.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 5. MOURN the wrongness of what happened and receive God’s comfort.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 6. RESTRUCTURE MY LIFE to rely on God’s grace and Word to transform my life.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 6. LEARN MY GOSPEL STORY by which God gives meaning to my experience.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 7. IMPLEMENT the new structure pervasively with humility and flexibility.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 7. IDENTIFY GOALS that allow me to combat the impact of my suffering.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 8. PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 8. PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 9. STEWARDSHIP all of my life for God’s glory.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 9. STEWARDSHIP all of my life for God’s glory.</p>

**To learn more about Freedom Groups visit [www.summitrdu.com/counseling](http://www.summitrdu.com/counseling)**

# Chapter I

## “Food Has Been More than Fuel to Me”

### ADMIT I have a struggle I cannot overcome without God.

**“Not overcoming my old relationship with food would be more costly than anything God would take me through in the pursuit of His freedom. God is good for having brought me to this point of admitting my sinful relationship with food.”**

**Memorize:** Philippians 3:19 (ESV), “Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Their” – Read through this verse replacing “their” with “my” and ask if it fits your eating patterns.
- “End is destruction” – Does how you eat, or don’t eat, contribute to your flourishing or your demise?
- “God is their belly” – How much does satisfying your eating patterns determine whether you’re at peace?
- “Glory is their shame” – If you got everything you wanted from food would you be healthy-holy or starved-obese?
- “Mind set on earthly things” – Do you eat for strength to serve God or to please others / distract yourself?

### Teaching Notes

“I felt so invested in my eating disorder and my belief system, it was hard admitting to myself that I had it all wrong this whole time (p. 111).” Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*

“Disordered eating is generally a pattern of using food for reasons other than nutrition... Disordered eating becomes an eating disorder based upon the behavior, the severity, and the length of time (p. 241).” Gregory Jantz in *Hope, Help, & Healing for Eating Disorders*

“Anorexia and compulsive overeating may appear to be opposites, but they are not. Food is their shared means for controlling that which seems uncontrollable (p. 19).” Gregory Jantz in *Hope, Help, & Healing for Eating Disorders*

“We don't own our bodies; they are not ours to abuse or care for according to our own perceived wants or desires. On the contrary, not only did God create us; he paid a high price to redeem us. And when he redeemed us, he didn't just redeem our souls; he redeemed our bodies and claims them for his use as well. *Therefore honor God with your bodies* (referencing I Corinthians 6:19-20; p. 46-47)... How we treat our bodies is a question of stewardship even before it is a question of health, comfort, enjoyment, or pleasure (p. 47).” Gary Thomas in *Every Body Matters: Strengthening Your Body to Strengthen Your Soul*

“It is an unwritten American the eleventh commandment: thou shalt not be fat (p. 3)... Every limitation we have can be seen as an invitation from God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. When we surrender, we don't give up or play dead or wait for God to fix us. Instead, we become active participants with God and making a new path of hope toward healing (p. 8).” Stephen Arterburn and Linda Mintle in *Lose It for Life*

“I know from personal experience that as long as my heart is focused on ‘looking good,’ there will never be a time when I am completely satisfied with my appearance (p. 41)... Progress towards change (or sanctification), then, requires us to see our overeating, bingeing, or starvation as sin—not just something inconvenient, embarrassing, or troublesome (p. 99).” Elyse Fitzpatrick in *Love to Eat, Hate to Eat*

“Start by admitting how reluctant you are—this might be the first honest thing you have done with your obsession in a long time (p. 14).” Ed Welch in *Eating Disorders: The Quest for Thinness*

“Being recovered is when the person can accept his or her natural body size and shape and no longer has a self-destructive relationship with food or exercise. When you are recovered, food and weight take a proper perspective in your life, and what you weigh is not more important than who you are; in fact, actual numbers are of little or no importance at all. When recovered, you will not compromise your health or betray your soul to look a certain way, wear a certain size, or reach a certain number on the scale. When you are recovered, you do not use eating disordered behaviors to deal with, distract from, or cope with other problems (p. 16-17).” Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*

### Embedded Study

What is your goal for this study? We'll discuss several self-defeating goals a bit later in this study, but for now let's consider what a good, sustainable goal would be for this study:

- To develop and sustain a satisfying lifestyle
- That seeks to honor God by being a good steward of the particular body He gave you
- By relating to food in a healthy way
- And recognizing that God gave us food to be enjoyable fuel

“We need a new relationship with food altogether, seeing it as an aspect of life but not the reason for life. While food ultimately is fuel for our physical vessel, it is also something we accept as a pleasurable and good gift from God. There is evidence of his care for us and that his provision of food goes beyond necessity to include aspects of his generosity and kindness (p. 53).” Gary Thomas in *Every Body Matters: Strengthening Your Body to Strengthen Your Soul*

Notice that in this approach *we do not use numbers* – ideal weight, desired pant size, pounds to lose-gain per month, etc... We simply want to be a good steward of the body God gave us. That is “success.” We will talk about numbers later, but they merely serve the larger purpose of stewarding our body. When numbers get in the front of our mind and priorities, bad things happen.

This stands in contrast to ways that we often think about changing our eating habits (contrasting with four points above):

- We think about short-term fixes that we'll abdicate in the near future
- We try to manipulate or condemn our body to conform to some idealized shape or weight
- By relating to food in unhealthy ways or manipulating ourselves with food as a reward or punishment
- And trying to use food to distract us from or resolve struggles over which it has no influence

Hopefully, you can begin to see that most people try to change their eating habits by becoming personally abusive. Shame, condemnation, and coercion are their emotional motivators of choice. If they parented their children or treated their co-workers like they related to food, they would be arrested or fired. God wants something better for you.

You can also see that most attempts at changing our relationship to food are self-sabotagingly short-term. Whether it's someone who over-restricts eating a bit less to get parents off their back, or someone who over-eats “going on a diet,” the dysfunctional relationship with food remains the “norm” from which they commit to temporarily depart. God wants something better for you.

“One of the greatest myths people hold is that losing weight will make them happy (p. 38)... We can't think of anything more depressing than dieting. Who wants to willingly embark on a life of deprivation and eating food you don't enjoy (p. 49)?” Stephen Arterburn and Linda Mintle in *Lose It for Life*

“I felt so invested in my eating disorder and my belief system, it was hard admitting to myself that I had it all wrong this whole time (p. 111).” Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*

“Disordered eating is generally a pattern of using food for reasons other than nutrition... Disordered eating becomes an eating disorder based upon the behavior, the severity, and the length of time (p. 241).” Gregory Jantz in *Hope, Help, & Healing for Eating Disorders*

This chapter is the first step in a journey to a healthy relationship with food. That journey begins with admitting what needs to change and accepting God's necessary role in that process of change. We will begin that journey in three sections:

1. Assessing Your Current Level of Motivation to Change
2. Ten Phrases that Encapsulate Your Journey
3. Assessing Your Current Relationship with Food

Before we begin, there is one more recommendation that needs to be made first. Meet with your personal physician. This will help you get a baseline from which to gauge your personal health (which is what we want to learn to steward on this journey). Your physician can also help you determine if meeting with a nutritionist would be helpful.

As with every part of this journey, it is vital that you be honest. You will never be healthier than you are honest. Let your physician know of any eating habits, post-eating habits, and exercise routine that would help him-her advise you on this journey. The remaining material of this chapter should help you determine that kind of information to share with your doctor.



## Five Levels of Motivation to Change

“Quitting smoking is easy. I’ve done it a couple dozen times,” captures well the pattern of trying to change our relationship with food. We want to, but we don’t. We’re motivated, but we’re not. We think we should, but wish people would just leave us alone. This mindset is called “ambivalence” – feeling two contradictory emotions about the same thing. Even if we didn’t know what ambivalence was, we’re good at it.

**Read James 1:5-8.** This is often a guilt passage. We read it and think, “If it applies to me, I should freak out because it sounds really bad.” Start with verse five and realize the passage begins with presenting God as generous. God is not upset about supplying what we need in our double-minded moments. This will help you not doubt there is hope for your fickle desire to change (v. 6). God is a gentleman. He won’t change us against our will (v. 7). But God is also loving and warns us against the dangers of our double-minded tendency. At this stage in your journey, you’re just getting comfortable with what God already knows. There is hope because God is not surprised even if we are surprised when we admit how bad things have gotten. Hope begins where you are and God will always join you there.

You need to name this tendency early in your journey or this attempt will merely be the latest edition of your good intentions. Don’t feel ashamed of your conflicted motives. God already knows and he still wants to help. The only person you can lie to is yourself and those who love you. In this section, you will look at five levels of motivation from Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder* (p. 19-22; bold text only). In the parentheses we’ll map out how these correlate with the nine step journey of this study.

1. **Pre-Contemplation** (before you started): This is the stage when we think our relationship with food is fine. You are annoyed and offended if someone suggests that changing your eating or exercise habits would be a good idea. “Change” is a concept met with resistance instead of consideration.
2. **Contemplation** (step one): Now you are beginning to believe that change might be beneficial and are wondering what the process might look like. You are trying to decide if change is “possible,” and, if so, if it’s “worth it.” You want to know what would be required of you and whether these sacrifices would produce a more satisfying life than continuing to neglect them.
3. **Preparation** (steps two to four): In this phase your consideration becomes more concrete. You gather the information necessary to enact an effective and sustainable plan. You assess obstacles; both logistical (external) and motivational (internal). You begin to enlist people to come alongside of you for the journey.
4. **Action** (steps five to seven): At this point plans come to life; ideas become choices. Progress is made and setbacks are navigated. There are successes and failures, but the trajectory of your journey is forward. Techniques become habits and habits become a lifestyle. You begin to enjoy the fruit of living differently.
5. **Maintenance** (steps eight and nine): A new lifestyle is embraced. Increasingly your emotions and thought patterns conform to this new lifestyle of stewarding your body for the glory of God. You learn to navigate changes related to events (e.g., wedding or a vacation) and life changes (e.g., metabolism changes with age).

**Exercise:** In the margin beside these five levels of motivation write “today” beside where your motivation is now. Write significant dates or events in the margin that came to mind when you read each description. Avoid writing the names of people. It’s not that we can’t learn from others, but there is a tendency to compare ourselves to others and say, “I’m not like them. This would be easier if I were.” Whether that is true or not, it’s not useful. This is your journey. No one will take it but you. Do not feed that habit of distracting-discouraging yourself with comparisons.

## Ten Phrases that Encapsulate Your Journey

**Read Proverbs 23:7.** “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. ‘Eat and drink!’ he says to you, but his heart is not with you (NKJV).” Our thoughts reveal our hearts (Luke 6:45). So we can trace our journey in phrases as well as stages. Below you will find ten phrases that capture our journey to a healthy relationship with food (adapted from Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder* p. 14-16; bold text only). Use these as a tool to help you locate yourself as you listen to yourself. The better we are at listening to ourselves the fewer setbacks we will experience and the shorter those setbacks will be.

As you read these, gain an appreciation for how change is a process; not a single leap from where we are to where God wants us to be. Realize afresh that God is kind and patient; walking us along the journey of change at a human pace. When we think “I can’t do it” we are usually trying to cover multiple segments of change all in one moment. Allow this study to prevent you from

being overwhelmed by the totality of the journey and grow your contentment to take each step by God's grace and in his strength.

1. **“I don't think I have a problem.”** (Denial) Chances are you wouldn't be beginning this study if there was not some reason for concern. If this is where you are, consider making this statement, “I would like to fairly assess my relationship with food to determine whether it honors God and is contributing to me living the full-satisfying life God intends.” The goal of this study is to avoid taking anything from you that is serving you well. You will make every choice along the way. We simply ask that you have the courage to be honest.
2. **“I might have a problem but it's not that bad.”** (Minimizing) “That bad” is a loaded phrase. Unless we're in the hospital we don't think we're “that bad” and, even then, we can easily rationalize that the doctor is being unreasonable or that since we understand the dangers we can control our eating habits better. It is the wise person who assesses the degree of their struggle before a crisis forces them to. That is what you'll begin doing in the early steps of this study.
 

“There is no particular body shape or appearance that someone must have in order to qualify for having an eating disorder. Anyone—male or female—of any race, age, height, or weight can have an eating disorder... Many people with eating disorders do not seek help, because they do not feel as if they look sick enough to have an eating disorder (p. 63).” Jenni Schaeffer in *Life Without Ed*
3. **“I have a problem but I don't care.”** (Ambivalence) We see the conflict that exists inside our own soul again. It is so easy for us to see something detracting from our life and not care. “I'm going to die of something. Why not this?” We can easily rationalize. If the issue was merely your right to choose what you want for your life this logic would be fine. But our stated goal is to steward the life and body God entrusted to us. That radically changes our logic.
 

“Start by admitting how reluctant you are—this might be the first honest thing you have done with your obsession in a long time (p. 14).” Ed Welch in *Eating Disorders: The Quest for Thinness*

“We don't own our bodies; they are not ours to abuse or care for according to our own perceived wants or desires. On the contrary, not only did God create us; he paid a high price to redeem us. And when he redeemed us, he didn't just redeem our souls; he redeemed our bodies and claims them for his use as well. *Therefore honor God with your bodies* (referencing I Corinthians 6:19-20; p. 46-47)... How we treat our bodies is a question of stewardship even before it is a question of health, comfort, enjoyment, or pleasure (p. 47).” Gary Thomas in *Every Body Matters: Strengthening Your Body to Strengthen Your Soul*
4. **“I want to change but I don't know how and I'm scared.”** (Panic) This is why ambivalence is so appealing. We often get to this phrase and go backwards instead of forward. When we commit to the journey we become intimidated by its length. That is normal and understandable. It is part of the process. Don't condemn yourself for it. Admit it and be honest with God about it. Let Psalm 56:3, “When I am afraid, I put my trust in you [God],” be your perpetual prayer when this is your dominant thought. God is honored when we run to him with our fears; like a parent is honored when their child instinctively runs to them when they are afraid.
5. **“I tried to change but I couldn't.”** (Despair) We have to come to the end of ourselves before we will rely on God. Despair is the first step towards reliance. This is another uncomfortably-good part of the journey. You will fail many times on this journey. You are fighting your sin nature, not just a bad habit. At this point, simply commit to fail-forward into God's grace and strength. Despair that takes you to God is your friend; you will find that it was the seed of hope instead of destruction. If you feel stuck here, read the book of Ecclesiastes. Notice how God inspired a whole book of dead-ends in order to show his patience, grace, and wisdom to guide people in the process of change.
6. **“I can stop some of the behaviors but not all of them.”** (Early Change) We prefer results over process, but one key mark of people who achieve great things is their ability to savor each increment of progress rather than being perpetually discouraged about how far there is to go. In kindergarten we started by being able to recognize “some of the letters” but thought memorizing the whole alphabet and learning to read was impossible. Now you're breezing through this study (at least the reading part). Your emotional response to this journey may be just as daunting, but if you stay the course, it will be just as rewarding as learning to read.
7. **“I can stop the behaviors but not my thoughts.”** (Middle Change) Behaviors are more tangible than thoughts and emotions, so it makes sense that one would change before the other. Don't become disheartened by what is predictable. This will be a season when you strengthen your ability to “take every thought captive” (II Cor. 10:5), but allow God's faithfulness with your behaviors to be seen as a down payment on his faithfulness with your thoughts and emotions. By this point in your journey, you will have already come farther than you thought possible at the beginning.
8. **“I am often free from behaviors and thoughts but not all of the time.”** (Latter Change) The more freedom we experience the more troubling setbacks and temptation can feel. When setbacks were a lifestyle, we experienced them

as “normal” so they didn’t bother us. When you get to this stage you may experience more upset because of a lesser setback than you do now for a greater set back. That is actually a good thing. It will mean your conscience and sense of normalcy have acclimated to an expectation that you will live more in accord with God’s design for how you steward your body and life.

9. **“I am free from behaviors and thoughts.”** (Mature Change) Don’t assume, “My life will always be this hard if I try to have a healthy relationship with food and steward my body well.” It won’t. You will begin to enjoy healthy so much that unhealthy makes much less sense to you. This requires relinquishing many of the idols that fuel your current relationship with food (step three) and establishing a lifestyle where healthy habits are part of your rhythms of life (steps six and seven), but you are not signing up to fight a perpetual battle that will be as hard as it feels right now.
10. **“I am recovered.”** (Recovered) Our sanctification – stewarding our life as Christ would – will never be complete in this life. But you will not need to say, “Hello, my name is [blank] and I have a destructively unhealthy relationship with food” for the rest of your life. The definition below captures well what it means to be “recovered.”

“Being recovered is when the person can accept his or her natural body size and shape and no longer has a self-destructive relationship with food or exercise. When you are recovered, food and weight take a proper perspective in your life, and what you weigh is not more important than who you are; in fact, actual numbers are of little or no importance at all. When recovered, you will not compromise your health or betray your soul to look a certain way, wear a certain size, or reach a certain number on the scale. When you are recovered, you do not use eating disordered behaviors to deal with, distract from, or cope with other problems (p. 16-17).” Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*

**Exercise:** In the margin beside these ten phrases write “today” beside where you are now. Write significant dates or events in the margin that came to mind when you read each description. This journey will not be as linear as these ten phrases or the nine steps of this study might imply. Use these phrases and this study to orient you to (a) locate where a given moment of struggle is in the process of change, (b) reinforce the appropriate and most effective approaches to that part of the struggle, and (c) avoid the mentality of thinking you have to be “all better” or might as well “give in.”

### Assessing Your Current Relationship with Food

**Instructions:** Read the following descriptive statements. This assessment contains questions for healthy and multiple unhealthy relationships with food. Even if you do not feel like one section of this tool fits your life well, please complete the entire assessment. Mark the answer that best fits how you respond:

**(N) almost never, (R) rarely, (S) sometimes, (F) frequently, or (A) almost always.**

A self-scoring on-line version of this evaluation can be found at: [bradhambrick.com/healthy](http://bradhambrick.com/healthy).

1. I begin my day with a healthy breakfast.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
2. Over the course of the day I eat foods from all food groups.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
3. I allow myself to enjoy and savor the foods that I eat.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
4. I manage my schedule so that eating is not a rushed, stressful activity.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
5. I get adequate sleep so that eating is not an attempt to compensate for inadequate energy.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
6. I know what the normal weight range is for my age, height, gender, and frame.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
7. I know how many calories I should eat per day to maintain my normal weight range.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
8. I eat foods that allow my digestive track to operate smoothly and regularly.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
9. I eat a balance of nutrition-dense and calorie-dense foods so I am both healthy and satisfied.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
10. I resist using a scale as the measure of whether I have a healthy relationship with food.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
11. I frequently eat to distract myself from guilt, insecurity, or other unpleasant emotions.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
12. I frequently mistake being upset for feeling hungry, because it’s easier to satiate hunger.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
13. I feel guilty for feeling hungry because I fear gaining weight or am ashamed of my weight.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
14. After eating I feel disappointed because life is not “better.”	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
15. When I don’t know what else to do, I fill my time with snacking.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
16. I have a list of “good foods” I allow myself to eat and “bad foods” I avoid.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
17. I will lie about my eating habits when I think someone would disapprove.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
18. When eating with others, I believe I must eat less than anyone at my table.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
19. I punish myself when I break my food rules.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
20. What I did or didn’t eat strongly influences whether I think I had a good or bad day.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
21. When I walk in a room I immediately compare my figure to others.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
22. I feel awkward or ashamed to eat with other people.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>
23. I feel the need to hide my eating habits from other people.	<b>N</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>A</b>

24. Because how I use food to assuage unpleasant emotions, I confide in people less.	N	R	S	F	A
25. Because people have raised concerns about my eating habits, I avoid people.	N	R	S	F	A
26. As I eat, I do not pay attention to when I am full.	N	R	S	F	A
27. I regularly eat until I feel "stuffed" and uncomfortable.	N	R	S	F	A
28. I eat when I am not hungry.	N	R	S	F	A
29. I consume more calories than I need to maintain a healthy weight.	N	R	S	F	A
30. I lack the self-control to not eat when it is unwise for me to eat.	N	R	S	F	A
31. I have an intense fear of gaining weight even though I am technically at or underweight.	N	R	S	F	A
32. I am preoccupied with my weight and know the caloric value of every food I eat.	N	R	S	F	A
33. I frequently make excuses for not eating and tell people I'm not hungry.	N	R	S	F	A
34. My hair, skin, and nails are thin, dull, and dry.	N	R	S	F	A
35. (Females) My menstrual cycle is irregular or has stopped altogether.	N	R	S	F	A
36. I frequently feel cold and dress warmer than others to compensate.	N	R	S	F	A
37. People tell me I'm skinny but I think I'm fat.	N	R	S	F	A
38. I am having a harder time remembering things and sometimes feel disoriented.	N	R	S	F	A
39. I have osteoporosis (low bone density).	N	R	S	F	A
40. I don't have the energy or interest to engage activities I used to enjoy.	N	R	S	F	A
41. Whether or not I exercise determines whether I think I've had a good or bad day.	N	R	S	F	A
42. I exercise even if I am injured because I feel like I must.	N	R	S	F	A
43. I become angry or anxious if something interferes with my exercise.	N	R	S	F	A
44. I sometimes think I should exercise less, but can't convince myself to do so.	N	R	S	F	A
45. I always feel like I could have and should have done more exercise.	N	R	S	F	A
46. I binge on a large quantity of food and feel out of control as I do so.	N	R	S	F	A
47. To compensate for bingeing I purge by vomiting, using laxatives or something comparable.	N	R	S	F	A
48. I am secretive about my eating habits or hide food so that I can binge.	N	R	S	F	A
49. I lie about and find ways to hide my purging habit.	N	R	S	F	A
50. I experience sore throat from vomiting or irregular bowel movements from laxatives.	N	R	S	F	A

**Key to Survey Scoring:** Give yourself one point for an "S" response, two points for an "F" response, and three points for an "A" response. If your total score matches the total number of questions in a given subset, that is an area of concern. If your total score comes close to doubling the total number of questions, it is a significant concern. If your total score more than doubles the total number of questions, it should be considered a life-dominating struggle.

A self-scoring on-line version of this evaluation can be found at: [bradhambrick.com/healthy](http://bradhambrick.com/healthy).

**Healthy Eating Habits (\* Reverse Scoring \*):** These first two areas of assessment have to do with healthy eating habits. The scoring instrument will need to be used in reverse. These are positive qualities that are indicative of a healthy relationship with food. As you grow, these scores will increase rather than decrease.

- Questions 1-5: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes **healthy eating habits**. It is easy for assessments to focus exclusively on what you're doing that is unhealthy. We need to know those things. But this assessment begins by identifying practices that are fundamental to being healthy. In this study, as with any effort at change, it is as important to focus on what you are running to as it is to focus on what you are running from.

- Questions 6-10: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions focus on your level of **body awareness**. For many people who struggle to have a healthy relationship with food, they lack an awareness of their body, its basic needs, and how to care for themselves. Some of this information you will get in the course of this study. Other aspects of this information you will only be able to get by becoming more mindful of your body and eating habits.

**Uses of Food:** When our relationship with food becomes unhealthy we begin to use foods for purposes over which it has no influence and develop rules for food that have little to do with caring for our body. The more influential these uses and rules become, the less healthy our relationship with food becomes.

- Questions 11-15: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes common **emotional uses of food**. Often we eat or refuse to eat for reasons that have little to do with the presence or absence of hunger. Food was meant to fuel the body, not quell the soul. When we use food for this secondary purpose we end up consuming more calories than our body needs, because our focus is not on caring for our body but trying to calm our soul or distract our mind.

“Anorexia and compulsive overeating may appear to be opposites, but they are not. Food is their shared means for controlling that which seems uncontrollable (p. 19).” Gregory Jantz in *Hope, Help, & Healing for Eating Disorders*

How would you describe or summarize your emotional uses of food? \_\_\_\_\_

- Questions 16-20: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes common **unhealthy food rules**. Eating can easily change from an activity to a competition. In a competition there are clear rules that help decide who “wins” and perpetual fear of losing. If emotional uses of food tend to result in over-eating, unhealthy food rules tend to correlate with unhealthy restricting.

What are the food rules you believe you must obey to be “good”? \_\_\_\_\_

- Questions 21-25: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions describes the **social implications** of a healthy relationship with food. Food is very social. We often eat in social settings and social setting draw out many of the insecurities related to our weight and eating habits. As we change our relationship with food, there will be ripples in our social lives.

**Overeating:** One side of our bad relationship with food can be excess. When we are consuming more calories than our body needs, it is a strong indicator that we are using food for reasons other than fuel. In future chapters we will look at how to dissolve the motive and erode the patterns that result in this over-reliance on food.

- Questions 26-30: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions focus on **overeating**. It is only recently in human history that “the average person” has begun to live with caloric excess. Overeating was not a common problem because “extra food” was not a common luxury. Gluttony was seen more as an issue of robbing from those near you than it was a matter of self-discipline. Living in the context of an abundance of food and a culture of over-sized portions brings new challenges.

“The most common daily lunch in North America—some kind of meat, vegetables, and drink, maybe even a dessert—constituted a feast in Old Testament times (p. 69).” Gary Thomas in *Every Body Matters: Strengthening Your Body to Strengthen Your Soul*

“As long as what you eat dominates your affections, thoughts, and behavior—even if you are eating small portions, starving yourself, or insisting on only eating ‘healthy’ foods—your eating is gluttonous because your life is focused on food (p. 109).” Elyse Fitzpatrick in *Love to Eat, Hate to Eat*

**Restricting:** The other side of our bad relationship with food can be restriction. In this part of the evaluation we will look at three patterns that are frequently present when our unhealthy relationship with food becomes restrictive: anorexia, compulsive exercise, and bulimia.

- Questions 31-40: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions focus on **anorexia**. Anorexia is when we intentionally malnourish our body because of an irrational dissatisfaction with our body image. Often understood merely as problem of vanity or insecurity, anorexia is more lethal than any other psychological diagnosis. However, the pride of being able to exhibit such large amounts of self-control often blinds the starving individual from their need for change and makes getting healthier feel like being a weaker person.

“Eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any psychological illness (p. 154).” Jenni Schaeffer in *Life Without Ed*

- Questions 41-45: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions focus on **compulsive exercise**. Exercise is part of our relationship with food. When thinness becomes our quest, the role of exercise in our life is also frequently distorted. Exercise is engaged in such a manner that

is actually begins to contribute more to the deterioration of our body rather than the strengthening of our body. Compulsive exercise can be present with either anorexia or bulimia.

- Questions 46-50: ( Total: \_\_\_\_\_ in 5 questions)

This set of questions focus on **bulimia**. Bulimia involves the persistent cycle of bingeing and purging; consuming a large amount of calories in compulsive fashion and then eliminating those calories before digestion can take place (i.e., vomiting or laxatives). It is common for those who experience anorexia to also begin to display the pattern of bulimia.

### Conclusion

At this point we hope three things are true: (1) you are able to put your struggle into words better than you could a few pages ago; (2) you have a sense of the journey ahead of you that is less all-or-nothing; and (3) you see your need for God to overcome the struggle you face. God is always available; the question is whether we see our need for him. Hope begins when we do.

We will look at many other important factors in the chapters to come, but for the present time, maintain you commitment to these three things.

1. Admit your need to change in the areas you discovered in this chapter.
2. Focus on the next, healthy step ahead of you; don't get intimidated by the whole journey.
3. Embrace God's commitment to be with and for you in that process of change.

For some readers the moral language used to describe our relationship with food may be uncomfortable. This is an important reason for this emphasis. Calling unhealthy eating sin means that our goal is holiness not thinness. God does not have an ideal body type. There will be many shapes and sizes in heaven. This should give hope.

This should also provide motivation. Our goal – being a good steward of our body – is something we have a fresh opportunity to accomplish every day. It may take a while to get our body weight back in a healthy range for our age, gender, and body frame. But we can begin living in a God honoring, healthy life today. Every day can be a “win” when our goal is simply to honor God.

At the end of each step we provide a few questions we would like an accountability-encouragement partner to be asking you as you take this journey. This person could be a pastor, counselor, friend, or small group member. Use this as a way to educate those you are enlisting be part of your community support network about what they can do to help.

#### Accountability Focus (ADMIT):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly and to confront any contradiction between your words and life.

- Do I admit all the forms my unhealthy relationship with food takes?
- Am I willing to be honest about where my current level of motivation is and how it fluctuates?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element you are learning about your relationship with food to your accountability partner. These commitments are preliminary to chapter six “life restructuring” but serve to build progress while you get to that point.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 2

### “An Honest Look in the Mirror”

#### ACKNOWLEDGE the breadth and impact of my sin.

**“I am beginning to see the extent and impact of my unhealthy relationship with food. It is bigger than I wanted to admit [describe] and still may be bigger than I realize. Apart from God’s grace, I lack or abuse self-control. I acknowledge that there is no safety and no freedom in minimizing my sin [describe]. Before I can truly understand the greatness of Jesus I must acknowledge the magnitude of what His death and resurrection has conquered on my behalf and in my life.”**

**Memorize:** Ecclesiastes 6:7-9 (ESV), “All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied. For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? And what does the poor man have who knows how to conduct himself before the living? Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this also is vanity and a striving after wind.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “All the toil” – Consider all the energy you put into eating or not eating. Is this a good investment of your life?
- “For his mouth” – This is a common struggle people face. We don’t naturally have a healthy relationship with food.
- “Appetite is not satisfied” – All of our appetites resist accepting “enough” or take pride in having “control.”
- “What advantage” – There is no advantage to our appetites being out of control. The result is always injurious.
- “Vanity... striving after wind” – The things that drive us to misuse food never deliver as they promise.

#### Teaching Notes

“In order to begin changing your relationship with food, it is important to look at your current behaviors, so you can be honest with yourself about what you are doing and what you need to work on and change (p. 129).” Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*

“Try not to get hung up on the fairness of the genetic hand you may have been dealt (p. 71).” Stephen Arterburn and Linda Mintle in *Lose It for Life*

“To make matters worse, losing one pound doesn't feel like it makes any difference at all, even though losing a pound can be difficult to do. The sacrifice-to-reward ratio is out of whack (p. 96).” Gary Thomas in *Every Body Matters: Strengthening Your Body to Strengthen Your Soul*

“Our bodies are able to tolerate enormous amounts of abuse, but sooner or later they begin to break down (p. 26).” Gregory Jantz in *Hope, Help, & Healing for Eating Disorders*

“I have had years of people complimenting me for my talent, mind, good personality, and sense of humor, but these new complements were intoxicating! I realize the truth of the statement: ‘Nothing tastes as good as thin feels.’ For me, being thinner qualified the need to be loved and accepted by others (p. 43)... I eventually became convinced that death—at least the look of starvation—was beautiful. I was in to being the ‘beauty,’ the look of the malnourished (p. 44)... I was ‘feeling worse,’ but believing that I was ‘looking better.’ At 90 pounds, my skin was crêpe paper and just hung off from my bones. I didn't have enough muscle tone or fat to support any kind of shape. Of course, I saw this as ‘fat flab’ (p. 47).” Sheryle Cruse in *Thin Enough: My Spiritual Journey through the Living Death of an Eating Disorder*

“Anorexics still get hungry, of course, but their fear of fat causes them to control their hunger pangs. And when these natural feelings of hunger are squelched, the anorexic experiences the exhilaration of control. If you are anorexic, you will need to be very honest with yourself about your eating patterns. You may want to congratulate yourself on your willpower over food (p. 20)... As bulimics isolate themselves, food becomes the obvious substitute for social interaction. Food replaces other people as the source of comfort and companionship. Deception and avoidance replace openness and camaraderie (p. 24).” Gregory Jantz in *Hope, Help, & Healing for Eating Disorders*

### Embedded Study

Thank you for continuing on this journey. It takes courage to persevere in something that is difficult. You are to be commended for completing step one and beginning step two. In this step we will examine breadth and impact of our unhealthy relationship with food. In step one, we named our struggle, now we will examine it.

It may be strange to realize that we all learned to start using food as both a self-soothing and punitive instrument as infants. Food is a primary tool in every parent's motivational and disciplinary strategy. "The baby is crying. Maybe she's hungry. Give her a bottle... If you don't quit pitching a fit you won't get any desert... You were so good you can have we'll have your favorite dinner tonight." These things are not bad. They just reveal how we've related to food since before we knew words.

"You began life with normal eating habits: You ate when you are hungry and didn't eat when you were full. But in a weight conscious world, where food is used for comfort, you take small steps and 'normal' gradually disappears. You want to be thin, so you become more serious about dieting. You like how food makes you feel, so you overeat and binge (p. 4)." Ed Welch in *Eating Disorders: The Quest for Thinness*

With this much history, it is hard to imagine that our relationship with food would not significantly impact our lives. Allow this thought to help you engage this chapter non-defensively. It is easy for this subject to illicit a sense of feeling judged or ashamed. That makes this journey more difficult, because it makes the journey lonely. If you can use this study to invite other people to come alongside you in your struggle, it will be a significant aid.

In this chapter we'll examine the impact of our unhealthy relationship with food in four sections.

1. How Is an Unhealthy Relationship with Food Like an Addiction?
2. 10 Patterns of Thinking that Undergird an Unhealthy Relationship with Food
3. How Is My Unhealthy Relationship with Food Affecting Me
4. What Are Some Initial Marks of a Healthy Relationship with Food?

#### How Is an Unhealthy Relationship with Food Like an Addiction?

Don't get hung up on whether your relationship with food is an "addiction." There is no need to engage a discussion of withdrawal symptoms and tolerance levels at this point. Regardless, the dynamics of an addiction can provide us with good questions to assess the severity of our unhealthy relationships with food. Gregory Jantz in *Hope, Help, & Healing for Eating Disorders* (p. 82-83; bold text only) identifies eight parallels between addiction and disordered eating.

1. **Both promise freedom but deliver slavery.** Do you feel like your eating pattern has provided what you hoped it would when you established it? Were things supposed to be "better" or "happier" than this? Gluttony (obsession with food), like any sin, fails to keep its promises. Personifying your relationship with food and being angry with it is one way to better come to grips with how sin lies.

What are some of the promises that your eating patterns have left unfulfilled? \_\_\_\_\_

2. **Both are progressive.** Your relationship with food did not begin where it is now. Whatever unhealthy roles we ask food to play in our lives grow until we intentionally change them. That is why we have moments of shock when we realize things have gotten "this bad." It is important not to fall back into denial during these moments of grace.

What are some "moments of clarity" when you realize how things were worse than you realized? \_\_\_\_\_

3. **Both are deceptive.** We can't believe our own eyes and thoughts are caught up in destructive eating patterns. Whether we're telling ourselves we'll just have a few or saying our emaciated body looks fat, we have a hard time being honest with ourselves (much less anyone else) when we have an unhealthy relationship with food.

What distortions have you noticed in your own thinking and perception about food and weight? \_\_\_\_\_

4. **Both steal intimacy.** The less honest we are with ourselves the more threatening it is to be close with people who love us enough to be honest with us. It's not that we don't want closeness; we do. We hate being alone. We just fear the implications of being more fully-accurately known. Whether it's isolation or superficiality, an unhealthy relationship with food tempts us to withdraw from people who really care.

How have you noticed your relationships becoming more distant as your disordered eating became more pronounced? \_\_\_\_\_



5. **Both promote shame.** Whether it is self-loathing or self-deprecating humor, an unhealthy relationship with food will not let you be nice to you. The more secrets you have the more shame you’ll feel. The more we try to distract ourselves from life or control life the more helpless we will feel.

How have your eating patterns contributed to a sense of shame? \_\_\_\_\_

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6. **Both produce spiritual isolation.** What we do or don’t eat will never make us closer to God. But if we’re trying to manage life vis-à-vis what we do or don’t eat, then these patterns will definitely make us feel further from God. The less we trust God with what matters most to us, the less relevant God feels for our life. Disordered eating is often strong evidence of trying to manage life without God.

How have your eating patterns added to the sense that God doesn’t care or isn’t willing to engage with you? \_\_\_\_\_

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7. **Both cause physiological changes.** Our habits change our bodies. We will provide a more detailed discussion of this later, but for now ask yourself the question, “How have my eating patterns changed my body in unhealthy ways?” As you reflect on this question focus more on health matters than body figure.
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8. **Both lead us to accept fear and anxiety as a normal part of daily life.** The more we manipulate life with destructive patterns the scarier it is to think of engaging life in healthy ways. The idea of eating what “experts” call “healthy” seems frighteningly unrealistic when that has not been our lifestyle.

What parts of a healthy relationship with food causes you to feel upset (anxious, offended, defeated, etc...)? \_\_\_\_\_

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Another aspect of an unhealthy relationship with food can be the behavioral pattern of weighing yourself. The number on the scale can easily become our glory or our condemnation. In reality, it’s neither; it’s just a temporal fact. Here are some recommendations to help you break a “scale addiction.”

- If your struggle is with anorexia or bulimia, only weigh yourself with your physician or counselor.
- Only weigh yourself one time per week; short-term fluctuations don’t mean as much as we feel they do.
- When you weigh, always weigh at the same time of day; this provides a more accurate comparison.
- If you have been practicing good body stewardship, don’t weigh. The number is not the most important thing.
- If you are not emotionally prepared to be disappointed, don’t weigh.
- When you like the number, don’t allow that joy to supplant satisfaction with being a good steward of your body.

**Read I Corinthians 10:23-24.** One of the classic defenses of addictive behavior is the question “What is so wrong with [blank]?” and the blank is filled with a minimized description of the addictive behavior. This passage, which is about food, answers that question with nothing and everything. There may be nothing technically wrong with the behavior, but if it is destroying or controlling you, then it is against God’s design for your life. A key litmus test is how this behavior impacts relationships (v. 24). Does it facilitate more meaningful friendship? Is it a blessing you would want for others? Does it lead to you being more authentic? Does it lead to you being more vain (self-centered) or caring (other-minded)?

### 10 Patterns of Thinking that Undergird an Unhealthy Relationship with Food

Disordered eating patterns begin about three inches Northwest of our mouths; in our brains. Behavior patterns are thought patterns before they are activities. In this section we will not focus on thought content (e.g., “I’m worthless” or “I’m fat”) as much as thought patterns (i.e., ways of filtering, processing, or reacting to information). Often we are ineffective at changing the content of our thoughts because we fail to see the patterns in which they are established.

Carolyn Costin and Gwen Schubert Grabb describe ten patterns of thinking that contribute to disordered eating (p. 98-100 in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*; bold text only). These patterns are very characteristic of most anxiety disorders. This reveals the role that disordered eating often plays in our misguided attempts at emotional regulation.

1. **All-Or-Nothing Thinking:** If I’m not perfect, I’m trash. If I don’t obey my eating plan, I’m a worthless human being. If life doesn’t go according to plan, then life is falling apart and completely out of control. If this is how you process disappointments, then it will be difficult to have a healthy relationship with food; or other people. It becomes hard to have a “good day” because in an all-or-nothing mindset, days are either great or awful. The emotional exhaustion results in retreating to food for comfort or punishing yourself by not eating.

2. **Over-Generalization:** In this style of thinking every negative event is perceived as part of an emerging pattern. The response to the negative event is, therefore, as intense as if it were a longstanding issue. “My friend hasn’t called me back. They must think I’m annoying. No one will ever want to be my friend.” Or, “I had a second helping of dessert. I’m a failure who deserves to be punished and rejected.” When no moment can be an island, every moment feels like a tidal wave.
3. **Discounting the Positive:** This is the flipside of over-generalization. Every positive event is an exception and every compliment is a pity-based courtesy. “I think I had a good day, but there is no way I can keep it up. They said I look nice, but it’s just because I was such a mess last time they saw me.” When we discount the positive, our life-narrative remains unremittingly negative. We “know” our life story is bad, so we brace against allowing having hope so we can’t experience the pain of disappointment. But a life without the possibility of disappointment is either a fantasy (unreal) or depressing (barricaded from hope).
4. **Emotional Reasoning:** Emotional reasoning confuses the “realness” of our emotions for the “truthfulness” of our emotions. Emotions are real experiences. There is no question we feel fat or that we feel hopeless. Our emotions are not always truthful. We may not be fat, and we are never without hope. A vital skill in battling the thought processes that undergird disordered eating is the ability to doubt our own emotions; we don’t have to deny our emotions (because our emotions are real, this would be a form of lying) but we should doubt them (require that they live up to a standard of truthfulness before we act on what those emotions call us to do).
5. **Mind-Reading:** We all tend to project our fears and self-assessments into the minds of others. If we are insecure, we think others think poorly of us. If we are prideful, we assume people will be honored to be our friend. If we value thinness, we believe losing weight will solve our social woes and we explain interpersonal conflict or slights because of our weight. We “know” that the things that are most important to us must explain the responses of people around us. People quit being real people and become personifications of our fears.
6. **Personalizing and Blaming:** We are incredibly creative at coming up with ways to explain our behavior in ways that have nothing to do with our choices. Blaming is when we say another person’s bad choice caused our bad choice. “I binged because my friend forgot my birthday.” Personalizing is when we inflate the significance of another person’s actions by making ourselves the center of their world so it can excuse our bad choice, “My friend hasn’t call me back because she hates me, so I need to take comfort in food.” There will always be enough sub-optimal events around us for personalization and blame-shifting to leave us stuck in our disordered eating habits. We must develop the ability to grieve misfortune without allowing it to become fuel for dysfunction.
7. **Magnification and Minimization:** Our mind operates like amusement park mirrors. It makes some things seem way too large and other things way too small. If we had a strong sense for what was true, we would be amused by this distortion (like we are when we see the appearance of ourselves as if we were 20 feet tall in a distorted mirror). But, unfortunately, often we lack the ability – or willingness – to identify this distortion, and we begin to view life as if the distortion were true.
8. **Mental Filter:** If the last pattern was about the magnitude of an experience, mental filters are about the relevance of an experience. Consider this scenario: if you have three good days and one bad day in your relationship with food, do you feel like you’re winning or losing? If our answer is “It depends on what the scale says,” then our focus is still more on body figure than body stewardship. Either way this question reveals a mental filter. Either the number three will be deemed more important than the number one, or the weight of being “bad” will be considered heavier than the weight of being “good.” Know your filter and be able to account for it in your emotional reasoning.
9. **Should Statements:** Should statements usually are based on enough truth to be powerful but exist in a hypothetical reality that makes them useless. “I *should* have eaten better yesterday.” This is TBU, true but useless. It creates guilt, but gives little direction for change. Rarely does it lead to a positive resolve like, “I want to be a good steward of my body today.” Similarly, “I *should* be in better shape,” is also TBU. All it does is create shame and discontent. Rarely does it lead to the commitment, “I will follow my doctor’s exercise and eating recommendations today.” Christians are often prone to should statements because we feel like we’re holding to high ideals. Instead, let’s focus on walking faithfully with God as we seek to be a good steward of the life and body he’s blessed us with today.
10. **Labeling:** Labeling is when we turn verbs and adjectives into nouns and identities. “I failed,” becomes, “I am a failure.” “I’m lonely,” becomes, “I am unlovable.” Verbs and adjectives are temporal. Nouns and identities are permanent. That is why this exchange is so dangerous. You may have failed to follow your body stewardship plan today, but thanks to God’s grace, that does not have to be a permanent reality. Turning verbs into nouns makes us passive. Turning adjectives into identities robs us of hope. This is more than English grammar; it is a huge key to human motivation.

**Read I Corinthians 10:4-6.** We often restrict the idea of “taking every thought captive” to countering the content of theologically inaccurate thoughts. After reading this section, hopefully you can see the benefit of allowing this practice to extend

to taking captive patterns of thought that dishonor God and are personally destructive. In the same way that we would want to battle lust at the level of imagination, not just behavior; we want to recognize thinking patterns that allow us to begin taking destructive thoughts captive earlier in the process. In the next chapter we will examine an even more basic level at which to take thoughts captive – motives. Until then, begin paying attention to when these patterns lead you in destructive directions.

**Exercise:** Write your initials beside each of these patterns of thought to which you frequently succumb. Write the inner dialogue by which you enact these patterns. Ask a friend to read this dialogue to you. See if the logic is as convincing when it is heard in another person’s voice and outside your own mind. Allow this to further awaken you to the way that sin so easily entangles us when we attempt to battle it on our own.

### How Is My Unhealthy Relationship with Food Affecting Me

The impact of disordered eating is broader than an addictive lifestyle and unhealthy patterns; it is profoundly physical. Food is where we get the nutritional building blocks for the maintenance of our body. When we do not provide our body with the correct supplies, it cannot maintain health.

In this section, we will examine the physical effects of disordered eating. Your goal in this section is two-fold: (1) identify those changes that are already occurring in order to motivate an adequate level of commitment to change; and (2) be aware of coming dangers if you do not commit to a healthy relationship with food to offset the temptation to quit when your motivation inevitably wanes. If you are uncertain about the presence of these changes, then speak with your doctor to help you make this assessment. We will examine how to counter these effects more in step six.

#### Physical Effects of Anorexia

The malnutrition of anorexia affects a wide array of body systems. When the body does not get adequate nutrition, there are literally no parts of the body that are unaffected. The effects listed below are representative, not exhaustive, of the impact anorexia has on your body.

- **Osteoporosis / Osteopenia** – Bones fail to get the calcium they need to remain strong; becoming brittle. Not only do bones break more easily, they become less capable of supporting your body structure – due particularly to deterioration in the spinal column – and chronic pain develops. Being underweight does not offset this structural compromise. Rather than appearing young and fit, you accelerate the visual impact of age – being brittle and slumped.
- **Dry, Rashy Skin** – Skin becomes papery for the same reasons bones become brittle; malnutrition robs them of their needed recuperative supplies and a multi-vitamin is inadequate to offset this deficiency. Bruising and cutting of the skin become increasingly easy to do. Similar deterioration happens with your hair as well.
- **Gastrointestinal Imbalance** – Our digestive tracks were designed by God to operate with a rhythm of activity and inactivity. Unnaturally long dormant periods affect our digestive system like leaving your car in the driveway not driving it for six months. You may think because its unused it cannot be broken, but that is untrue.
- **Abnormal Blood Count** – In our day we seem to be more concerned with neurological imbalances than blood imbalances (both are important). Not only does anorexia result in deficient supplies of nutrients for the blood to transport to the body, but also of the ratio of red blood cells (anemia – energy levels), white blood cells (disease resistances), and other blood cells get off balance.
- **Hypoglycemia** – When your body has inadequate glucose levels it experiences shakiness, dizziness, mood swings, visual disruptions, increased sensitivity to cold, and difficulty concentrating... among other things. When you view calories as evil, you are cutting off the glucose supply that stabilizes these symptoms.
- **Slowed Thinking** – Inadequate glucose for the brain results in this and the next effect. When the brain does not have adequate energy stores, it will not perform optimally. The greater reduction in its energy stores, the greater the reduction in its ability to process information.
- **Severe Mood Swings** – Malnutrition impacts emotional stability in several ways. First, the sub-optimal brain performance makes it harder to process life events. Second, the lack of energy creates an emotional instability comparable to prolonged sleep deprivation. Third, the lack of nutritional supplies compromises the body’s ability to produce the needed neurotransmitters related to emotion.
- **No Menstrual Period** – The body is excellent at prioritizing those functions which are most necessary for survival. As malnutrition becomes more pronounced, the body will shut down a woman’s menstrual cycle. This is a sign that malnutrition is reaching severe proportions. Infertility can result from these changes.

- **Irregular Heartbeat** – As your overall body weakens and has to work harder to maintain basic survival functions, the decrease in potassium results in an irregular heartbeat that can result in heart failure. You do not have to be "dangerously thin" in order for this effect to take place. Often death occurs because people believe they have to be at the most degenerative end of anorexia to experience heart failure.

### Physical Effects of Bulimia

All of the effects of anorexia could be listed under bulimia as well. Because purging interrupts the absorption of nutrients, the food ingested during bingeing does not offset these effects. The symptoms listed below are those that uniquely begin to emerge from the various approaches to purging.

- **Severe Constipation** – When laxatives are abused in purging, the intestines become dependent on their influence. The rapidity and ease with which laxatives cause food to pass through the intestines results in a muscle decay that is comparable to what happens with our leg and arm muscles when we live a sedentary lifestyle.  
 "Diet pills and laxatives are not only emotionally addictive; they are also extremely physically addictive--especially laxatives, which are intestinal tract and digestive system become dependent upon in order to operate (p. 243)." Gregory Jantz in *Hope, Help, & Healing for Eating Disorders*
- **Body Swelling** – Vomiting results in the body becoming dehydrated. Your body resists this by storing water. This is because your body likes you more than you like your body. It wants you to survive and knows that fluids are necessary. The results can be swelling in the face, abdominal area, hands, legs, and feet.
- **Tooth Decay** – Purging by vomiting results in stomach acid frequently passing over your teeth. Your teeth were not made for this acidic environment, so they decay. Cavities and even tooth loss can be the result.
- **Esophagus and Voice Box Damage** – The acidity of vomiting does not just affect the mouth. It also affects the passage from your stomach to your mouth. This is your esophagus and includes your voice box. The health complications of these effects can be severe.
- **Stomach and Intestinal Ulcers** – The more you vomit the more stomach acid your body loses. The more stomach acid your body loses the more stomach acid it produces. When you habituate your body to produce stomach acid, it produces an excessive amount. Add this to an inadequate amount of food for the stomach acid to work on and it begins to erode your stomach wall and intestines.

### Physical Effects of Overeating

Over-nourishment can be as detrimental as under-nourishment. Remember, our goal is to find the range of nutritional intake that allows us to steward our bodies well and learn to be content living in that range. That means we also need to examine the impact of providing our body with too much food.

- **Obesity** – This may be the most obvious effect both logically and physically. Our body stores excess calorie intake as fat. This becomes weight that our body must carry and additional living mass for which our body must care. In both of these ways, the larger we become, the more stress we put on our body.
- **Gastrointestinal Imbalance** – Overeating creates an opposite GI imbalance from undereating. When we overeat our digestive system does not get the rest God intended. This overuse does not provide time for the natural recovery processes God designed for our digestive system. Overeating does for our intestines what sleep deprivation does for our brain.
- **High Cholesterol / Heart Disease / High Blood Pressure / Stroke** – These four affects cluster together. Our circulatory system was not made to be jammed with extra cargo and to deliver nutrients across a body that begins to grow wide after it has finished growing tall. When we stretch our circulatory system in this manner high cholesterol and blood pressure will result in heart attacks and strokes.
- **Diabetes** – Obesity is the leading cause of type II diabetes and account for 95% of the occurrences of diabetes in the United States. Your body begins to have trouble processing the glucose in your blood. Many more health effects begin to emerge because of the presence of diabetes.
- **Sleep Apnea** – Obesity is also a leading cause of sleep apnea, the obstruction of breathing while you are asleep, which results in a poor quality of sleep. Often this becomes a spiral as you sleep poorly and then crave sweets or carbohydrates as a way to compensate for the lack of energy which sleep should have provided.

- **Arthritis** – When your body is asked to carry extra weight, it takes a toll on your joints. This results in persistent pain and less mobility; factors that make it harder to exercise in order to lose the extra weight.

If you're thinking, “This won't happen to me.” You're wrong. This is how your body works. If you spend more than you make, you'll go bankrupt. If you fail to obey the law, you'll go to jail. If you mistreat your body with food in these ways, these are the health consequences.

You can allow this warning to make you more sober and begin working to offset the lifestyle that produces these effects now, or you can wait until they are so pronounced you cannot avoid them and face much more intense challenges then. As a body-bound human being, we are not afforded any other options.

**Read Genesis 2:5-9 and John 1:14-18.** Notice how pro-body God is. God thought it was worthwhile to make a body for our souls. When Jesus came he thought it good to have a body. Don't allow the realities of this section to merely produce fear-based change (avoiding painful health conditions). Allow this section to awaken you to the blessing it is to steward the gift of a body. Strive to think more of honoring God than punishing or comforting yourself when you partake of a meal.

**Read Exodus 20:13.** Before this section it might seem extreme to parallel disordered eating and the command, “Thou shall not kill.” But if Jesus would say that lust is early-onset-adultery (Matthew 5:27-30), then starving yourself to death (anorexia and bulimia) or embracing a lifestyle of obesity is early-onset-suicide. Often we only think of the 10 Commandments in terms of how we treat others. “Lying to myself isn't really lying,” we think. But the 10 Commandments apply equally to how we treat ourselves. It is wrong to abuse yourself with food; not because God wants to be the food-police, but because God is a loving Father who wants to see his children flourish. God's commands are for your good; not to make life a moral gauntlet.

### What Are Some Initial Marks of a Healthy Relationship with Food?

We don't want to leave all the “practical” suggestions until step six; otherwise, this study could begin to feel like you're learning so much about what's wrong that hope fades. Below are several suggestions that would enable your relationship with food to become healthier.

1. **Get Adequate Sleep** – Food is fuel. If you do not get adequate rest, you will be tempted both cognitively and physically to compensate by consuming more fuel. As you seek to express self-control, your efforts will be made much easier if you are not fighting through the fog of inadequate sleep.
2. **Don't Skip Breakfast** – Metabolism arguments could be made for this, but motivational arguments are better. When you skip breakfast (a) you are beginning your day with a punitive measure, and (b) you are making yourself mentally weaker to resist temptation for the rest of the day. Enjoy a healthy breakfast, thank God for his goodness, and start the day mentally alert.
3. **Plan What You Will Eat** – Begin planning what you will eat. A budget is a good practice for your money; the less disciplined you are, the more it is needed. A food plan is a good practice if you've not relating well to food; the less healthy your relationship with food has been, the more a food plan is needed. A sample food plan chart is provided at the end of this chapter. Here is some guidance on how to use it.
  - Name: This is your chart. Own it. Make it fit your life. It is here to serve you, not for you to serve it. Write in foods you enjoy or are interested in trying. This is not punishment; it is a way to choose an enjoyable life that honors God and your body.
  - Date: You don't have to complete one of these every day for the rest of your life. Make several that work for you and alternate between them if you like. At first, it will be important to follow the plan closely. Once you begin to naturally enjoy living within the range of what is healthy, the guidelines of a written plan will become instinctual and the written plan will be less necessary.
  - Calorie Information: Commit to stay within your range. In order to determine your healthy calorie range, first determine your healthy weight based on age, gender, height, activity level, and body type. Your physician can help you identify your healthy weight range. *If calorie counting has been a pronounced part of your restricted eating, then please skip this part of the daily food plan.*
    - For women, multiply your healthy body weight by 9 and 10 to get your healthy calorie range.
    - Example: If your healthy weight 140 to 150 pounds
      - $140 \times 9 = 1260$  (low range of daily calorie intake)
      - $150 \times 10 = 1500$  (high range of daily calorie take)
    - For men, multiply your healthy body weight by 11 and 13 to get your healthy calorie range.

- Example: If your healthy weight 170 to 180 pounds
      - $170 \times 9 = 1530$  (low range of daily calorie intake)
      - $180 \times 10 = 1800$  (high range of daily calorie take)
  - Meals: Eating smaller meals and allowing for healthy snacks is good for your digestive system, optimizes your metabolism, and prevents you from experiencing intense hunger (see below). Planning your meals also helps prevent you from buying binge-tempting or plan-busting foods at the grocery.
  - Food and Amount: Whether you’ve been over-restricting or overeating, “healthy” will feel odd when you write it down. It won’t seem “practical” or “realistic.” Don’t allow those feelings to derail you. It is normal to have an uncomfortable acclimation period to what is healthy when haven’t been eating well.
  - Level of Hunger: Use a subjective one to ten scale; one being “famished,” and ten being “stuffed.” Your goal is to live between three and seven and not eat unless you are below five. This is a much more sustainable approach to hunger and eating. Writing these numbers down will help you become more self-aware of your sense of hunger and satisfaction. Here is a scale developed by Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder* (p. 134-135; paraphrased and summarized).
    1. Extremely hungry, lightheaded, headache, no energy.
    2. Still overly hungry, irritable, stomach growling, constant thoughts of food.
    3. Hungry for a meal, sensing hunger, thinking about food and what would be good to eat. *This is the ideal hunger level for eating a meal.*
    4. A little bit hungry, a snack would do, or making plans for eating pretty soon.
    5. Neutral: don’t feel hungry or full.
    6. A little bit full, not quite satisfied, have not eaten enough.
    7. Satisfied and comfortably full, could get up and take a walk. *This is the ideal target for conscious eaters to stop.*
    8. A little too full, happens sometimes, wait until hungry again to eat, but not too long.
    9. Overly full, uncomfortable, like what happens on holidays, try to learn from this.
    10. Extremely full, painful, likely after an episode of emotional eating or binge eating. Very physically and emotionally distressing.
  - Feelings: Pay attention to how you feel before, during, and after eating. If you find you want to eat for reasons other than hunger, be honest about that. Name what you’re experiencing and find ways, other than food, to resolve those emotions. Talk about these experiences with the friends, pastor, or counselor with whom you are going through this study.
  - Purge: This column is for accountability for purging. If you purge after eating, put “Y” for yes. If you are tempted to but resist, put “T” for tempted. If thoughts of purging do not emerge, put “N” for no. If your struggle with eating does not include purging, you can ignore this column.
- 4. **Every Balanced, Proportional Meal Is a Victory** – Victory is not a changing number on a scale. Victory is every meal that honors God by caring well for your body. Your goal is not a number, but a relationship – a thriving relationship with God, an honest relationship with others, and a compassionate relationship with yourself.

**Accountability Focus (ACKNOWLEDGE):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly and to confront any contradiction between your words and life.

- What aspects of addictive-like patterns did you discover in your relationship with food?
- What unhealthy patterns of thought most fuel your unhealthy relationship with food?
- Will you share with me your daily food plan and how well you do at honoring that plan?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element you are learning about your relationship with food to your accountability partner. These commitments are preliminary to chapter six “life restructuring” but serve to build progress while you get to that point.

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- \_\_\_\_\_



## DAILY FOOD PLAN

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Day: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

Healthy Calorie Range: \_\_\_\_\_

Minimum Calorie Commitment: \_\_\_\_\_

Maximum Calorie Commitment: \_\_\_\_\_

Meal	Food and Amount	Level of Hunger (Before / 1-10)	Feelings	Level of Hunger (After / 1-10)	Purge (Y/N)
Breakfast					
Morning Snack					
Lunch					
Afternoon Snack					
Dinner					

## Chapter 3.

### “Why Did Meals Become the Battle of My Soul?”

UNDERSTAND the origin, motive, and history of my disordered eating.

**“I do not know all I need to know about myself or my disordered eating. I do know that my heart resists being known (Jeremiah 17:9), and that any sin reveals the things that are most important to me (Luke 6:45). I am coming to realize that [list] desires lead me to disordered eating, and that [list] experiences have contributed to the strength of those desires. I believe God is more satisfying than those desires could ever be without Him.”**

**Memorize:** I Corinthians 10:31 (ESV), “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “So” – Paul is adjudicating a debate over whether to eat food that had been sacrificed to idols.
- “Whether” – Paul chooses not to settle the debate by making “food rules” but by appealing to motives.
- “Eat or drink” – God leaves the choices that will change your relationship with food fully in your hands.
- “Whatever you do” – Paul is going to say that there is only one motive that frees us from the tyranny of self.
- “to the glory of God” – That one motive is to connect our actions to the larger purpose of glorifying God.

#### Teaching Notes

“Whether real or imagined, conscious or not, in one way or another, you're eating disorder serves a purpose or function for you (p. 216)... On the other hand, if you have anorexia or are very restrictive with food, you are more likely to experience satisfaction, or even pride, in your ability to control your food intake in your weight (p. 39).” Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*

“When I was in the depths of my eating disorder, ‘I’m thin’ used to be my answer to all of life's tough questions. Am I happy? Yes, I'm thin. Am I a good performer? Sure, I'm thin. Am I confident? Of course, I'm thin. As long as I was thin, I did not really have to think about anything else (p. 81).” Jenni Schaeffer in *Life Without Ed*

“The problem with the therapeutic model—eating and exercise to look good and feel better—is that everything is related to self: ‘I shouldn't over eat because it will make me less healthy.’ ‘I should exercise because I don't want to become weak and lose my breath climbing up the stairs.’ Talking about discipleship brings God back into the picture: ‘I shouldn't over eat because God tells me not to, and it dishonors him as Lord when I disobey, and I want to be as strong as possible to serve him as best I can’ (p. 48).” Gary Thomas in *Every Body Matters: Strengthening Your Body to Strengthen Your Soul*

“Food was my comfort. Food was my reward. Food was my joy. Food was what I turn to in times of stress, sadness, and even in times of happiness (p. 29)... Idolatry, in the case of food, means the consumption of ill-sized portions and unhealthy choices because we feel like we deserve it or needed to feel better (p. 159).” Lysa Terkeurst in *Made to Crave*

“We can assure you that people who learn to respond to emotional difficulties without using food to numb or escape feelings have a better and longer weight loss maintenance record than those who only deal with eating and exercise (p. 153).” Stephen Arterburn and Linda Mintle in *Lose It for Life*

“Idols create laws that multiplied exponentially (p. 174)... The Law of Diminishing Returns is in full force in idol worship. The behavior will grow and grow until it completely consumes you and you spend your entire life compulsively overeating, bingeing, purging, or starving. Your god has an insatiable hunger—and if you feed him, he'll grow (p. 180).” Elyse Fitzpatrick in *Love to Eat, Hate to Eat*

“At this point, I became obsessed with self-protection, self-preservation. Funny, huh? I was basically near death, and yet I saw self-preservation as maintaining control (p. 48).” Sheryle Cruse in *Thin Enough: My Spiritual Journey through the Living Death of an Eating Disorder*



### Embedded Study

If only we could say that we eat because we're hungry, and we stop when our hunger is satiated. But does anyone really eat that way? We eat for comfort. We abstain because of fear. We eat to socialize. We abstain to be liked. We eat to be entertained. We abstain to punish ourselves. With the briefest of reflections, we quickly realize we have a very complex and elaborate relationship with food.

This complex relationship with food starts very young; actually, from infancy. Food is used to get a child to stop crying. Food is used as a reward (extra dessert) and a punishment (no dessert). When you ate all the food on your plate, you were a “big boy” or “big girl,” but you couldn't get up from the table until you ate at least five more bites of your vegetables.

Food has always been more than fuel. We learn to use food for many reasons long before we had the ability to reason.

We see in this statement the two realities we will explore in this step: (1) our disordered eating has a history and (2) our disordered eating has motives. Both perspectives are useful in our efforts to gain a healthy relationship with food.

We do what we do to get what we want. That is true of all human behavior. Lasting change requires changes in our motives. We need a healthy “why” we eat if we're going to get to a healthy relationship with “what” we eat.

But we've also been doing what we're doing for a long time. Habit is the momentum of the soul. Habit easily fools us into believing that self-sabotage can be comforting. We keep doing what we're doing because change is hard. Unless we carefully examine and expose our unhealthy eating habits we will blindly repeat them because “they haven't killed us... yet.”

These are the two subjects we'll examine in this step: history and motive.

### The History of Our Unhealthy Relationship with Food

The longer we've engaged our disordered pattern of eating, the less motive that is needed to fuel that pattern, but the stronger our allegiance to the motives that drive our eating pattern become. This is a doubled-edged sword; habits become more deeply engrained while we become more defensive towards those who will warn us against their danger.

You will likely have to be on guard against both of these realities in this chapter. The longer we do something, the more it feels like “this is just who I am” and “you're judging-rejecting me if you warn me of its danger.” Any theories about why (i.e., motive) we eat the way we do seem both silly (it can't be that simple) and threatening (offended at the idea of changing).

You don't have to fix this tension right now; just acknowledge that it says something about the importance of this material. We usually don't boldly contradict ourselves over trivial things. We get into impassioned contradictions when two things we want don't get along. That is the terrain we are getting ready to cross.

Begin writing out or sharing with a friend your answers to these questions.

- When did you first become weight-conscious and when was your first diet?
- What are your frequently repeated rituals related to eating and weighing?
- What were your family's belief and practices regarding weight, body shape, and food?
- What have been the most impactful experiences you've had related to weight and body image?
- How important were achievement and/or appearance in your family?
- How many times have you reached and changed your perfect weight?
- What was your worst day of disordered eating?
- How many diet and exercise plans have you tried?
- How would you currently define “a healthy relationship with food”?

What did you learn about yourself or admit to yourself in these reflections? \_\_\_\_\_

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Answering these questions was another exercise in not running away from your struggle. That is good even if it's hard. Having these conversations with another person is an exercise in not facing your struggle alone. That is even better.

As you reviewed your history with food, see if you can answer this question, “What has become so important to you that you're willing to jeopardize your health in order to get it?” \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

We will look at this more when we get to motives, but try to answer these questions as well, “When did this become so important? Who helped it become so important? How would your life be better if it were less important?” \_\_\_\_\_

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**Read James 1:1 and 4:1-10.** In these passages we see a connection between history and motive. James’ readers were persecuted for their faith and dispersed in order to survive. They left their homes, their jobs, and their communities. Out of this history, what they had left became much more important to them; so important, in fact, that they fought fiercely when the things they enjoyed were called into question. Their excessive love for things (motive) was shaped by their difficult history. God was compassionate towards their history without allowing it to excuse things that would be destructive to them. As we transition from history to motive, strive to allow your disposition towards your history (compassion) and motive (without excuse) to be the same as God’s.

### Motives that Drive an Unhealthy Relationship with Food

If our motive for eating was as simple as, “I’m hungry,” then we would start-stop eating in ways that would be healthy. If our motive for eating were as pure as, “To be a good steward of the body God has blessed me with,” then we would eat a balanced diet that was healthy for our body.

Unfortunately, as fallen people marred by sin, we have the innate tendency to use things (our body and our world) for reasons other than how God designed them to be used. We are not content with God’s design and believe we can “improve upon” what God called good and bad for us. This tendency has its origin in the original temptation (Gen. 3:5). We continually fall for the same lie.

The problem is not usually that we want bad things; most disordered eating is not an overt effort towards suicide-by-starvation or suicide-by-obesity. That may be the effect, but it’s rarely the motive. The motive is the good thing we want so much that we’re willing to kill ourselves, however slowly, in order to get it.

As you weigh these motives for disordered eating, ask yourself, “Is it worth it?” in light of this reality. Later we will come back and engage the question, “If these things aren’t bad, how can I enjoy them rightly?” but, for now, begin to tame the excessiveness of the motive by comparing it to its actual cost.

### Identifying Your Motives

We will look at 10 motives that frequently drive an unhealthy relationship with food. These are not meant to be exhaustive, but represent the alternative uses we try to derive from food. If you don’t find your motive on the list, then reading through the list should allow you to put into words what you’re trying to make food do for you.

1. **Relaxation:** Life demands a great deal. God wants us to rest. Food can be an excellent distraction from the stresses of life. When the sense of taste is activated, it can divert our attention from sight and sound; senses we use to problem solve (i.e., visualizing solution or reading reports, and that voice in our head reasoning through various possibilities). But when this God-given diversion is over relied upon, it becomes a form of escape and soon food has become our refuge from life (contra Psalm 92:1). This is when we begin to, in effect, pray to our food; we “cast our anxieties on food” (contra 1 Peter 5:7). Soon we are begging an inanimate substance to deliver us from life’s woes (Psalm 115:4-8); our idol, instead of being made with gold and silver, is made with flour and sugar.
2. **Reward:** We work hard. Everyday requires a wide assortment of tasks. There is a perpetual battle to maintain our motivation to meet the challenges of each day. Enjoyable moments at the end of a task are a reasonable way to reward ourselves. Food makes a great treat for a “job well done.” But too often our reward system grows erratic; there is less and less achievement for more and more reward. If businesses paid their employees like we rewarded ourselves with food, then they would go bankrupt for the same reason we become obese; there is an imbalance in the reward system.
3. **Control:** Over-indulgence is not the only way we can abuse ourselves with food. We can also over-discipline ourselves, which is a nice way of saying “starve.” Often this pattern is tied to the desire for control. When someone’s life feels out of control they begin to look for something in which they can have a voice. Meals provide three times during the day when life cannot be forced upon them. They may not be able to master pain, but they can master hunger. They may not be able to control the hurtful words that come in their ears, but they can control the bites of food than come in the mouth. Getting some approximation of control in these self-harming ways may not seem “worth it” unless you’ve known what it is like not to be able to change the things that are most important and most hurtful in your world.

4. **Appearance:** We live in an appearance-oriented culture. Thin is good. Thick is bad. Carolyn Costin, in *Your Dieting Daughter* (p. 13), coined "The Thin Commandments" to capture the rules that begin to dominate what "win" means in a thin-obsessed culture.
- i. If you aren't thin, you aren't attractive.
  - ii. Being thin is more important than being healthy, more important than anything.
  - iii. You must buy clothes, cut your hair, take laxatives, starve yourself, and do anything to make yourself look thinner.
  - iv. Thou shall "earn" all food and shall not eat without feeling guilty.
  - v. Thou shall not eat fattening food without punishing oneself afterwards.
  - vi. Thou shall count calories and fat and restrict intake accordingly.
  - vii. What the scale says is the most important thing.
  - viii. Losing weight is good, and gaining weight is bad.
  - ix. You can't trust what other people say about your weight.
  - x. Being thin and not eating are signs of true willpower and success.

While Costin makes no attempt to base her writing on Christian teaching, she beautifully illustrates what Christians have long taught about the nature of idolatry.

"Idols create laws that multiply exponentially (p. 174)... The Law of Diminishing Returns is in full force in idol worship. The behavior will grow and grow until it completely consumes you and you spend your entire life compulsively overeating, binging, purging, or starving. Your god has an insatiable hunger—and if you feed him, he'll grow (p. 180)." Elyse Fitzpatrick in *Love to Eat, Hate to Eat*

5. **Protection:** Sometimes the idols of control and appearance can combine to create the desire to be unattractive as a form of self-protection. This is especially true for someone who has been sexually abused; preyed upon because of the attractiveness of their body. But this can also be true for those who are uncomfortable with attention from others and learn to use their size as a way to make themselves "invisible" to the kind of attention they don't want to receive. Unfortunately, using food this way only provides the kind of protection one could get from a gang; yes, you are safe from certain dangers, but in the process you become exposed to many other dangers.
6. **Companionship:** Food never rejects us. Food will listen to our every woe. Food is never too busy. Food always seems to understand. These sentences reveal the mindset we're in when we try to use food as a pseudo-community. But there is also the frequent pairing of social events and food. When people gather (i.e., holidays, parties, etc...) there tends to be food. We easily begin to think, "If I'm going to be with people, I must eat." Whether you over-eat and this is a moment of temptation, or you over-discipline and these are moments of great stress, the pairing of food and people presents a challenge that must be navigated.
7. **Numb:** Food is sensual; it engages the senses. Food has taste, aroma, and texture. The more senses an activity engages, the better distraction it provides. This is why many people eat to numb emotions like anger, fear, guilt, insecurity, boredom, or shame. The multi-sensory nature of eating makes it a very effective emotional numbing agent... at least for the period of time we are eating. The problem is *you can neither starve nor stuff your anger away*. And, when the time of munching or starving is complete, the emotions return... compounded by the sense of failure and futility over how you've tried to manage them.
8. **Compensate:** "If I can't [blank], then at least I can [indulge or starve myself]." When our motive is compensation, then our disordered eating becomes either a form of penance or a consolation prize for how we believe we've failed or life has disappointed us. The food rules we follow are not a path to righteousness (next motive), but a way to make the best of a bad situation. Our unhealthy relationship with food is our perpetual "Plan B" for when life goes wrong. The more life disappoints us, the unhealthier we become.
9. **Achieve:** We can turn anything into a competition. Every class, discipline, field, and activity has its "best" representative; whether its algebra, art, or hot dog eating. Achievement-oriented people strive not to be "less than" others. This is what drives them. It is a form of self-righteousness. When this mindset gets tied in with our diet, we can get so fixated on being healthy that we become unhealthy. With this motive, it is important that "healthy" is not an extreme, but a balance; healthy is not on either end of the spectrum, but in the middle. This is why we talk about a "balanced diet" as being most healthy.
10. **Punish:** "I've been bad so I should not eat." "I've been bad, so I should punish myself by binging." "I'm a bad person, so I should make it obvious to everyone by getting fat." These motives for an unhealthy relationship with food are rooted in self-loathing. For some reason, we are prone to believe that our disgust is a better solution for our legitimate failures than God's grace, and we believe self-harshness is a better response to our non-moral short-comings than self-

compassion. We believe because “we are being hard on ourselves” then no one should be able to “criticize us” for how we’re using food and engaging life because that would be them trying to be more extreme than we already are. Hopefully as you read these few sentences that logic begins to fall apart.

Other \_\_\_\_\_: What was missing? What motive(s) fit your unhealthy relationship with food better? How would you describe what makes them enticing and what makes them ineffective?

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Here are three other reflective questions to help you identify the motive for your unhealthy relationship with food.

- What fantasies do you think would come true if you reached your ideal weight?
- What things will be absent when you begin the process of change?
- If I could personify my cravings based on my experience of them, what form would they take?

**Read Luke 9:23-24.** In light of what you’ve been learning about yourself, reflect on this well-known passage that summarizes what it means to be a follower of Christ. Often we view this passage negatively, “You have to be willing to give up everything that’s important to you in order to follow Jesus.” But hopefully you can see the beauty of this passage now. When we are dominated by the things that are too important to us, we can’t enjoy them even when we get them. It is only when “less important things” become “less important” that we can savor the joy that God intended to provide through them.

**Read Ecclesiastes** (yes, the whole book). The entire book of Ecclesiastes is one long book of motives for the pursuit of peace, hope, and happiness. As you read, realize this is the journal of a very wise and influential person. Realize your motives are not new and your disappointment in what they cannot provide is not unique. Be encouraged that someone has walked your same path, experienced the same emptiness, and learned where to find the security and fulfillment you’re seeking.

“Needs are looked upon today as if they were holy, as if they contained the quintessence of eternity. Needs are our guides, and we toil and spare no effort to gratify them. Suppression of desire is considered a sacrilege that must inevitably avenge itself in the form of some mental disorder... We feel jailed in the confinement of personal needs. The more we indulge in satisfactions, the deeper is our feeling of oppressiveness. We must be able to say no to ourselves in the name of a higher yes (p. 163).” Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel in the 1950’s as quoted by Leslie Vernick in *Lord, I Just Want to Be Happy*

## Talking to Your Motives

We learn about motives in order to start healthier conversations; conversations with God, others, and ourselves. In the final part of this step we will look at our internal conversations. In step four we will look at our conversations with God and in step five our conversations with others.

A large part of overcoming disordered eating is navigating conversations between your old self and new self (Eph. 4: 20-24), the spirit and the flesh (Gal. 5:16-24), or your sin nature and your new nature in Christ (Rom. 5:12-21). The Bible speaks of this internal battle in many different ways.

Here is your basic strategy from this point forward:

1. Recognize the distorted motives above as belonging to your old self, which is bent on destruction.
2. Express faith by doubting the messages of your old self.
3. Challenge the messages of your old self with the truth of what God says about who you are.
4. Choose in ways that honor God and contribute to your flourishing based upon God’s truth.

Realize in this process you have four options about how to address the messages from your old self or sinful-flesh nature.

- agree and obey – worst case scenario
- disagree and obey – a step in the right direction
- agree and disobey – a further step in the right direction
- disagree and disobey – healthy and free

These four options are represented in the chart below. Hopefully, what you see in this chart is that you do not have to condemn yourself for hearing the destructive messages of your flesh. Instead, your goal is simply to disagree and disobey. The part of you that clings to these destructive messages is slowly being put to death through faith and obedience. Don’t allow a sense of condemnation over your flesh’s continued presence to strengthen your flesh through guilt, shame, or a sense of failure.

	Obey	Disobey
Agree	Most Dangerous: We believe what our flesh nature tells us about ourselves and obey what it tells us to do to make the situation "better."	Reality of Growth Step: There will still be times we are prone to agree with our flesh nature about ourselves, but even in these moments of weakness we are able to resist the "remedies" our flesh offers.
Disagree	First Growth Step: We disagree with what our flesh nature tells us about ourselves but still obey what it tells us to do to make the situation "better."	Ultimate Goal: We consistently disagree and disobey our flesh because our confidence in what God says and what God offers is the strongest voice guiding our life.

Pick one of the dominant motives for your disordered eating ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) and fill in the blank chart below with what your internal dialogue is likely to sound like as you grow into the freedom God has for you.

	Obey	Disobey
Agree		
Disagree		

Use this chart (whether you write on it or not) to help you identify what your options are in moments of temptation. When you take the time to articulate your four choices, instead of just feeling pressured by your temptation, the best choice not only becomes “obvious” but it also becomes easier (not to say “easy”).

In an effort to help you further your understanding of your relationship with food, we will offer you one more tool in this chapter. This journaling tool is meant to help you begin to organize your experience with temptation into the categories provided in this seminar. Parts of this tool will reference future elements of this seminar, but if you begin using it now, you will develop a better understanding of your baseline response to those aspects of the change process.

You might ask the question, “Do you really think journaling is going to make me stop my disordered eating?” or, “If I journal and still engage in my unhealthy eating behaviors, have I failed?” The answer to both questions is “No.” Every moment of temptation is a time for us to learn. If you learn, you may still fall, but you are a step closer to victory than if you fell blindly. In this sense, journaling is an act of defiance that refuses to be passive even when you are at your weakest.

“It is important that you understand that we are not asking you to journal instead of doing the behavior, but rather, before you do the behavior... Journaling before engaging in the behavior helps you gain an understanding of why you might be doing it and what you fear might happen if you stop doing it. Journaling is an important step towards making more conscious choices (p. 49-50).” Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*

### Conclusion

The goal of this step is to allow you to see yourself more accurately “in real time.” When we are experiencing temptation towards disordered eating, it is hard to see ourselves and our situation accurately. When our assessment is distorted, it is unlikely that our efforts at resolving these challenges will be effective.

The journaling tool that concludes this step is designed to help you do two things in the midst of each moment of temptation you experience.

1. Gather the relevant information you've learned to assess during the first three steps.
2. Gather information that will allow you to be more equipped to effectively implement the remaining steps.

This should be very encouraging. You can now begin attacking your disordered eating. Whereas, before you likely felt like your eating patterns happened to you. Now, your relationship with food will not be able to manifest itself without you gathering important information that will become part of the remedy. The battle may still be hard, but the momentum is shifting in your favor.

### **Accountability Focus (UNDERSTAND):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly and to confront any contradiction between your words and life.

- Did I take the time to share the history of how my unhealthy relationship with food began and developed?
- Did I "own" the motives for my disordered eating without minimizing their significance?
- Could I clearly articulate the four quadrants to my temptation to disordered eating for each of my driving motives?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element you are learning about your relationship with food to your accountability partner. These commitments are preliminary to chapter six "life restructuring" but serve to build progress while you get to that point.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



# DISORDERED EATING JOURNAL

## STEP ONE: ADMIT:

**What was the situation?** Summarize the “who, what, before-after, where” of your temptation to disordered eating.

**How did I react?** Summarize the content of your thoughts and the choices you made. Use the four quadrant tool to identify both your actual reaction and other possible options.

## STEPS TWO & FIVE: ACKNOWLEDGE & CONFESS:

**What forms of thinking under-girded your disordered thinking?** Circle all that apply

All-Or-Nothing Thinking  
Mind Reading

Over-Generalization  
Personalizing and Blaming  
Should Statements

Discounting the Positive  
Magnification or Minimization  
Labeling

Emotional Reasoning  
Mental Filtering

**What are the consequences?** Physically and emotionally for you? As well as, how did your actions affect others?

## STEP THREE UNDERSTAND:

**What are my motives?** Circle or write in your motive/trigger.

Relaxation  
Protection

Reward  
Companionship  
Achieving

Control  
Numbing  
Punishing

Appearance  
Compensating

## STEP FOUR REPENT:

**How would God have me run to him in this experience?** What do repentance and faith look like *now*?

## STEPS SIX & SEVEN: RESTRUCTURE LIFE & IMPLEMENT:

**How did I leave myself susceptible to this struggle? What change is needed to prevent this?**

**What strategies to managing my disordered eating would be most effective in this situation?**

**What aspects of this struggle do I need to share with a friend, pastor, or counselor?**

## Chapter 4.

### “God, You are More Satisfying than Being Thin”

#### REPENT TO GOD for how my sin replaced and misrepresented Him.

**“My cravings counterfeit gods mocking my true Savior.  
I am beginning to see how offensive seeking satisfaction through my appetites is to God  
and how much pride I express trying to be/replace God.  
I repent not merely because my cravings hurt other people or disrupt my life, but  
because God is superior to my cravings and lovingly enables me to love Him (1 John 4:19).”**

Memorize: Acts 3:19-20 (ESV), “Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Repent... turn back” – The core meaning of “repent” is not “feel very bad” but “make a U-turn” back to God.
- “Blotted out” – God has no intention of shaming you with your sin. Instead, he wants to free you from false idols.
- “Times of refreshing” – Our anticipation of repentance should feel like the longing for a refreshing bath.
- “The presence of the Lord” – Repentance is what reconnects us with the source of our strength and hope.
- “May send the Christ” – Repentance unlocks the door of our life to unleash the return of the hero, Christ.

#### Teaching Notes

“So I go to war against gluttony and indulgence, not because I want God to love me more, but because God, who already loves me perfectly, warns me that gluttony and excess are my enemies-- regardless of how good they may sometimes feel. I go to war against gluttony, not to build a body that others admire, but to maintain a soul ‘prepared to do any good work’ that God can use to bless others (p. 88).” Gary Thomas in *Every Body Matters: Strengthening Your Body to Strengthen Your Soul*

“I had to, in short, practice being loved by God (p. 176).” Sheryle Cruse in *Thin Enough: My Spiritual Journey through the Living Death of an Eating Disorder*

“As long as you believe that changing something on your outside will solve the problem on the inside, the deeper issues will stay hidden and unresolved (p. 109)... You need to turn to someone who offers a better relationship than the one you have with your eating disorder (p. 191).” Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*

“Women turn to food when they are not hungry because they are hungry for something they can't name; a connection to what is beyond the daily concerns of life. Something deathless, something sacred. But replacing the hunger for divine connection with Double Stuffed Oreos is like giving a glass of sand to a person dying of thirst. It creates more thirst, more panic. Combine the butter and efficacy of dieting with the lack of spiritual awareness and we have generations of mad, ravenous, self-loathing women (p. 219).” Geneen Roth in *Women, Food, and God* as quoted in Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*

“Positive guilt is the sense of shame that we feel when we are stepping outside the bounds of what is familiar, when we are breaking the old rules... Positive guilt is guilt we feel when we are breaking rules that need to be broken (p. 99).” Jenni Schaeffer in *Life Without Ed*

“Repentance is also required and that the client, through spiritual pride, has concluded, ‘I must handle life on my own. I cannot trust God nor will I be dependent on him. I must take control.’ This position, born out of pain, confronts the reality that control is elusive... Belief in self-sufficiency ends in continual striving. Anorexia is a misguided attempt to be self-sufficient; bulimia utilizes self-striving in an effort to gain control (p. 324-325).” Linda Mintle in “Eating Disorders” in *Caring for People God’s Way* edited by Tim Clinton, et al



### Embedded Study

Should we really say, “God I am sorry my food portions were not ideal (either too large or too small)?” After all, haven’t we established that God does not have an ideal body type? Doesn’t the idea of repenting for a bad relationship with food wreak of legalism? Aren’t we getting dangerously close to holding ourselves to the standard of some fictitious “heavenly meal plan”?

These questions push us to ask, “For what are you repenting?” As we will see, the most important part of repentance is never the behavior that made repentance necessary. When we focus on behavior we will inevitably make some kooky legal code that is supposed to please God. We, then, either become a slave to the code or become repulsed by the code; either way, our focus fixates on the code more than God.

We repent for the way our sin replaces or misrepresents God. When we sin, we either believe we have found something more satisfying than God (replacement) or we believe God has become unreasonable / out-dated (misrepresentation). So while repentance does involve saying, “I did wrong,” the real action of repentance is in gaining an accurate view of who God is and placing God back in the center of our lives.

We will help you see the role of repentance in gaining a healthy relationship with food in three sections.

1. To Whom Are You Repenting?
2. Key Elements of Repentance
3. A Sample Prayer of Repentance

#### To Whom Are You Repenting?

To whom you pray is more important than what you say. Too often we are not praying to the one-true God who made us with a purpose and loves us beyond measure (Eph. 2:8-10). Too often we think our words have to convince a stingy God to be generous with us. Too often we believe that God is only paying attention to our lives when we speak up and turn his head.

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man’s spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God... The most (determining) fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like (p. 1).” A. W. Tozer in *The Knowledge of the Holy*

What we want to do in this section is to debunk four misconceptions about God that make repentance either seem powerless or punitive. With each we will provide counter-arguments to help you see how a right relationship with God is foundational to a right relationship with food. When we don’t know God accurately or rely on him fully, then other areas of life will necessarily begin to try to fill a role that is too large for them.

1. **God as Unemotional:** The number one reason we avoid repentance is because we often think God is more concerned about what we’ve done than what we’re going through. It feels as if God is only concerned about our sin and not our suffering. When this is the case, we feel like it would be easier to get better without God.

But think about the way your disordered eating is affecting you (step two). Would God be loving if he were content for you to continue compounding these effects? God is concerned about your sin because it’s multiplying your suffering. God also wants to bring comfort to the parts of your history that contribute to your disordered eating (first part of step three). But you must trust him enough to relinquish your self-harm before you can experience his comfort.

**Read Hebrews 2:14-18.** Notice how important Jesus’ compassion is for the gospel. God was not merely concerned to pay the full price for our sin (e.g., propitiation) so that we could get into heaven; he was also very concerned that we know he understands our struggles, so that we would want to be near him. Heaven is not meant to be an eternal all-inclusive vacation where there is so much to enjoy we never get bored. Heaven is about being with our heart’s-desire, God himself, so the gospel must contain this kind of emotional-relational concern.

Do this thought experiment. Review the history for your disordered eating you wrote out in step three. Imagine reading this to God as a prayer for how you’re hurting. Now look up and imagine what expression is on God’s face. Is he angry or compassionate; frustrated with you or concerned for you? Now read the end of Hebrews 2 again. Does your instinctual response accurately represent God?

Realize that God doesn’t want you to know him accurately so that you can pass a theology test and pray fancy prayers. God wants you to know who he is so you will turn to him in hard times and allow him to be a refuge from Satan’s lies, a comfort in hard times, and the Savior from your sin.

2. **God as Irrelevant:** Okay, so God cares; what can he do? God’s not going to make the hunger or food-aversion go away. God’s not going to change my body type or metabolism; that was his work anyway. So I understand that God cares, doesn’t that still leave everything up to me and my choices?

Yes and no. God won't change you against your will. God is a gentleman and will not force himself upon you. In that sense, everything is up to you and your choices. But relationships enhance the number of choices that are available to us. In isolation, you have the choices that your strength, wisdom, or abilities provide.

When it's just you, it's your desire to be healthy against your distorted-desire to be happy. Good intentions are simply that... good intentions; what we know what we should do until what we want to do trumps wisdom. When it's just you, it's your word against your word. Your voice, “I'm fat,” competing with your voice, “Be nice to yourself.”

When God enters, “healthy” and “happy” no longer have to compete, because God's voice can serve as the final-loving arbitrator between our fickle desires. This doesn't mean we can't choose what is unhealthy, but it does mean we have more options than we did when we were alone and that we can pursue those options in God's strength.

**Read Matthew 11:28-30.** In this passage, God represents us as weary oxen carrying a load too great for us. He offers to share that yoke – the piece of wood fashioned to connect two oxen to a plow. God offers to come alongside of us to offer his strength to our toils and to guide the process. It was customary practice to pair an inexperienced ox with an experienced one, so that the older ox could guide the younger one to plow straight. God's relevance does not eliminate our requirement to “walk out” the change process, but God does offer strength and direction for the task.

3. **God as Unpleasable:** “I won't ever do it good enough for God. After all, doesn't God require perfection? There is no way I can eat ‘just the way I'm supposed to’ for the rest of my life. I get that God is beside me, but I know me. I'll stray even with a yoke-thingy connecting me to God. I'm an expert at wandering.”

It may be helpful to think of repentance as a commitment rather than a promise. God makes promises. He can keep them. We make commitments. We would break promises, but can continue in one direction even after we slip. Our repentance is not a promise never to fail again, but a perpetually renewed commitment to follow after God and what he designed to be satisfying for our lives.

Realize, God is pleased with progress as much as perfection. When God designed the Christian life he decided to transform our character over time; this is something theologians call “progressive sanctification.” This was God's idea and not a concession he made because we couldn't do any better. God, as the epitome of a good father, delights in the maturation of his children over time.

**Read Hebrew 10:14.** Contrast the verb tenses. In the ESV it says God “has perfected” (past completed action) those who are “being sanctified” (ongoing action). This is not a contradiction, but a picture. Why is it that God is not so displeased with your failures that he would give up on you? He knows what he has already made you. Why is God still calling you to faith and obedience? This is how he brings into reality of what he has already guaranteed. As you faithfully, yet imperfectly follow, God faithfully and perfectly keeps his promise.

4. **God as Unapproachable:** Until you come to him, all these truths about God are merely “nice thoughts.” God must be approached or we are alone with our sin. God is compassionate, relevant, and pleasurable in Christ. This, however, does not remove your responsibility to come to him.

This is where many people pull up short. They learn many things about God. They learn how God feels about them and what he's done to make renewed relationship possible. But they don't come to him. For some this is failing to come to God for saving-faith (initial salvation). For others it is a failure to come to God for sustaining-faith (ongoing battle with indwelling sin). Either way, information is mistaken for relationship.

Think of a child with a favorite sports hero. The child could tell you that player's every statistic and piece of life history. But what they have is information, not relationship. If that player was the child's father, then they would play catch, shoot baskets, get ice cream, cry, ask questions, and just hang out. That would be relationship. Have you brought all of your life, not just your disordered eating struggle, to God in this way?

**Read Hebrews 4:14-16.** Underline the phrase “with confidence draw near” (or the equivalent phrase in your translation). Does this describe your relationship with God? God intends to be supremely approachable. If you did not have parents who were approachable in this way, it may feel very odd to have this kind of father-child relationship with God. But don't allow that lack of familiarity to prevent you from embracing what God offers. Repentance is not punishment, it's not God putting you in time out to think about what you did. Rather, repentance is God's provision to allow the relationship he always intended to have with you to be restored.

**Read Romans 2:4.** Notice that it is the kindness of God that brings us to repentance. This is what accounts for the risk of repentance. The outcome is guaranteed; God has already promised forgiveness. We hesitate not because we doubt the offer, but because we doubt the character of the one making the offer. Before moving to the next section on the key elements of repentance, realize your ability to have this conversation will be directly proportional to how much you trust the character of the one with whom you're having this conversation.

Reflection: How has this section challenged your view of God? How is God different than you imagined him to be? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Key Elements of Repentance

There is no formula for repentance. The six points below are merely meant to help you experience the full redemptive impact of repentance. In this sense, repentance and God's forgiveness can be like a smart phone. They have many features that we may not know are present or how to utilize. When we buy the phone, we get them all; but we do not get the full benefit of them until we realize they're there and how to use them.

After each point, we will offer an area of self-assessment. These questions are meant to help you determine whether you are placing yourself in a position to receive the benefits God intends to provide through each aspect of repentance.

**1. A desire to live for God and submit to His Lordship.** Repentance does not begin with remorse. If that were the case, then we would be saying the cure for guilt begins with feeling worse.

Repentance begins with a passionate desire to submit to God's Lordship out of trust for His character. We truly begin to believe that what God wants for us is actually what is best for us. We trust God to lead our lives more than ourselves.

When we see God's ways as best, we are sorry we fell short of them, but this remorse is not "icky" like shame; instead it is like the sense of reunion with a trusted friend after you realize you were wrongly upset with them and they graciously embrace the friendship again.

- Self-Assessment: Are you surrendering to the Lordship of Christ because you trust his love for you or are you only seeking relief from unpleasant emotions and destructive habits?

**2. An understanding of how our sin sought to replace God.** It is not just actions or distorted motives for which we repent. We repent for having replaced God with ourselves. The idols that fuel our disordered eating want to control all of our lives and interpret all the events in our lives. Repentance acknowledges this false worship as an affront to God and wants him to have his rightful place in our lives.

- Self-Assessment: Were you able to see the "against God" nature of your disordered eating in the motive assessment from chapter three? What did you learn and what was hardest to acknowledge?

**3. Brokenness over the nature of our sin.** A healthy life (don't just read "nutritional health") begins with recognizing our fallen human condition. Ultimately we sin because we are sinners. The myriad of factors that led to our sin are not the root cause. The root is that our nature has been distorted by the Fall (1 Cor. 15:21-22).

True repentance is not just sorrow over particular idols or behavioral failures but brokenness over our condition as a sinful person. When we acknowledge our depravity, we gain an accurate self-assessment that allows us to rely on God in the perpetual way that genuine repentance requires and creates the non-shame-based honesty in which a real relationship with God can thrive.

Repentance is what allows you not to have to be either fake or fatalistic about your short-comings and perpetual struggles. Repentance allows you to be honest and have hope at the same time.

- Self-Assessment: Do you resist seeing yourself and allowing yourself to be known as someone who is in perpetual need of God's sustaining grace?

**4. Expression to God.** After sin, our instincts cause us to hide from God rather than talk to God (Gen. 3:8). Too often we think that a directionless sense of regret for sin is the same thing as repenting to God.

You will not feel restored to God as long as you are avoiding God because of your sin. It does no good to address your repentance "to whom it may concern." Any ambiguously addressed repentance is little more than talking to yourself differently. Talk to God when you repent so that you can know His response to your repentance.

- Self-Assessment: Have you talked to God in your repentance? If not, might it be that your repentance seems ineffective because the "no one" you spoke to can have no power to forgive or comfort?

**5. Faith in God's willingness to forgive.** Repentance is an expression of faith. We come to God with nothing to offer in exchange for our forgiveness. If we do not believe God will freely forgive, we will continue in our "try harder" or "hide more effectively" approaches that allow our disordered eating to fester.

All this does is inadvertently reinforce the false beliefs that our sin is good and God is mean. Unless we believe that God is willing to forgive on the basis of His grace and Christ's death, then repentance becomes the continuation of an unhealthy relationship with a never-pleased, always demanding deity.

- Self-Assessment: How do you view God (i.e., expression on His face, posture of His body, tones when He speaks, words that He says, gestures of His hands) when you come to God in repentance? This question will be very important for the material below. Take extra time to continue to reflect on it.

**6. New direction of life usually expressed first by confession.** What this looks like will be clarified more in chapters five and six. Repentance is our part of entering into or recommitting to a covenant relationship (i.e., like marriage) with God. This is why sin is frequently called spiritual adultery. Repentance is our vow-renewal ceremony that expresses our renewed commitment to covenant fidelity. In this sense, repentance provides the assurance of acceptance and protection which we often seek in food or being excessively thin.

- Self-Assessment: Does it startle you to think of repentance as a vow-renewal ceremony? How does that image extend the implications of repentance beyond the moment of prayer?

### A Sample Prayer of Repentance

There is no magic in these words or this outline. The intent is to help you assimilate what you’ve learned from the first four chapters in a repentant conversation with God before you begin allowing these insights to permeate your life by having confessional conversations with other people (chapter five) and crafting an action plan to restructure your life in a way that is less hospitable for disordered eating (chapter six).

Take this sample and use it as a conversation outline with God. As you talk with God, review through your notebook and verbalize what you have learned. Know that God is interested in what you are saying; not because you have finally “learned your lesson” but simply because he cares for you (1 Peter 5:7).

**Heavenly Father,**

**I am now glad I can come to you in the midst of my unhealthy relationship with food. I have been hesitant to come to You, because...**

[describe your misconceptions about God and/or repentance]

**I also haven’t wanted to admit the full extent of my struggle with disordered eating. I have not wanted to admit it to myself or to you.**

[describe what you saw about yourself in chapters one and two]

**I am beginning see how the things that have become more important than you (i.e., idols) are fueling my unhealthy relationship with food without providing the relief they promise.**

[list your motives from chapter three and describe how you have lived for them]

**You know how those things came to be so precious to me. You know what I need (Matthew 6:8). Where my desires are good, I trust you to provide. Where my desires are bad or excessive, I ask that you would change me in whatever ways necessary.**

[talk about how this scares and/or confuses you]

**I have replaced you in my life with my fears. I have declared myself more capable of caring for me than you. I see how wrong and foolish that is. Please forgive me.**

[talk with God about the six elements of forgiveness]

**Thank you for loving me and walking with me through these unsettling emotions (Psalm 23). I look forward to learning more about your character as I strive to trust and rely on you more in my daily life. Lord, grant me the perseverance to continue on this journey even when I’m emotionally weary. Even though this road with you may be hard, the side roads without you are harder. I know this. Help me not to forget it. Amen**

### Accountability Focus (REPENT):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly and to confront any contradiction between your words and life.

- How have my misconceptions of God or repentance made me more hesitant to repent?
- Have I evidenced a willingness to embrace each of the six elements of repentance?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element you are learning about your relationship with food to your accountability partner.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 5.

### “My Unhealthy Relationship with Food Led to an Unhealthy Relationship with You”

CONFESS TO THOSE AFFECTED for harm done and seek to make amends.

**“I have not represented God well in your presence. [List]  
You have been hurt by my un-God-like actions, attitudes, and beliefs. [List]  
My goal in life is to make God’s character of love known.  
That starts with this request for forgiveness.  
I value our relationship more than my pride.  
I am currently working on submitting my life to God’s control and  
understand if you need time to consider my request for forgiveness.”**

**Memorize:** I John 1:6-10 (ESV), “If we say, we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “If we say” – Part of your confession needs to acknowledge that verses six and eight were true of you.
- “Walk in darkness” – It is important not to see your disordered eating as “the good life,” but as destructive.
- “Walk in the light” – True confession is a lifestyle and not an event; not just something to “get it over with.”
- “Deceive ourselves” – Begin to see how you deceived yourself as the first step in being dishonest with others.
- “Make [God] a liar” – When we refuse to acknowledge the wrongness of our disordered eating we call God a liar.

#### Teaching Notes

“Disclosure was the next step in my recovery process (p. 134)... I saw the eating disorder issue as a giant balloon. Little by little, as I told the truth to more people, I was deflating it (p. 155).” Sheryle Cruse in *Thin Enough: My Spiritual Journey through the Living Death of an Eating Disorder*

“But I had allowed my world to become so small, so isolated, due in large part to my controlling need for self-protection. That left little room for anyone to get into my life. But now, desiring change and a closer relationship with God, I had to get used to people again. I had to get used to and knowing people and being known by them (p. 174-175).” Sheryle Cruse in *Thin Enough: My Spiritual Journey through the Living Death of an Eating Disorder*

“I learned that I could tell people the truth and they would love me more, not less, so I reached out to others to help me (p. 5)... I realize that by not talking to anyone about my fear of the unknown, my deep-seated insecurities, and my desperate need to feel more in control, I was actually fueling and protecting my eating disorder (p. 25).” Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*

“Eating disorders are emotional time bombs because all emotions are put on hold so that the person can concentrate solely on food. They also act as time bombs in our relationships. Other people cease to be as important as the relationship with food. Food becomes a secret friend or a hated enemy that no one else can understand (p. 26).” Gregory Jantz in *Hope, Help, & Healing for Eating Disorders*

“Central to healing is being able to focus outside yourself, to reduce your level of self-absorption. Being able to look at others as allies instead of competitors or enemies is vital to grasping reality. Not only do these attitudes allow you to see the world as it really is—and yourself as others see you—but they help you find other people who can interact with you, providing you with the support you need on your journey (p. 112).” Gregory Jantz in *Hope, Help, & Healing for Eating Disorders*

“Ed wanted me to lie to everyone who is closest to me (p. 25).” Jenni Schaeffer in *Life Without Ed*

### Embedded Study

You will only be as free as you are honest. Privacy kills change and fuels sin. Transparency kills sin and fuels change. Chances are this step may scare you as much as any step you have taken since the first one. But remember it is not nearly as scary to move forward as it is dangerous to go backward. Don't allow fear to make you forgetful.

When you are tempted to think, “This is not worth it. Too much is being asked of me. Why do I need to confess my struggle to others?” remind yourself of these things. Our tendency has been to face difficult situations with indulging in food or punishing ourselves with restriction. That can no longer be our life pattern. Now we will face hardship by being honest with others.

Confession serves two functions:

1. Acknowledging how we've harmed relationships and making amends
2. Inviting people to become a more informed part of our support network

Confession is what invites other people into our lives and points out to them where they can help. Confession is how we acknowledge our weakness and admit that we need their help; we won't lie, dismiss, or lash out. Confession is what ensures others that we have the humility and realistic expectations necessary to be safe to receive help. Confession is the door to community; the door through which we must enter if we do not want to be alone in the dark with our disordered eating.

Simply put; we confess to others because it is good for our pursuit of righteousness as much as because we've sinned. Often, with confession, we are like the child who is offended by their parents telling them to eat the vegetables so they can be “big and strong.” We perceive the remedy as an insult highlighting that we are “small and weak.” It makes sense, but as long as we think that way, we're trapped.

In this chapter we will examine four subjects:

1. Excuses for Not Reaching Out for Help
2. How to Effectively Let Someone Into Your Struggle
3. Elements of Confession
4. Preparing for a Confessing Conversation

### Excuses for Not Reaching Out for Help

Hopefully by now you are growing less defensive towards the word “excuses.” If so, that is a sign of growth and something for which you should give thanks to God. We all make excuses when change is hard. Excuses always get in the way of important things. The best thing to do with an excuse is acknowledge it and move on. The worst thing to do with an excuse is to believe it or become ashamed of it and get stuck.

The list below is a modified version of a list created by Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder* (p. 195-196; italics only). Consider this suggestion: read each of these excuses in the voice of a struggling friend before you read them in your voice. That will make the debunking statements after each one seem much more convincing.

1. *“I should be able to handle this on my own.”* This is “The Great Lie” of change. We were never designed to live in isolation. We were made for community. We would never accept this logic from a friend. But we will believe it, because it somehow makes us feel like we're being “strong” and “noble” to attempt the impossible.
2. *“I don't want people to know.”* At least now we're being honest in our excuse. The question is, “What do you want more: authentic friendship and freedom from disordered eating or falsely positive reputation with your friends that you'll feel the continued pressure to live up to?”
3. *“I am ashamed.”* This one is even more honest. We feel “less than” when we acknowledge our struggles. But this excuse, like most fears, evaporates when we test it. When you confide in good friends, they admire your courage instead of condemning your weakness. Why? Because we all have challenges we need to face and when we see someone face “The Great Silencer” of shame, we know the internal battle they're winning.

“I learned that I could tell people the truth and they would love me more, not less, so I reached out to others to help me (p. 5)... I realize that by not talking to anyone about my fear of the unknown, my deep-seated insecurities, and my desperate need to feel more in control, I was actually fueling and protecting my eating disorder (p. 25).” Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*

4. *“I don't want to be a burden.”* Galatians 6:2 says Christians are to, “Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.” The more we listen to this excuse, the less the church is the gift of grace that God intends it to be. When God gives you a weapon with which to fight your sin, it is not noble to lay it down before the battle.

5. *“I don’t have anyone to call.”* Start by asking yourself, “How many people would be deeply offended to hear me say this?” If the answer is truly no one, call a pastor or Christian counselor as you begin to build quality friendships. If names come to mind, allow those individuals to be the hands, feet, and ears of Jesus that God intended his church to be.
6. *“People won’t know what to say.”* You’re not asking for answers; you’re asking for support. Another suggestion would be to ask them to go through this study with you. This would be a great way to review-reinforce the ground you’ve already covered with a deepening network of support.
7. *“By the time I realize I’m in trouble, it’s too late.”* The more you talk, the sooner you’ll talk. Maybe the first few times you call, it will be after you’ve fallen. But if you establish the pattern of refusing to struggle alone, you will begin to call before the time when temptation has expressed itself as sin.
8. *“What if I reach out but still act out?”* You will. Do you really expect to have a perfectly healthy relationship with food, something you’ll face three times a day for the rest of your life, for the rest of your life? This is precisely why you’re reaching out. This excuse is actually a great reason to follow the counsel of this chapter.
9. *“I tried this and it didn’t work.”* Again, “work” can’t mean “never struggle again.” Wise counsel only “quits working” when you “stop trying.” Change is a process and the process stops when you stop. When you are continually committed to making the next God-honoring, healthy choice in a context of good friends, it is working.
10. *“I’m not sure I want to stop.”* If you’re still uncertain about being willing to confide in more people how you’re struggling, this is likely the root of the problem. Don’t be ashamed of it. Be honest with yourself and weigh the consequences. Go back to step one and assess yourself on the five levels of motivation, look at the physical consequences of not changing in step two, and ask yourself if your idols from step three will ever keep their promises. Then realize these are not just conversations you need to have with yourself; they are conversations you need to have with some trusted friends.

**Read James 5:16.** Notice that this command is given in the closing section of James’ letter. It is a general call to every believer. Unconfessed sin is “abnormal” in the biblical depiction of the Christian life. When we experience as normal, what Scripture depicts as abnormal, we should expect significant disruptions in our life, relationships, and emotions. Confession is one way we stop trying to make dysfunctional functional in our relationships.

### How to Effectively Let Someone Into Your Struggle

Knowing that you should do something is different from knowing how to do it. In this section, we’ll begin to turn that next corner. The bullets below are adapted from Sheryle Cruse in *Thin Enough: My Spiritual Journey through the Living Death of an Eating Disorder* (p. 147; both text only).

- **Begin with those you trust most and move out from there.** When something is hard, it is wise to begin where it is safest. Start with friends or family you believe are most likely to forgive where you have been deceptive and supportive in your continued journey. After these conversations, get feedback on the conversation. Learn from each confession as a way to become more confident that this is a wise step.
- **Don’t dwell on their anticipated reactions.** The more time you spend imagining how the conversation will go, the worse it will get in your imagination. This is the natural human tendency for anything we want to avoid. Know what you need to say (next section) and resist the urge to rehearse the conversation further than that.
- **Be honest, simple, and concise.** Your opening statement should be as simple as, “I have had an unhealthy relationship with food for a while. I don’t want to pretend like the struggle doesn’t exist. I want to understand how it has harmed our relationship and ask forgiveness for any way I’ve been dishonest or defensive. I would appreciate your support as I seek a healthy relationship with food in God’s strength.”
- **Disclose where you are at this point in time.** Confession is step five of nine, so it’s literally a mid-journey activity. Confession is not saying “I’ve arrived;” it’s acknowledging you have a ways to go. It would be appropriate to say, “I am at the point in my struggle where I am consistently resisting the urge to minimize my struggle, but am still in the process of learning how to overcome it.”
- **Give your friend a quality resource on disordered eating.** Again, this study could be a resource you could point your friend to if they would like more information. It’s free, sequential, and available in an assortment of formats (e.g., written, video, and audio) for their convenience.
- **Don’t rely on just one person.** The smaller your support network, the more weight each person will bear. You care well for your support network and increase the likelihood someone will be available in your moments of struggle when

you allow your network to grow. Meeting with a pastor, mentor, or counselor who is experienced with your pattern of disordered eating is also a way to improve the longevity of your support network.

- **Be patient with yourself.** Chances are even this list is starting to feel over-whelming. That’s okay. Change is never easy and when we grow impatient with ourselves change becomes even harder. Remain committed to taking the next healthy, God-honoring step and you’ll reach your destination.
- **Be encouraged by your courage.** Courage isn’t the absence of fear. Courage is the continued pursuit of your goals in the face of fear. You’re doing that or you wouldn’t have reached this point. That’s not making lemonade out of lemons. It’s affirming the perspiration that came with your faithful obedience to God to reach this point.

**Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.** Often this is a read as a marriage passage, but it is about friendship in general. Notice two things. First, implied in this passage is the mutual awareness of our struggles. Everybody in this passage is facing a challenge. Second, notice the number change from two to three. When we obey God by reaching out to other believers in our struggle, God’s presence is added to the impact of these relationships to magnify their impact.

### Elements of Confession

Knowing how to do something is different from knowing what to say. In the last section we developed a process; in this section we will outline a conversation.

How many things that we need to do on a daily basis come less naturally than confession? The prevalence of our need to confess to others can blind us to our lack of aptitude. Like a chore we do not enjoy, we feel like we’ve done more than enough when the job is simply “done.” Our discomfort tempts us to ignore the quality of our work.

In this section, we want to borrow from Ken Sande’s book, *Peacemaking for Families*, where he develops seven key elements of confession (bold text only). This captures well the key elements of a conversation of confession.

**1. Address Everyone Involved.** One of the questions you have already examined is, “Who has been affected by my disordered eating?” These are likely the people close enough to care about you and you care about them. Who have you lied to, been fake with, lashed out at their concern, neglected their warnings, been needlessly sensitive, coerced into following your legalistic food rules, led into unhealthy eating patterns, etc...?

- Food is social. You won’t change a socially-rooted part of your life in isolation.
- Choices create social pressure. You won’t live unhealthily in a way that has no impact on those around you.
- Lasting change is public. You won’t make substantive changes and no one notice.

Allow these three realities to help you see that this aspect of confession is both necessary and good. This is not extreme and it is not punishment. Those who really want to change involve others. Those who believe their change is good want others to know about that change (so it can encourage them to make similar changes). Confession is an important transition from a temporary-change-initiative to a lasting-lifestyle-change.

- Make a list of the people that you need to confess to because (a) they have been negatively impacted by the lifestyle surrounding your disordered eating and (b) they will notice or be affected by the changes you need to make.

**2. Avoid If, But, and Maybe.** These are words that radically change the nature of a confession conversation. They are the “prepositions of blame-shifting and minimization.” When you use, them the person you are talking to will likely (and rightly) be concerned that they are evidence of regression in your journey, but because you are trying to take an important step forward, you will be tempted to be defensive towards their concern.

Let’s look at the impact of each word.

- “If” indicates that you doubt the certainty of what you’re saying and, therefore, weakens your confession.
- “But” in the middle of a confession shifts responsibility from what precedes the “but” to what comes after the “but.”
- “Maybe” reduces the level of personal commitment to what you are saying and gives little confidence to the listener.

Look at each of these examples and notice the impact of the three words in question.

- “If I lied to you about my purging and tried to hide it from you, I am sorry.”
- “I know I shouldn’t seek comfort in food, but that’s just what people in my family do.”
- “Maybe I could try to call you when I can tell I’m down and know temptation will be stronger.”



This language is very common and represents the kind of tentative phrasing we fall into when we’re uncertain. But it is also the kind of language that reveals a lesser commitment to persevere in the change process. As a way of learning to speak in a way that neither shifts blame or minimizes your struggles, rewrite each of these statements without the troublesome language.

- A. \_\_\_\_\_  
 B. \_\_\_\_\_  
 C. \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Admit Specifically.** One goal of confession is to help you be known accurately. When we know we’re being fake, it is more tempting to buy into the false reality of sin. Whether we starve ourselves to live up to the “have it all together person” we present ourselves to be, or over-indulge as a form of self-punishment and emotional escape; being unknown helps us live unhealthily.

Being specific also helps us and our friend to identify where “doing better” should be evident first. When our confession is generic we have little guidance on where our efforts towards a healthy relationship with food and others should be focused. Generic confession leaves us in complete control. We have all the relevant information. Those we’re confiding in aren’t equipped with the necessary questions to ask. This leaves us vulnerable in the same ways we were before.

Being specific in our confession does two things: (a) it reveals to our friend that we are a “safe” person who can talk about needed changes in our life without falling into self-pity or blame-shifting, and (b) it helps us identify more realistic expectations of what change will look like. The exercise below is meant to help facilitate this aspect of confession and several other aspects of change coming later in this chapter.

- Use the “web diagram” exercise (see Figure 1) to identify the specific actions or attitudes you are confessing – “Ring B” in the example below. We will use the Rings D and E in the next point of this section.
- Instructions and Sample: A sample web diagram is provided below using concentric circles (a different version of the same exercise that is easier to read in a type-print format). In this sample we will follow disordered eating emerging from an exaggerated desire for control that is negatively impacting a family.
  - A. Write each ruling desire / motive you identified as too strong in your life (step three) in the center of a blank piece of paper.
  - B. Out from that motive draw lines and write the sinful actions you commit in an attempt to obtain this desire. How do you violate healthy relationship and honoring God in attempts to obtain this desire?
  - C. From each of the actions draw lines and write specific occasions when you have sinned in this way – when have the actions from “Ring B” occurred?
  - D. From each occasion of sin draw lines and write the type of impact this had on your friend or family member – how are the lives of those I care about different because of the events of “Ring C”?
  - E. From each impact draw lines and write the evidences of this impact in the life of your friend or family member – what changes do I see, direct or indirect, that reveal the “Ring D” changes have occurred?

**4. Apologize (Acknowledge the Hurt).** Sin has consequences; both intentional and unintentional. Confession expresses empathy and takes responsibility for the dominoes that result from the trigger event of our sin. This is not groveling or penance; both of which are emotionally manipulative and reveal the “value” we place on our sin. The “value” of sin is Jesus’ death on the Cross. By contrast, this is an exercise in other-mindedness. Resistance to expressing empathy reveals that the self-centeredness that made our sin seem reasonable in the moment of sin is returning.

- Complete with Rings D and E of your “web diagram” if you have not already.
- Your goal in confession is to represent God more accurately to the person your sin has offended. God is compassionate and understanding to our hurts (Psalm 56:8). Therefore, our confession should include evidence that we have reflected on the impact of our sin.
- When sharing this aspect of your confession, avoid using verbs of completion (i.e., “I know...”); instead use process verbs (i.e., those ending in “-ing,” for example “I am learning...”). Avoiding verbs of completion allows the other person to talk about other ways our sin has affected them without it feeling like they are “piling on” to what we have already said “I know.”

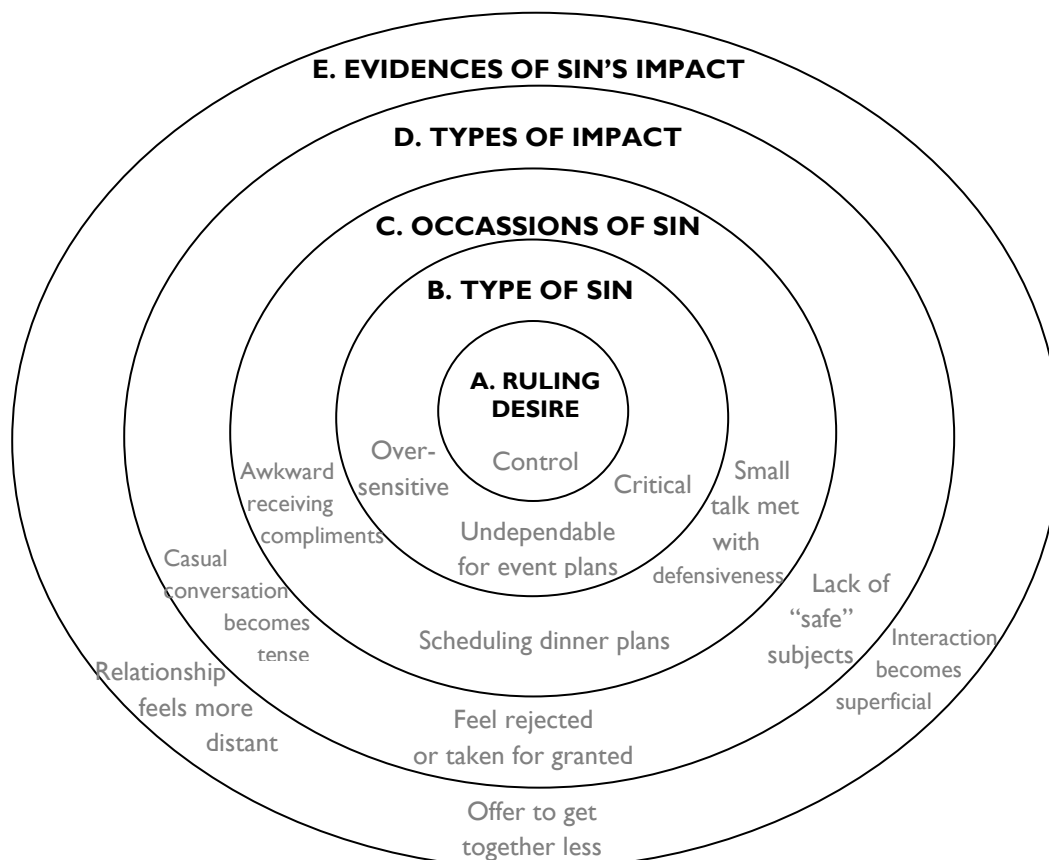


Figure 1: The Five Rings of a Web Diagram to Prepare for Confession

**5. Accept the Consequence.** Confession is not a plea-bargain or the beginning of a negotiation. If you have been hiding binge foods, then consequences may entail being transparent about your finances and disclosing your hiding places. If you have been using laxatives or diet pills, then consequences may involve talking with your physicians about these actions and inviting accountability about these practices.

But it is important to remember that consequences are not punitive. Consequences can play a disciplinary role (reinforcing life lessons and solidifying prevention measures) or a trust-building role (providing tangible fruit for an otherwise unverifiable desire to change). When we are confessing, our voluntary participation in the process means we should be viewing the consequences that are required as trust-building measures.

- Begin by stating the obvious. If there are clear changes you need to make, state them in your confession. Don't phrase them as, "I will do [blank] for you," as if it were a favor or concession, or "If you insist, I will [blank]," portraying change as punishment. It is more in keeping with confession to say, "Because I see my need to change, I will [blank]."
- End by asking an open ended question. Honest questions are a sign of humility. They reveal that we are not presenting a contract or deal, but that we are seeking to restore a relationship and our life to a state of healthiness. A simple, "Are there other ways I can show you the sincerity of my desire to change or help you trust me in the areas I've brought unhealthiness into our relationship?" would suffice.

**6. Alter Your Behavior.** Confession is not the culmination of the journey. It is merely the drawing of the map and acknowledgement that the journey is needed. There has been a great deal of emotional energy spent to get to this point, and that is why many people stop their travels at the step of confession. But when we stop at confession our lack of future effort gives the person reason to say, "You didn't really mean what you said." This is why our study still has four more chapters to go.

- **Read Luke 14:28-33.** Part of embracing the Gospel is counting the cost of following God and embracing the sacrifice. Obviously, it's worth it. We give up our life of sin and its misery. We gain a life of being transformed into what God intended and Heaven. But it feels painful and often we want to back out because of our doubt. The same

is true with confession, because it is rooted in the Gospel paradigm of dying to self and living for God’s glory through serving others. As you prepare to confess, realize this dynamic is part of the emotional battle.

**7. Ask for Forgiveness & Allow Time.** “I’m sorry” is not the same thing as asking for forgiveness. “I’m sorry” is an appropriate statement after a mistake or a misfortune. “Will you forgive me?” is the appropriate statement when we have sinned against another person or our sin affected another person. Be sure you are requesting forgiveness and not merely asking to be excused.

It is also important to remember that while forgiveness is commanded by God, Scripture never calls on the confessing party to remind others of this command or to insist that it be obeyed on a certain time table. If your sin created mistrust in the other person, then you honor them by being patient. Impatience only exacerbates mistrust. While Scripture commands them to forgive, it does not command them to trust. This is an additional grace they give you.

- Allow at least as much time as it took you to come to repentance. It is hypocritical to expect someone else to process suffering (your sin against them) faster than you acknowledged and committed to change your sin.
- During the interval between confession and granting forgiveness, love and serve the other person while continuing to work on your personal change. This helps you remain other-minded and it honors your friend.

### Preparing for a Confessing Conversation

Knowing what to say is different from communicating what you intended in the moment of conversation. In the previous section we outlined a conversation. In this section you will fill in the outline.

On the next page is a tool to help you outline the conversations you need to have.

1. Begin with the list of people you made under “Address Everyone Involved” above. Print one copy of the confession guide for each person on the list. Write the name of each person at the top of one edition of this guide (PDF copies available at [www.bradhambrick.com/healthy](http://www.bradhambrick.com/healthy)).
2. The top paragraph is meant to overview for you the flow of this conversation. It does not need to be spoken, but is a kind of map to help you not get lost in the details.
3. Complete the open-ended statements that follow using your notes from earlier chapters and the work you did on your web diagrams.
4. If you are concerned about whether you succumb to blame-shifting or self-pity during your confession, rehearse confessing with a mentor or counselor.
5. Request a time to meet with each person and follow through with your confession.

**Read Philemon.** This short letter tucked in the back of the New Testament is a prepared confession. Paul came to learn of how Onesimus, prior to becoming a Christian, had stolen from Philemon, his employer at the time. Onesimus later became a Christian under Paul’s teaching. Paul sent this letter with Onesimus when he returned to make things right with Philemon. So if you are wondering if this kind of action is necessary or biblical, realize that it was important enough that God devoted a book of the Bible as an example of what you are preparing to do.

### Accountability Focus (CONFESS):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly and to confront any contradiction between your words and life.

- Am I being honest about which forms of resistance towards confession are most tempting for me?
- Am I omitting or resisting confessing to someone to whom I should confess?
- Can I rehearse my confessions without getting off message (i.e., self-pity or blame-shifting)?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element you are learning about your relationship with food to your accountability partner. These commitments are preliminary to chapter six “life restructuring” but serve to build progress while you get to that point.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



## CONFESSION GUIDE

Name of the person to whom you are confessing: \_\_\_\_\_

*“I have not represented God well in your presence [explain]. You have been hurt by my un-God-like emotions, attitudes, and actions [describe]. My goal in life is to make God’s character known. That starts with this request for forgiveness. I value our relationship more than my pride. I am currently working on submitting my life to God’s control and understand if you need time to consider my request for forgiveness.”*

**I am now willing to admit that I sinned against you by... [list specific sins and avoid words like if, but and maybe]. These actions were my choice and wrong.** Review Rings B and C of your web diagrams.

**I am learning to see how much my life was ruled by the desire for [list motives for your sin]. You did not cause my sin.** Refer to the relevant motives from chapter three and Ring A of your web diagrams.

**I am beginning to see how my sin has affected you. [Describe]** Describe what you can understand of how your sin negatively affected the life, emotions, trust, and relationships of this person – Rings D and E of your web diagrams.

**I know I must change to honor God and to bless those I care about. Because I see my need for change, I will [list obvious needed changes]. I am still learning what other changes honoring God will require of me.** State those changes that are foundational.

**Are there other ways I can show you the sincerity of my desire to change or help you trust me in the areas I’ve brought unhealthiness into our relationship? [pause and take notes on their answer]** This section should be blank until you speak with the person.

**I understand if it will take some time but I am asking for your forgiveness. Thank you for showing me the honor of listening.**

## Chapter 6.

### “I Want to Steward My Life; Not Wrestle a Scale”

RESTRUCTURE MY LIFE to rely on God’s grace and Word to transform my life.

**“I have learned a great deal about my self [list with examples], my disordered eating [list examples], and my Savior [list with examples]. Because of these truths I want and need to make the following changes [list]. My temptation is to see these changes as ‘what I do’ rather than merely cooperating with and celebrating God’s grace in my life.”**

**Memorize:** 1 Timothy 4:8 (ESV), “For while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Bodily training” – God likes your body and wants you to care for it as the good gift he intended it to be.
- “Some value” – The effort you put into caring for your body is not wasted; God places value on those efforts.
- “Godliness” – Your character is what determines whether your physique is a blessing or bondage.
- “In Every Way” – Godliness is what allows us to savor every blessing that God bestows without excess or neglect.
- “Present life and.. life to come” – Character enrichment is not just heaven-preparation but also vital to a happy life.

#### Teaching Notes

“I sensed a stronger resistance to impatience, lust, and other sins. Confronting excessive, indulgent eating was almost like taking spiritual penicillin or antibiotics and that it seemed to cut the feet out from under other demands (p. 61)... Obesity is ‘socially contagious.’ Your social environment has a tremendous impact on your own journey of either gaining or losing weight (p. 92).” Gary Thomas in *Every Body Matters: Strengthening Your Body to Strengthen Your Soul*

“The enemy of our souls wants to discourage us from ever thinking we could have a supernatural self-control (p. 31)... Research tells us that people become more successful at long-term weight loss when their motivation is to become healthier, not thinner (p. 34).” Stephen Arterburn and Linda Mintle in *Lose It for Life*

“I used to carry my food plan home with me on a piece of paper. If I had not, I would never have remembered what I was supposed to eat. I even recorded what I ate every day in a food journal. The rigidity was necessary in the beginning in order to get me on the right track (p. 42)... A true test of my recovery has been feeling overweight and still eating breakfast, lunch, and dinner (p. 68).” Jenni Schaeffer in *Life Without Ed*

“In the past, when I’ve read the diet books, I frequently skipped right to the eating plan so I could get to the store and buy the food on the list and get going. I usually didn’t care why I should eat and ways the author said; I just wanted to get going on losing some weight (p. 97).” Elyse Fitzpatrick in *Love to Eat, Hate to Eat*

“The most valuable lesson I learned was how to listen to my own body (p. 122).” Sheryle Cruse in *Thin Enough: My Spiritual Journey through the Living Death of an Eating Disorder*

“Part of your recovery will be developing your own line or limits where you are no longer willing to betray yourself to ‘fix’ or change your body (p. 71).” Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*

“I used my cravings for food as a prompt to pray. It was my way of tearing down the tower of impossibility before me in building something new (p. 30)... We can step on the scale and accept the numbers for what they are—an indication of how much our body weights—and not an indication of our worth (p. 74).” Lysa Terkeurst in *Made to Crave*

“I have these boundaries in place not for restriction but to define the parameters of my freedom. My brokenness can’t handle more freedom than this right now. And I’m good with that (p. 153).” Lysa Terkeurst in *Made to Crave*

## Embedded Study

This is probably the chapter you were looking for when you started this study. Thank you for your patience and perseverance in getting to this point. The foundation you’ve laid will help to ensure that your current efforts towards establishing a healthy relationship with food do not meet the same fate as previous well-intended efforts.

You’ve probably known that in order to be a better steward of your body you needed more than food facts and an exercise plan. You needed to understand how you were misusing food for purposes food could never fulfill. You also needed to allow God and others to play the vital role in change that God designed them to do.

Now you’ve done those things. That means that practical advisements on meal plans, approaches to exercise, and other life management changes have the opportunity to become healthy lifestyles. No longer are these plans your “savior.” No longer are you merely mustering will power. No longer are you striving to make yourself acceptable to God and others through your appearance.

You are now merely seeking to be a good steward of the body God gave you in the context of loving-supportive friendship with fellow believers. We will look at what this good stewardship means in three sections:

1. Accepting Your Body
2. Preparing for a Return to Healthy Eating
3. Body and Food Stewardship Practices

### Accepting Your Body

**Read Psalm 139.** First read verses 14-16 and then read the entirety of the Psalm. God has a very different relationship with your body than you do. God sees your body as a piece of his art. God is not comparing you with others like we are prone to compare ourselves. Accepting your body is merely an exercise in agreeing with God that when he crafted you and said, “It is very good” (Gen 1:31). That is not conceited. To believe anything to the contrary is to argue with God.

A definition: To “accept my body” means “as I care for my body in a manner that honors God I am content with my weight and shape regardless of the number on the scale, the effects of age, or how I look in comparison to others.”

This acceptance does not begin when you reach an ideal weight; that is an anti-gospel mindset. God does not withhold his delight in us until we become perfect. God accepts us in Christ and, in the strength his acceptance provides, we are compelled to make the changes that conform our character more into the character of Christ.

Here are five steps to accept and your body (modified and adapted from Stephen Arterburn and Linda Mintle in *Lose It for Life*, p. 182; bold text only).

1. **Stop Degrading Your Body:** Imagine a child bringing you a piece of their personal “art” with a big smile. You look at it and say, “That’s hideous. I feel ashamed and worthless when I look at it.” That’s a jarring thought experiment. What we wouldn’t dare do with a child, we often persistently do with ourselves. Every person belongs to God by rights of creation. Christians belong doubly to God by rights of redemption. We have no right to insult what God deems precious. In this step you simply stop exercising a right you do not have.
2. **Stop Putting Life on Hold:** Make a list of the number of things you put in this blank, “I will [blank] when I lose ‘x’ pounds or get in shape.” Why wait? Life should not start at minus-10-pounds. Life starts now. Quit taking yourself fitness-hostage. When you put off the things you’d find meaningful and satisfying until you meet your weight goal you’re making yourself a slave to the scale and killing the motivation necessary for lasting change.
3. **Think God’s Words about Yourself:** Whose voice is the loudest in your head? This is the pivotal question for accepting your body. Appendix A contains a list of identity statements about who you are in Christ. It is a walk through the New Testament learning how God sees you. These are not “if only” statements, but the reality of who you are in Christ. These are all the significance, acceptance, and purpose you could ask for. You steward your body to live in these realities for as long as possible for the glory of God.
4. **Develop Your Own Style and Personality:** Don’t be a slave to culture and trends. The shape of beauty changes with every generation and culture. Yet the people we find most attractive (not just physically) and those we most enjoy spending time with are those who are comfortable in their own skin. You don’t become attractive by reaching a number; you become attractive by enjoying the person God made you to be and showing genuine interest in the person God made others to be.

5. **Rest and Run in God's Acceptance:** To the person who has had an unhealthy relationship with food, the temptation is to distort these five steps as if they would produce passivity. "If I accept my body, I will neglect my health." Contentment is not a synonym for neglect; it is an antonym for excess (in the case of food, both excessive discipline and consumption). When we rest in God's acceptance we do not fall into the false belief that our body size equates to our value. When we run (meaning pursue God's design for our life) we do this out of devotion for someone we admire and want to make known; not someone from whom we fear rejection and punishment.

You might ask, "When do I know that I am accepting my God-given body?" Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder* (p. 148) provides a list of physical, psychological, and social indicators that we are at peace with our God-given body.

- Weight range is maintained without engaging in eating disordered behaviors
- Having regular menstruation every month and normal hormone levels (as age appropriate)
- Normal blood pressure, heart rate, and body temperature
- Normal blood chemistry values such as electrolytes, white and red blood counts, etc.
- Normal bone density for age
- Normal levels of energy (not exhausted, shaky, or agitated all day)
- Normal, or at least some, sex drive
- Ability to concentrate and focus (reading, movies, work, school)
- Normal social life with authentic, and personal relationships (not just online)
- Decrease and/or cessation of obsessive thoughts or food cravings or urges to binge
- Ability to choose freely what to eat both when alone and with others
- Ability to eat at restaurants, at friends' houses, at parties, and on vacation
- Absence of food rituals dictating eating patterns and behaviors
- No erratic mood swings

Use this as a check list. Mark those that are already consistently true of your journey towards a healthy relationship with food. If you have not been to the doctor since you began this study, now is a good time to go and request the kind of health checks referenced in this list. For those items you could not mark, make them a matter of prayer and ask the friends in your support network (step 5) to become a source of encouragement for continued growth in these areas.

### Preparing for a Return to Healthy Eating

For better or worse our bodies are remarkably adaptive. When we abuse our bodies, through over-eating or restriction, our body adapts to the "new normal" we inflict upon it. These adaptations are not good, but they need to be accounted for if we are going to transition our body back to a healthy relationship with food.

The material presented in this section is an adaption of chapter 10 from Gregory Jantz in *Hope, Help, & Healing for Eating Disorders* (p. 143-159). If you find this material helpful, it is highly recommended that you read this chapter from Dr. Jantz book and consult with a nutritionist who can help you personalize these recommendations for your body.

1. **Rebuilding Digestion:** An unhealthy relationship with food results in an unhealthy "gastrointestinal ecosystem." Dairy products with added probiotics, eating foods high in fiber, and whole grains can help restore your gastrointestinal ecosystem. Unless you give attention to this step, then beginning to eat in a healthy manner can be upsetting enough to your stomach that you revert back to the unhealthy patterns you were used to for relief.
2. **Nutritional Rehabilitation:** An unhealthy relationship with food results in an assortment of malnutrition issues. For those who have been over-restricting, then getting your potassium, zinc, B vitamins, and amino acids back in balance is the first priority (in that order). These impact your appetite, energy levels, and sleep cycle. A nutritionist can help you develop a plan to get you back to optimal nutritional health: vitamin A, biotin, folic acid, niacin, pantothenic acid, vitamin C, and vitamin D; each of which play unique roles in optimal energy levels, cognitive clarity, and body functioning.
3. **Healthy Choices:** Getting your gastrointestinal ecosystem reset and your nutritional levels back to normal make it much easier to have a healthy relationship with food. When our body is reacting to unhealthy food choices it has a hard time accepting healthy food choices. We interpret our body's resistance as "healthy just doesn't work for me." Treat your body well and healthy will work. Here are twelve choices suggested by Dr. Jantz; some of these will be treated in more depth in the next section.
  - i. Eat a variety of foods, even if in very small amounts (helps to break strict "food rules" mentality).
  - ii. Eat frequently to keep blood sugar balanced.
  - iii. Balance the food you eat with physical activity (key word "balance").

- iv. When making food choices, include plenty of variety (helps ensure nutritional balance).
  - v. Eat breakfast every day.
  - vi. Make food choices that are low in fat and cholesterol (foods with high propensity to comfort eating).
  - vii. Make food choices that are moderate in sugar content (avoid hyper-charging your body).
  - viii. Make food choices that are moderate in salt content.
  - ix. If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation (lowers your impulse control).
  - x. Be intentional about your meal environment (helps avert irritable bowel syndrome).
  - xi. Listen to your body's signals.
  - xii. Slow down to eat (it takes 20 minutes for your body's hunger-satiety mechanism to trigger).
4. **Avoid Hypoglycemia:** The rise and fall of blood sugar levels are key elements of temptations towards an unhealthy relationship with food. The more you do to maintain balanced blood sugar levels the less intense your temptation towards disordered eating will be; not to say it will become non-existent, but a major physiological trigger will be eliminated. One of the primary impacts of the “healthy choices” list above is that it mitigates any negative impact from hypoglycemia in your struggle with food.

**Read Matthew 26:41.** Notice that Jesus ties the strength of temptation to the condition of the body; in this case fatigue. In the preceding hours, the disciples had traveled, secured a place to hold a ceremony, prepared an elaborate meal, eaten a meal high in carbohydrates with wine, and then walked to a dark-quiet place to pray. When they repeatedly fell asleep, Jesus' response was, “Your spirit is indeed willing, but your flesh is weak.” There is comfort in knowing God is patient with our weakness, but we should also apply wisdom and avoid creating physical challenges that will heighten our temptation. That is what this section has been all about.

### Body and Food Stewardship Practices

Think about healthy relationships with people; these relationships aren't healthy because they follow certain rules (as if the rules were the reason), but living within the parameters of what is healthy protects the relationship. The same relationship between rules-healthy will exist in your relationship with food.

The guidelines below are not a recipe for a healthy relationship with food; however, violating these rules will place you at risk for disordered eating. Focus on accepting your body as God created it (first section of this chapter) and allow the points below to merely be how you steward the life and body God gave you.

1. **Review the Basics:** How are you doing at the initial marks of a healthy relationship with food that we set out in chapter two? These are the foundation for the other practices listed. Hopefully, the weeks you have committed to these practices will serve as momentum towards the other things you'll learn in this chapter.
  - Get adequate sleep
  - Don't skip breakfast
  - Plan what you will eat
  - Every balanced meal is a victory
2. **Be Mindful as You Eat:** Whether you struggle with over-eating or restricting, mindful eating can be a great benefit. For the over-eater, the tendency is to eat mindlessly; not paying attention to what is eaten because the goal is comfort, not nutrition. For the restrictive eater, eating becomes a stressful activity marked by guilt and anxiety. Mindful eating counters both.

Mindful eating simply means to pay relaxed attention to the full experience of eating without guilt. Allow your attention to focus on the taste, texture, and aroma of your food as you eat. During a meal pay attention to how your level of hunger changes to satisfaction. Receive the meal as a gift from God and practice gratitude throughout the meal; as opposed to just praying before the meal.

“Sixty seconds before you eat, sit quietly (with no distractions) and think—what do I feel and what am I thinking about right now? Record this. Then look at what you are about to eat. Notice how it tastes. Do you like what you are eating?... After you finish, take another 60 seconds and write down how you feel—energized, tired, unsatisfied, content, etc... (p. 66-67).” Stephen Arterburn and Linda Mintle in *Lose It for Life*

In order to do this, especially if eating has become a stressful experience for you, you may need to learn some relaxation exercises. Imagine the benefits of starting every meal “emotionally neutral.” Imagine the freedom of ending each meal contented and at peace. That is what the practice of mindful eating provides.

Consider the alternative. Every meal is a battle. The time period after every meal is a battle with self-condemnation. That is no way to live. Embracing every meal as a time to celebrate the goodness of God's provision and a time to steward your body allows you to regularly practice mindful eating.



3. **Enjoy What You Eat.** If mealtimes don't become enjoyable, you'll quit. God meant food to be a blessing, not a battle. This is why fad diets only work short-term. They don't produce a lifestyle we will embrace; they produce a strained habit we'll keep up until we reach a certain number.

Don't allow yourself to label certain foods as “bad.” In order to feel satisfied you will have to eat less of calorie dense foods, but that shouldn't make them off limits. But learning contentment with a healthy portion is much more sustainable than banishing desired foods from your diet. Food rules lead to food splurges.

“I began to look at food for what it was: a gift from God designed to keep his creation alive. Food was not designed to be entertainment, comfort, or a God substitute. He did mean for food to be enjoyable—hey, taste buds, right (p. 120-121)?” Sheryle Cruse in *Thin Enough: My Spiritual Journey through the Living Death of an Eating Disorder*

4. **Consistent Exercise.** Something is better than nothing and something can lead to more. Anything you can do to increase the amount of movement in your day is a win. Taking the stairs instead of the elevator. Going for a 10 minute walk on your lunch break.

“The problem is, many people start out exercising for a week, feel only the suffering, and then give up before the mental benefits kick in (p. 116).” Gary Thomas in *Every Body Matters: Strengthening Your Body to Strengthen Your Soul*

The best form of exercise is cardiovascular; something that increases your heart rate for an extended period of time. This burns more calories, strengthens your heart, and builds lean muscle.

Exercise increases your basal metabolic rate – that is the number of calories that you burn when you're doing nothing. Muscle weighs more than fat, so you may not see the same results on the scale that you would if you were only dieting. But remember, our goal is not a number; our goal is to be a good steward of our life and body.

What are some windows of time when you could add more movement to your day? \_\_\_\_\_

What type of activities could you add during these windows of time? \_\_\_\_\_

“Psychologically, the endorphins that follow a hard workout are an excellent way to manage stress and feel better about life in general (p. 37).” Gary Thomas in *Every Body Matters: Strengthening Your Body to Strengthen Your Soul*

5. **Manage Your Stress Well.** When we mismanage stress, two things happen. First, we tend to seek relief in unhealthy ways. Second, our body produces a hormone called cortisol. Both of these things are counter to our goal of being a good steward of our body.

What are your unhealthy habits for relieving stress? \_\_\_\_\_

What areas of life are you neglecting or mismanaging that add to your stress? \_\_\_\_\_

What changes could you make to reduce the level of stress in your life? \_\_\_\_\_

When we engage these questions we are beginning to take ownership of our lives in a healthy way instead of just letting life continue as-is. Live with the expectation that you are going to “happen to life” as much as life “happens to you.” This active mindset is vital to continuing healthy life practices.

So, what is this cortisol hormone? Cortisol helps us deal with stress by shutting down unnecessary functions, like reproduction and the immune system, in order to allow the body to direct all energies toward dealing with the stress at hand. These functions of cortisol are supposed to be short-lived, just long enough to deal with the offending stressor.

When cortisol production becomes a way of life (i.e., living stressed) it does many things: impairs the quality of sleep, increases the body's energy stores (i.e., fat) in the abdomen area, increases craving for sugar-based foods for quick energy bursts, suppresses the immune system, creates muscle tension that leads to headaches, hampers your sex drive, creates an irritable stomach, and suppresses serotonin production that leads to depression.

Hopefully you can see the simple changes you listed above can make a huge difference in your life if you maintain them. If you realize that stress is a key factor in your efforts to have a healthy relationship with food, the following resources are recommended.

- [www.bradhambrick.com/burnout](http://www.bradhambrick.com/burnout)
- [www.bradhambrick.com/anxiety](http://www.bradhambrick.com/anxiety)

6. **Don't Overschedule.** God simply asks you to be a good steward of your 168 hour week. When we forget this we live in the perpetual stress (see previous point) of unrealistic expectations for ourselves.

But overscheduling does more than illicit stress. Overscheduling makes for erratic eating patterns. We allow ourselves to get too hungry before we eat. We have to eat fast; which is usually not healthy. We fail to enjoy the experience of eating; which means we feel like we “deserve” more treats later.

Overscheduling makes it very difficult to live within a level of hunger between three and seven (see tool you began using in step two). When we overschedule, we wait too long to eat and allow our hunger to become so intense it is hard to be content with healthy portions. We also realize it may be a while before we are going to eat again so we over-indulge; even if we don't fall in a bulimic binge-purge cycle, overscheduling places us in a feast-famine pattern.

**Read Matthew 6:34.** Often we just think about this verse in terms of worries about the future. But when we overschedule we are trying to cram tomorrow's work into today; which is another form of forcing tomorrow's worries upon today. Having realistic expectations for your schedule each day is another way to live in obedience to this verse.

7. **Do Things You Enjoy.** When you're trying to overcome an unhealthy relationship with food it is easy for life to become more focused on what you can't do or shouldn't do rather than what you were created to do. God created you with particular talents and interests, engage them.

When we fail to do things we enjoy, then we begin to feel like life “owes” us a few treats or exceptions. The problem is that when we've struggled with disordered eating, those exceptions are forms of self-abuse; our rewards are actually punishments. But the less we allow ourselves to enjoy life, the less clearly we can see this.

**Read Psalm 37:4 and Galatians 5:22.** Delight and joy are central parts of the Christian life. God wants these things for his children. The desire for joy is God-given. The design for joy is also God-made in two senses. First, God designed the moral code that prevents our pleasures from running away with us into destruction. Second, God made each person uniquely with particular interests and passions. When you pursue hobbies, interests, passions, and causes that invigorate you, you are celebrating God's design in your life.

8. **Avoid Lying at All Costs.** Nothing is more dangerous than a lie. Binging is not more dangerous than a lie. Starving is not more dangerous than a lie. A lie leaves you alone with your sin. Honesty allows you to always fight with people by your side. A lie means you've not only sinned, but that you are continuing to align yourself with your sin.

At this point in your journey you've likely made significant progress. Lying maybe as tempting as it was in the beginning of your journey, but in different ways. Early on we don't want to admit we need to change. Once we begin to make progress and enjoy the fruit of our new found freedom, we don't want to admit we slipped.

We began this journey by realizing that progress would involve good days and bad days. We would get defensive when anyone would imply that we might “always eat right.” But once we feel like we're “doing better” we quickly lose our willingness to acknowledge our failures. We become the source of the expectations we once resisted.

Allow people to know the real you. This is the only way to live the adage “one day at a time.” When we live falsely, we are always trying to live up to what we've presented (promising we'll do more in the future) and think about what we've told to whom (living in the past). Honesty is freedom.

**Read Exodus 20:16.** Now, hopefully, you can see why lying made God's top ten. There is as much hope as you are honest. God wants you live in emotional-relational freedom and he knows that lying results in emotional-relational bondage. Commitment – *if you feel like you might have been anything less than fully honest with someone in your support network, make it clear immediately.*

9. **Use a Healthy Thinking Journal.** The focal point of this journaling tool is different from the one we introduced in step 3. We want you to focus less on food, as if calories and food groups were the most important thing, and more on the general healthiness of your thinking process, realizing as you think in healthier ways you will only expect from food - what food can provide and eat in ways that care well for your body.

Notice that this journal takes longer to complete. It is more than an “in the moment journal.” The first five questions are about things you can answer in a moment of food temptation, while the final two questions will require the perspective that comes with reflecting on the temptation later. By this point in your journey, this longer perspective should be both reasonable and a sign of your growth.



## HEALTHY FOOD THOUGHTS JOURNAL

Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

**Describe the situation that is stirring your emotions.**

Rank the intensity of your emotions. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**What are the worst-case-scenarios that are running through your mind?**

**Personify your emotions and make the best case you can for why they might be true.**

**What typical lies or irrational fears are embedded in your best possible presentation of your emotions?**

**What healthy choices or beliefs are available for you to do or believe?**

**What is the outcome of the situation that stirred your emotions?**

*\* Keep a record of how your emotions prove unreliable in these situations.*

**What truths did you learn about God and yourself in this situation? Try to include Scripture references.**

The final question should be a point where your spiritual growth is more prompted by your personal Bible study, prayers, and reflection than the content of this study. It is a major marker of growth and source of personal encouragement when you realize that each moment of temptation is becoming a time when you learn things about God and yourself which actually contribute to your health and deepen your relationship with God.

10. **Value Small Day-to-Day Choices.** No healthy choice is too small to make a difference. Often our temptations seem emotionally larger than our obedience is practically significant, so we neglect our simple obediences. Conversely, our "small" temptations don't seem like a major setback, so we overlook the compromises that result in us re-engaging our old, unhealthy relationship with food.

For example, if your struggle is overeating, realize that on average cutting just 100 calories a day results in losing approximately 10 pounds in a year. Or, if you struggle with over-restricting, texting a friend in a moment when old lies start to ring true again is a great way to gain the external perspective to see what is most important again.

Make a list of the "small" daily choices that you realize make a big difference in your health. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Application:** Whenever you feel overwhelmed, identify the smallest, relevant choice that moves you in the direction of a healthy relationship with food. Don't succumb to the false idea that you have to overcome a temptation in a single choice. You don't. You just want each choice to be a step towards God's best for you.

11. **Clean Out Your Closet.** This one may be hard. But your goal in life cannot be to get to a place defined by a pair of jeans in your closet. Too often, when we have had an unhealthy relationship with food, life satisfaction is defined by getting to a certain size waist. Articles of clothing become the "finish line" and we feel an inability to rest (be satisfied with life) until we reach that goal.

When this happens, what we tell ourselves is "motivating" is actually a source of self-abasement; we declare ourselves "not good enough" by a standard we see every day when we decide what we're going to wear. We entrench a battle to be content with good body stewardship into our daily routine. If we were talking to a friend about any other area of life-dominating struggle, we would call this sheer folly.

"Cleaning my closet was a more invasive task than just getting rid of clothing. My closet represented a lifetime of armor used to create a perfect and beautiful exterior to cover a dark, empty, twisted interior of lies, torture, and sadness (p. 186)." Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*

**Application:** Go through your closet and dresser. Remove any article of clothing that does not represent a healthy or realistic expectation for your body at this time. Give these items to a charity. Any article of clothing that might represent a healthy expectation for your body in the future should be packed and put in storage out of daily or weekly sight. Only clothes that can be worn during the next three months should be left in your closet or dresser.

**Caution:** If this exercise creates a significant amount of emotional distress, do not attempt this by yourself. Invite someone from your support network to be with you while you complete this task. But do not transfer the emotional responsibility for this task to them. Their presence is to support you as you make a wise but difficult choice.

**Read Matthew 5:27-30.** Removing articles of clothing from your closet that are not realistic or healthy for you is one of the appropriate "radical amputation" steps Jesus would advocate for to remedy your unhealthy relationship with food. To allow a pre-occupation with your body image to derail your life is an alternative form of lust; the equal-but-opposite expression of lust Jesus is describing in this passage where we fixate on the body image of another person. Remember, in this study, we are not trying to develop a biblical diet plan (as if God has a preferred menu), but gaining a healthy relationship with food. You will not have a healthy relationship with food when you daily expose yourself to the standard of an unrealistic body image in the form of "skinny jeans."

12. **Implement More Healthy Food Habits.** Hopefully you've reached a point in your journey that strategies are no longer seen as saviors. When we initially realize our unhealthy relationship with food, we are prone to think a new set of habits will set us free. This doesn't mean that new, healthy habits are useless; it just means that we need to engage healthy habits with reasonable expectations if we are going to sustain them and realize their benefit.

If you struggle with over-eating, consider these healthy habits:

- When you've finished dinner, floss and brush your teeth. This helps establish that once you've had dinner, you will not snack afterwards.

- Don't drink your calories. Beverages tend not to be filling and allow you to consume more calories than you realize. Drink water instead.
- Have an afternoon cup of soup. A primary diet killer is being hungry. A cup of soup tends to be low calorie and curbs hunger. Your “progress” may be slower in the first month, but your consistency will produce better results over the course of 6-12 months.
- Eat a high fiber diet. Fiber works to slow the absorption of sugar and slows digestion which leads to feeling satisfied longer.
- Increase your consumption of dairy products which speeds up your metabolism.
- When you eat at a restaurant, which is known for oversized portions, ask for a to-go box with your meal and put half of the meal in the box before you begin eating.
- If you want a “good dessert,” order it at a restaurant. It will be better than what you buy or bake and you won't have the extra servings at your house.

If you struggle with over-restricting, consider these healthy habits:

- Plan ahead what you're going to eat; whether it's at home alone or out with friends. If you've chronically erred on the side of “not enough,” don't continue to give yourself that option.
- Choose new foods that you want to try (i.e., food adventures) and allow the experience of eating to be as satisfying as the taste of food.
- Identify qualities that you admire about people of all body types. If you struggle with the desire to restrict yourself from healthy eating, rehearse the things you genuinely enjoy about people that have nothing to do with weight or shape.
- Eat consistently throughout the day so you do not get overly hungry and feel like you have to eat “a lot” to be satisfied. This helps minimize some of the conflict of conscience that is associated with food.
- Refuse to believe that nutrition from multi-vitamins and supplements are the same as eating. 100% of your daily vitamins and nutrients from a handful of capsules is not sufficient fuel for life.

13. **Learn to Deal with Criticism.** Until we learn to deal with real criticism we will live haunted by perceived or potential criticism. To the degree that comfort eating or punitive restricting is a temptation for you, you will have to be able to withstand criticism to sustain a healthy relationship with food.

The reality is, you will disappoint people. And, not everyone will approve of how you look, what you think, or the things you prefer. Unless you can withstand people voicing their displeasure, disapproval, or disagreement, food will remain your never-rejecting refuge. So, how do you deal with criticism?

- a) *Know what's most important.* Getting lost in criticism means we're allowing secondary or tertiary things to supplant what is most important in our lives because those things are most important to somebody else.
- b) *Have friends with whom you're authentic.* It's less of a big deal for someone to know your weaknesses when the people you are closest to already know those weaknesses and love you anyway.
- c) *Own and learn from your mistakes and failures.* Often responding poorly to criticism has to do with avoiding areas of needed growth. The effort you've put to reach this point should be significantly alleviating that dynamic.
- d) *Repent with humility but not shame.* Humility is glad to grow and learn. Shame is embarrassed that growth and learning was needed. Humility is healthy and freeing. Shame is toxic.
- e) *Don't get distracted from what's most important.* If the legitimate criticism was not about something central to our life, then we want to grow and learn without diverting too much energy from what is most important. If the legitimate criticism is about something central to our lives, we are even more grateful this individual had the courage to bring it to our attention.

**Read Proverbs 27:6.** The process at this point about dealing with criticism is an application of this proverb. The “faithful wounds of a friend” are a grace of God. When we fear them we necessarily run from God. When we run from God, we will do something; in the context of this study that is either comfort eating or self-punishment through starvation. Having people from your support network help you sort through when feeling criticized would derail your progress is an important way to continue growing.

14. **Practice Self-Compassion.** Often our biggest critic is not “out there.” Instead, we are our biggest critic. It is often in the context of this internal battle that self-esteem becomes the perceived answer. Contrast these two definitions of self-esteem and self-compassion.

- Self-esteem is the belief that I am worthy of full acceptance just the way I am; therefore, self-esteem is brittle or defiant in the context of needed changes.
- Self-compassion is the belief that we are flawed people in need of change but that echoing God’s grace towards our self is the most effective and God-honoring way to facilitate that change; self-compassion can remain humble and authentic during the process of change.

What does self-compassion look like practically in the context of gaining a healthy relationship with food?

- Refusing to berate yourself for setbacks in your growth while having the courage to acknowledge them.
- Not over-compensating (eating or restricting) when you get off your plan, but being content to start fresh with your next balanced day of eating.
- Enjoying the process of growing more than the destination of reaching particular goals.
- Contentment with the body and season of life in which you experience life.
- The ability to focus on what you want out of life more than what you’d like to change about yourself.

“You could say that the biggest key to my recovery was learning how to take care of myself in a real way, instead of starving and always trying to lose weight (p. 93)... Many times I've said I wish my body could be a separate person from me so that I could apologize to it for the pain I've put it through for the last 15 years (p. 255).” Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*

**Conclusion**

Remember this chapter was meant to be a buffet; there was more offered than you’ll be able to implement. That is intentional and designed so that you can select those strategies that are the best fit for you. Start by picking one or two most important things you learned in each of the three key areas of this chapter.

<b>Focal Area</b>	<b>One or Two Approaches I Believe Are Most Important</b>	<b>Benefits I Hope to Gain</b>
Accepting Your Body	• •	
Preparing for a Return to Healthy Eating	• •	
Body and Food Stewardship Practices	• •	

Share the things you wrote down in the chart above with your support network. As you share them, allow this to be something that you *want* to do more than something you *should* do. The pursuit of a healthy life in the context of a supportive community should be becoming a delight more than a duty. Realize you get to pursue these benefits with people you care about and who care about you. That is more satisfying, freeing, and sustainable than anything your unhealthy relationship with food could have ever promised to provide.

**Accountability Focus (RESTRUCTURE LIFE):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly and to confront any contradiction between your words and life.

- Was I willing and excited to share the things in the chart at the closing of this chapter?
- Which needed change seems most intimidating or difficult?
- Which changes do I already feel excited (rather than dread) about the possibility of making?

## Chapter 7

### “From a Balanced Diet to a Balanced Life”

IMPLEMENT the new structure pervasively with humility and flexibility.

**“Plans are easier than life. They exist outside my sinful heart and broken world. Trying to live out my plan has taught me more about my self, my sin, and my Savior. As I have had victory, my unhealthy relationship with food has taken new forms. I have had to remember that my plans are merely how I intend to rely on God and not, themselves, my deliverer.**

**Here are the unexpected challenges I faced [list], how I failed [list], where I succeeded [list], what I learned [list], and how God was faithful [list]. I now see that [list] is really the most important part of my plan.”**

**Memorize:** 2 Peter 2:22 (ESV), “What the true proverb says has happened to them: ‘The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.’” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “True proverb” – This verse does not claim to be pleasant; it is not. But it is true and it is a good warning.
- “Has happened” – The pattern of this verse repeats itself often unless we take intentional steps to prevent it.
- “Dog returns” – How many times have we been absolutely sick of our behaviors yet returned to them for comfort?
- “Returns to wallow” – People, because of sin, have an innate tendency to seek comfort in things that make life worse.
- “The mire” – Without self-loathing, we must remind ourselves that where we want comfort is actually “the mire.”

#### Teaching Notes

“Most people do experience anxiety when they stop using food to cope with stress because they have to learn new ways to cope. Change, even when desired and positive, can be stressful (p. 17).” Stephen Arterburn and Linda Mintle in *Lose It for Life*

“An over eating episode is preceded by a process—one that generally involves a predictable progression that gradually moves you farther and farther away from doing what you know worked in the first place until, ultimately, you lose control and you revert to the old patterns (p. 225-226).” Stephen Arterburn and Linda Mintle in *Lose It for Life*

“It is important to learn the difference between having an inner critic and healthy self-reflection. An inner critic is nasty and mean. An inner critic will cause you to doubt yourself and keep you unhappy, insecure, and stuck. Self-reflection can help keep you humble and help you continue to improve yourself and grow (p. 90).” Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*

“If we remember that humility is the chief virtue—if we look at fitness through the lens of humility and build community that embraces humility—then we can look at this issue through the lens of encouragement instead of judgment, inspiration instead of condemnation (p. 73).” Gary Thomas in *Every Body Matters: Strengthening Your Body to Strengthen Your Soul*

“Learn something from each relapse (p. 115)... A lapse in behaviors does not mean you are back at square one (p. 191)... That is why it is worth it to never give up—the ability to enjoy silence and not be tormented by what I have eaten today and by what remains in the refrigerator to be eaten (p. 181).” Jenni Schaeffer in *Life Without Ed*

“Becoming accountable for my own recovery was actually one of the main reasons for using the Ed metaphor. By the way, it is just a metaphor (p. 192)... I eventually stopped using the metaphor of Ed all together. It was just a tool-- my training wheels... But eventually it became important for me to stop fighting against Ed so much (p. 193).” Jenni Schaeffer in *Life Without Ed*

### Embedded Study

As you reach this chapter the momentum of change has probably already fluctuated several times. Getting started was hard. It felt like an uphill battle. Old patterns of life didn't want to let go of you and you didn't want to admit they had a hold on you. Changing your eating patterns can feel like betraying a friend; breakups are never easy even when they're good and needed.

But honesty with self, others, and God has a great way of building momentum. You began to let go of the weights of sin that clung to you so you could run free (Heb. 12:1). This second phase is almost always exciting. When there are so many ways that your relationship with food can be healthier, it can bring a great sense of hope and progress.

In the third phase, the one we're starting now, life restructuring may begin to feel more like work again. “Implementation” is not an exciting word or process. Lasting change happens in incremental units and mundane moments. Change begins to impact moments that feel “less relevant” to your battle with food. The relief you've gained tempts you think you can risk a few of your previous bad habits.

In this chapter you will evaluate the effectiveness and needed modifications to your life restructuring plan made in chapter six. This step will require the passage of time. Implementing (chapter seven) takes longer than creating a plan (chapter six). For this reason, if you are in a group program, it is recommended that you give at least two months to this step. You will need to see how your plan responds to the changes of settings, relationships, and emotions that happen over months rather than days.

As this time passes, there are two areas of assessment that you will be performing from this chapter. First, you will be learning how to measure lasting progress. What is the difference between “I'm having a good day” and “My life is beginning to conform to God's design”? Second, you will be looking at key areas of your life to make sure that you have not overlooked something that was not immediately relevant during the emotional crisis that precipitated your seeking help.

But before we engage those subjects, we will spend a couple of sections discussing the topic of relapse. What is a relapse? How do I know if I've relapsed? If a relapse doesn't “just happen” what contributes to a relapse? What do I do if I realize I've relapsed?

### Discussing Relapse

Is every slip a relapse? Does every bad food choice mean I'm “starting over”? How can I not expect myself to be perfect for the rest of my life without making excuses for myself that will make it easier to slip back into destructive behaviors? You can see why relapse is such a difficult subject in a recovery program.

On one hand, you can expect to relapse many times in the journey of recovery. If we don't relapse, then our struggle was probably not “life dominating” and didn't warrant the level of attention this study provides.

On the other hand, we don't want to expect to fail. We want to face every moment with the expectation that we'll rely on God to make healthy, God-honoring choices.

With that said, here are the expectations of this study:

- We will face relapse.
- Relapse is the recurrence of self-destructive behaviors related to our desired change.
- More dangerous than relapse are dishonesty and hiding.
- Dishonesty and hiding are the difference between a relapse slip (short) and relapse slide (long).
- Relapse begins to end when honesty begins.
- We are more likely to be honest about something we've openly discussed.
- We include this section, not to excuse or predict relapse, but to place ourselves in position for a healthy response.

In their book *Lose It for Life*, Stephen Arterburn and Linda Mintle lay out four phases of a relapse (p. 228-230; bold text only). The presence of an early step does not make the latter steps inevitable. Rather we will look at each in order to help you prevent moving further into relapse when you realize you're in a vulnerable condition.

1. **Complacency:** “I just want a break from being good.” This is the mild, passive-aggressive defiance of fatigue. It likely means we've been trying to change too fast (perfectionistic approach to change) or that we've got too much in our schedule. Early honesty with people in your support network is the best response to this fatigue. Don't try to press through in private. Evaluate what would be a sustainable approach to change with people who care about you. That is what this chapter is all about.
2. **Confusion:** It has been said by many, “Worldliness is what makes sin look normal and righteousness look strange.” The further we get into temptation, the more this dynamic effects our thinking. You begin to view “healthy choices” as an “unhealthy burden.” You begin to view “unhealthy choices” as “moments of freedom.” You begin to view “supportive



friends” as “people who don’t understand and expect too much.” When this disorientation begins to emerge be honest ASAP. This is the pattern of thought that will extend a relapse. Even if you don’t know what to disclose at this point, call a member of your support team and say, “I’m struggling. I don’t think I’m thinking well right now. Can we talk?”

3. **Compromise:** This step can be fueled by self-pity, denial, or defiance. But we begin to think, “I deserve my self-destructive behavior,” as if it were a form of relief. The duration of time that has passed since we last engaged these patterns allow the sense of high or relief to be greater and the physical effects not to be as immediately felt. It is as if our bad friend really has learned to be good like they promised. We also know those who care about us will be disappointed and hurt, so we are more prone to remain secretive about what we’re doing. Frequent warning signs at this stage of a relapse are:
  - More frequent weighing yourself and preoccupation with your weight
  - Comparing yourself to others and a growing sense of insecurity
  - Resuming some of the food rituals or food rules that were part of your disordered eating
  - Preoccupation with calorie counting or reading food labels
  - Preoccupation with clothes you used to wear or want to be able to wear
  - *Each of these distract you from being content being a good steward of your God-given body*
4. **Catastrophe:** Destructive choices destroy. There is no way around that. When we fail to acknowledge compromise (stage three), catastrophe (stage four) will get our attention. While our goal is to interrupt a potential relapse before it reaches catastrophe phase, the earlier in the deterioration of health and relationships we acknowledge what is happening, the better. Don’t allow shame or pride to prevent you from reversing the impact of your choices.

**Read I Corinthians 10:13.** “God will not let you be tempted beyond your ability” doesn’t just mean the type or intensity of temptation, but also means at any point in the temptation cycle. Too often we conceptualize a fictional “point of no return” in our battle with disordered eating. If a “point of no return” exists, it is the point at which we decide not to be honest with God, ourselves, and others. The grace of God means there is always hope in honesty about our sin and struggles. When God promises to provide “a way of escape” that refers, not to some secret passage way (hidden is never free), but to the context of grace and support which the gospel provides that allows us to be honest.

### How to Measure Lasting Progress?

Measuring progress is tricky for many reasons. First, measuring progress is an attempt to measure something very fluid and dynamic. There is a rise and fall, acceleration and deceleration in progress that makes it hard to get a concrete reading. Second, measuring progress has a tendency to measure performance over dependence. This tendency can easily begin to undermine the God-reliance stressed throughout this material. Finally, measuring progress can foster shame when there is some type of regression. How regression is handled is pivotal to establishing lasting change.

C.S. Lewis gave a very instructive metaphor for how to deal with shame. Lewis compared shame to hot coffee. If we spill hot coffee on our skin we are burned, scalded, and feel disgusting. However, if we drink coffee we are warmed, nourished, and energized. When we avoid shame or wallow in shame, it becomes like spilled coffee. When we handle the stigma that may exist over disordered eating in the ways that are outlined in Scripture, then even our weaknesses draw us closer to Christ, remind us of the necessity of the cross, and give us a testimony to share.

David Powlison gives seven indicators that progress is being made with sin (bold text only). These are discussed to give you a more robust understanding of progress than merely counting the number of good eating days. As you read these consider how each point helps you see and/or maintain progress even when you are tempted towards disordered eating.

1. **Decrease in Frequency of Sin:** Progress does mean that we should sin less; trust and rest in God more. As you implement these materials in the context of loving community and wise medical advisement, there should be noticeable and quantifiable decreases in the frequency of binging, comfort eating, and restricting behaviors. A holistic plan to combat disordered eating lived with the encouragement-accountability of friends disempowers the shame and sense of inevitableness that fuels disordered eating.
2. **Repenting More Quickly:** Progress means that when sin leads us to disordered eating habits we will respond to those occasions differently. Quick repentance is the key to stopping a relapse. No longer will you give into the mindset, “If I’ve already been bad, I might as well enjoy it.” Your conversational comfort in going to God in repentance should be increasing (review step four). We should now be convinced, “The quicker I am honest, the quicker I will be free.”
3. **A Change in Battleground:** Progress should mean that you see an advance in your battle against sin; from behaviors and belief to its core fortress—your heart commitments. This is why we changed the journal tool you’re using in chapter six from the one introduced in chapter three. These changes should excite you. This realization is what allowed Paul to

say "I am the chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15) without shame. He was excited to take his battle with sin to its core. While each new battleground may require different strategies and durations of time to win, there should be a joy as you see God's kingdom penetrating new territory in your soul.

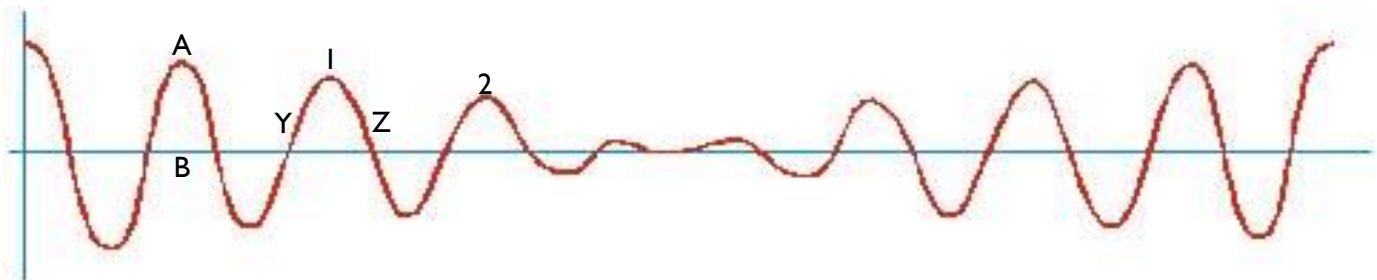
4. **Having a Greater Sense of Need for Christ's Mercy and Grace:** Progress that does not persistently realize its reliance upon Christ, degenerates into pride and becomes a stronghold for the enemy; especially for those who struggled with over-restricting, this will be a temptation. The enemy may use this stronghold as the basis for generating new expectations or failures that tempt us to retreat back to our disordered eating behaviors. The point is not to try to predict where every new challenge will come from, but to remain humble and reliant upon God regarding whatever challenge may arise.
5. **Increase accountability and honesty:** Progress means that you do not need a "reason" to be honest and things do not have to be "that bad" in order for you to have accountability. In many ways, this variable is one of the primary, practical expressions of humility. Humble people refuse to fight sin alone and refuse to trust their own hearts apart from the community of caring, Christian friends (Heb. 3:12-14).
6. **Not Responding to Difficulty with Disordered Eating:** Difficulty is the time when progress is most clear. When we forget this, we become discouraged by difficulty and this discouragement adds to our temptation. Recognize that when difficulty comes (i.e., conflict, stress, setbacks, etc...) this will be a time when your progress will be most evident. Realizing this should help you maintain the will to persevere during these challenges.
7. **Learning to Love and Consider the Interest of Real People:** This is the epitome of progress because it is the fulfillment of the whole law of God (Gal. 6:2). The opposite of disordered eating is not merely healthy eating habits. The opposite of disordered eating is the emotional freedom to engage genuinely with real people in the ups-and-downs of real life with an accurate self-perception. A healthy relationship with food means we no longer live to meet an ideal or to comfort suffering but to engage authentic relationships as a way to assist people to love-enjoy God more.

There is another way we can think about measuring our progress with disordered eating. We can look at markers of reliance upon God in the moment of struggle or we can consider a multi-dimensional way of measuring the decreasing size of our temptations. We want to do both; we want to increase our reliance upon God in the midst of the experience (criteria above) and we want to decrease the size of our temptation in as many ways as possible (criteria below).

As you face the ebb-and-flow in your relationship with food and self-perception, we want you to look for three markers of progress with temptation: intensity, duration, and frequency. Even when you're struggling with temptation, look for these markers as evidences of God's grace. To help you make sense of what growth looks like practically, imagine a sound wave (see the illustration below). A sound wave can be measured three ways:

- Intensity (height: A to B)
- Duration (width: Y to Z)
- Frequency (peak to peak: 1 to 2)

Our temptation to disordered eating can be measured in the same three categories. This now gives you three ways that you can begin to measure progress with your struggle. Is your temptation less intense? Does your temptation last for briefer periods of time? Are your temptations less frequent? Your journals should provide a fairly objective basis of comparison for how these changes have already begun to occur since you began this study.



*Illustration: Disordered Eating Temptation and Sound Wave Comparison*

To provide some encouragement consider the following "life disruption score" (LDS). LDS is an arbitrary statistic, but it highlights a valid point. Let's assume that the intensity, duration, and frequency of your temptations were maxed out on a 1 to 10 scale. That would create a LDS score of 1,000.

$$10 \text{ (intensity)} \times 10 \text{ (duration)} \times 10 \text{ (frequency)} = 1,000$$

Now let's assume that you are able to decrease the impact of each variable only by two increments. How much do you think that would improve your LDS score?

$8 \times 8 \times 8 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$  (yes, you have to do the math)

Are you surprised at what a small amount of progress in each area can do? It is not just a math trick. It is the grace of God. If our sanctification (spiritual, relational, and emotional maturity) required a level of effort that matched the impact of our sin, that would be self-atonement. What it takes is dying to self and wisely living for God's glory by relying on God's grace. When that starts, the momentum of Heaven is at our back. Each step of faith is caught up in the current of God's grace.

You might ask, “What is the variable that makes this work?” The answer is hope. When we begin to see that we can, by God's grace, have victory over our temptations, we gain hope. We feel less powerless. Disordered eating thrives in an environment of perceived-futility. Once we gain gospel-hope, much of the bondage of sin is broken.

### Looking for Progress

Now that you have a more complete picture of what progress is, you need to do a thorough examination of your life to determine how well this progress is being actualized in various parts of your life. In the material below you will examine the key relationships (who?), times (when?), locations (where?), and activities (what?) in which progress should be becoming increasingly evident.

It is important that as you assess these areas that you are as honest about them as you have been with everything else in this study. It would be easy to allow change-fatigue to tempt you to become less authentic with others or honest with yourself. However, if you treat non-crisis sin differently than you treat crisis sin, then it will become a crisis situation again.

#### Inspection Area One: Who?

**Spouse:** If you are married, then your spouse is either a significant asset or liability in your pursuit of a healthy relationship with food. Your spouse likely shares more space and meals with you than anyone. Your spouse will be more affected by changes in your eating habits than anyone. If you haven't already, begin to share your journey with them.

If marriage enrichment is needed to create a home environment that is more God-honoring or home systems that are more-functional-less-stressful, the “Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage” enrichment seminars are available for guidance in the areas of foundations, communication, finances, decision making, and intimacy at [bradhambrick.com/gcm](http://bradhambrick.com/gcm).

**Individual Person:** Are there particular people who trigger heightened disordered eating temptations for you?

If you have safety concerns, it is advised that you seek guidance from a supervisor, administrator, teacher, or other suitable authority figure over the relationship. If the relationship does not have a suitable overseer, then seeking the guidance of a pastor or counselor is advised. The book *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship* by Leslie Vernick is also recommended.

If the struggle is rooted in insecurity rather than safety, then learning to vocalize those concerns, learning social skills to overcome points of insecurity, or becoming less dependent upon this individual's approval are likely advisable. The resources below address various aspects of these concerns.

- *When People Are Big and God Is Small* by Ed Welch is good for relationships with a codependent dynamic.
- *The Peacemaker* by Ken Sande is good for those who are intimidated by conflict.
- *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* by Paul Tripp and Tim Lane outlines normal relational expectations.
- *Picture Perfect* by Amy Baker describes how to handle perfectionistic expectations of yourself.

**Group:** If your temptations toward disordered eating are attached to particular groups of people (i.e., those perceived to have more status than you, those whose appearance you rank higher, those who are different from you in some way you deem significant, etc...), then you need to examine the motivation and history for that reaction.

Generally these temptations triggered by a group can be attributed to (a) an idolatrous over-valuing of certain “desired” attributes and social roles, (b) aspects of an abusive personal history that changed your instinctual response to those who remind you of the abusive experience, or (c) a prejudicial response towards a particular group of people.

If your temptation is strongly influenced by a history of abuse, then it is recommended that you utilize a resource such as counseling or one of the books listed below to help you overcome these responses.

- *On the Threshold of Hope* by Diane Langberg
- *Mending the Soul* by Steven R. Tracy
- *Is It My Fault?* by Justin and Lindsey Holcomb

If your group-related temptation is rooted in idolatry or prejudice, then it is recommended that you take to heart the truths found in the passage below.

**Read Galatians 3:28-29.** Strong emotional reactions based upon group identification reveal that we are valuing as “most essential” things that are not “most important” about a person. Our reaction reveals our preferences have become a strong measuring system. We sin when we deem people (individuals or groups) as safe-unsafe or good-bad without knowledge of whether our assessment is true. We must allow the gospel, rather than our fears, to be the lens through which we see people.

**Role:** Sometimes our emotional reactions have less to do with a particular person than it does with the dynamic of the relationship or the responsibilities we bear in a particular position. If a particular role is preventing you from experiencing greater freedom from disordered eating habits, then it is important to discern whether it is because of (a) inadequate training or preparation to fulfill that role, or (b) the weight-significance that you place upon that role.

If a lack of training or preparation for a particular role creates the angst that prompts temptation, then ask yourself the questions, “What training do I need?” and “How could I begin to pursue it?” Much of this study has prompted you to be proactive towards life struggles rather than trying to emotionally manage them with food. Continue in that with how you seek the training you need to be more comfortable in the role generating stress.

If you are over-valuing a particular role in a way that makes your life imbalanced, then you will have to wrestle with your priorities and values. Imbalanced priorities will crash even the best of systems; meaning, however excellent your step six plan for change may be, it will migrate back towards what you previously knew unless your values change. In this scenario, the type of insights that you gained in step three on motives will be important focal points for your accountability relationships.

**Read Ephesians** and fill in the chart below. The message of Ephesians can be summarized as “Don’t be who you were.” As you read Ephesians, pay special attention to columns one and three with old identity and new identity contrasts. You may find other old identity versus new identity contrasts. Add those to your chart. After making that list, go back and capture the experience of each identity – particularly as you have experienced in your spiritual maturation. An example is given for “far off” versus “brought near” to help you get started.

Who I Was Before Christ	My Experience	Who I Am In Christ	My Experience
Dead (2:1-10)		Alive	
Children of Disobedience (2:2; 5:1)		Adopted Children	
Far Off (2:11-22)	Feared people; felt rejected	Brought Near	Secure in Christ, willing to be vulnerable
The Least (3:7-13)		A Minister of God's Grace	
Morally Confused (4:14-19)		Lovingly Confident	
Old Man (4:20-24)		New man	
Crude (4:29-32)		Thankful	
Idolaters (5:3-6)		Set Apart	

Darkness (5:7-14)		Light	
Fools (5:15-17)		Wise	
Drunkard (5:18-21)		Filled with the Spirit	

**Inspection Area Two: When?**

**Time of Day/Week/Month:** Try to pay attention to whether temptation emerges at predictable times in the rhythms of your life. Are there regular points in your day, week, or month when the struggle is stronger? If the answer is yes, then ask yourself, “What type of rhythm best accounts for this – sleep cycle, work load, social interaction, meal times, financial pay cycles, hormonal cycles, etc...?”

If your disordered eating is linked to biological or time-related rhythms, then it would be wise to consult with a physician (if you have not already) who could help identify how to regulate the body functions that account for these changes in mood.

If your temptations are linked to behavioral or social rhythms, then, at the very least, you need to examine your life management systems. How well do you manage time and money? How willing are you to say “no” to over-commitments? How assertive are you in unhealthy relationships? If you find your mismanagement is rooted in bad priorities, which is often the case, then repent and commit to change. If the mismanagement is rooted in ignorance commit to learn and change.

Some resources that might be of benefit in this area are listed below.

- Time management – [bradhambrick.com/burnout](http://bradhambrick.com/burnout)
- Financial management – [bradhambrick.com/gcmfinances](http://bradhambrick.com/gcmfinances)
- Recommendations on the relational aspects are provided in the sections above

**Season:** Seasonal or annual rhythms can be similar to day-week-month rhythms. Our eating habits and appetites tend to change with the seasons. This is true for everyone, but can be concerning for those who have worked hard to stabilize their eating patterns.

The holidays and similar special occasions can also be an important time to think ahead about. Food can be central at these social gatherings. When you know these times are coming—which is a good thing about holidays and special occasions, they’re predictable—talk with people in your support network about how you plan to face them.

**Energy Level:** Fatigue has a clear and direct impact on our food consumption. When we are tired we eat more either to stay awake or to get an energy boost. The questions below are meant to help you assess if your lifestyle is setting you up to have a consistent energy level, thereby reducing your level of food-related temptations.

- Are you managing your life so that you have time and the mental freedom to get adequate sleep?
- Are you eating a healthy diet so that your body has the nutrition it needs to be nutritionally balanced?
- Are you getting cardiovascular exercise to help your body eliminate the chemical by-products of stress?
- Are you engaging with activities you enjoy so that your morale for a healthy life remains high?
- Are you using caffeine or other stimulants to offset unhealthy sleep habits?
- Can you thrive for the next decade if you live like you have for the last week? Month?

**Before / After:** The before/after might be an event (i.e., presentation, visit to family, etc...) or interaction (i.e., conflict, interview, etc...) that are stressful or a “let down” compared to your expectations. Learning to manage anticipation, disappointment, and achievement are important parts of maintaining a healthy relationship with food.

*Anticipation* – looking forward to a future event marked by uncertainty – is a frequent trigger for unhealthy eating habits.

*Disappointment* – looking back at a past event that fell short of one’s preferences – is another frequent trigger for unhealthy eating habits.

*Achievement* may be a trigger based on the fact that we think the “reward” should be consuming a quantity of food that is unhealthy or a type of food which it is harder for us to express self-control. It is not bad for food to be part of our reward system, but we need to be aware of the temptations that may arise.

**Life Transitions:** Major life transitions can also be times of emotional disorientation. Leaving for college, empty nest, first “real job,” becoming a parent / grandparent, mid-life crisis, retirement, and similar transitions impact us in at least two ways: (1) they cause us to question our identity, and (2) they make it hard for us to know how we “should” feel.

As you examine how prepared you are to sustain the progress you’ve made, consider whether there are any major transitions in your near future. If there are, then there are at least three recommended ways to prepare:

1. Expect some level of emotional disorientation. Don’t allow surprise to magnify the disruption.
2. Begin now introducing this into conversations with your support network.
3. Get guidance from others who have already faced this type of transition; especially those who have navigated this kind of transition while struggling with a comparable pattern of disordered eating.

**Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.** “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven (v. 1).” God is not annoyed that you have to consider how these time-factors impact your relationship with food. God is not tapping his foot wondering when you’re going to get back to “important work.” God is as, if not more, concerned with your health as he is your productivity. For God your productivity is merely an indicator of your health. Healthy people living out the gospel change the world. So God wants you to take the time to ensure your long-term health so that you can enjoy your ongoing role in advancing his kingdom.

### Inspection Area Three: Where?

**Home:** There are dynamics to home-life that are distinct from other relationships. Home is where we eat many of our meals and snacks. Home is the easiest place to hide our actions because it is so familiar and contains our private spaces. Home is a place of many associations that come with strong memories. Home is a place of many responsibilities that are not present in other relationships. Home is a place of down time and comfort-seeking behaviors (healthy and unhealthy). Home is, ideally, a place of refuge we return to from the stresses of life.

You can quickly begin to see how home will either be a great protection from or contributor to our patterns of disordered eating; and why it is hard for home to be a neutral influence for these behaviors.

What are the aspects of your home-life (routine and physical layout) that contribute to your disordered eating habits?

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What are the aspects of your home-life (routine and physical layout) that help alleviate your disordered eating habits?

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How or when can you refine or alter those aspects that contribute to your disordered eating habits?

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If your home-life has significant influence on your disordered eating habits, ask a friend from your support network or a counselor to review your answers to the questions above. Be sure that you are assessing what changes are possible and how to best accomplish them well. If disordered eating habits have been your “normal” experience, then it is likely that you may miss or over-under estimate the impact of potential changes.

**Work / School:** Outside of our homes, work or school is where we spend the most time and energy. Our occupation or education is usually how we answer the second standard question of social protocol – “What do you do?” Our sense of accomplishment and identity, for better or worse, often emerges from these domains.

If you experience significant uncertainty and dissatisfaction with life based on your work or selecting the schooling that would help you connect with a satisfying career, then the resources below may help you discern how to connect your vocation with God’s general call to advance his kingdom in a way that is more purposeful and satisfying.

- *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* by Tim Keller
- *The Gospel at Work* by Sebastian Traeger and Greg D. Gilbert
- *Step by Step* by James Petty (not about vocation, but excellent book on the decision making process)

If your stress related to work or school is tied more to the social dynamics, then the evaluations you made in the “Who?” portions of this chapter are likely to provide the guidance you need.

**Activity:** Like relationships, particular activities can become triggers for various temptations and insecurities. The weight that we place on our performance in particular activities can become so significant that it becomes a “reason” to act out. How we perform in a sporting event, on an exam, at a task at work, in front of particular people, or during an once-in-a-lifetime moment activity can become the measure of who we are.

This emotional reaction loses touch with reality. You existed before any activity. You exist during any activity. You will exist after any activity; even death. When we live as if one moment will define our life we are living a lie. God is better and more faithful than that.

In financial negotiations, people are advised to “never lose their walk-away power.” When they want something so badly they cannot walk away, they will not get a good deal. Similarly, in emotional regulation “never lose your walk-away power.” When a moment becomes so large that you believe your future hangs on it, you will be emotionally crippled and compromised in how you handle temptation.

**Read Luke 9:23-25 and Matthew 6:33.** God does not want to withhold any good thing from you (Psalm 84:11), but God also does not want you to be owned by any good thing (1 Cor. 10:23). When an activity becomes the source of your disordered eating temptation, then that is a strong indicator that this line has been crossed. Your joy will be greater in any activity when you are content in God without that activity.

#### Inspection Area Four: What?

**Entertainment:** One of the things we glean from our entertainment preferences is a sense of the ideal: the ideal figure based upon our favorite movie star or an ideal day based upon our hobby. Ideals can either be very good or very bad. Often, when we’ve had a prolonged struggle with disordered eating, they can be really bad.

If we thought we could live up to our ideal figure, we starved ourselves and exercised excessively to make it happen. If we didn’t think we could meet our ideal, we gave up being a good steward of our body and begin to over-indulge as a form of comfort-seeking behavior or to rebel against the ideal.

Our entertainment habits usually come with certain eating habits. These habits may be directly tied to the activity or mindlessly going on in the background. Either way, as we seek to be a good steward of our body, we will likely have to examine how our enjoyment of these interests will be affected by our God-honoring eating habits.

List: What forms of entertainment or hobbies do you frequently engage? \_\_\_\_\_

Reflect: What role does food – eating in over-indulging or calorie burning if over-restricting – play in these interests? \_\_\_\_\_

Plan: What would a healthy relationship with food look like with each of your interests? \_\_\_\_\_

**Albatross:** “Albatross” here refers to occasions that deviate from your “regular” schedule; those occasions for which your instincts and habits may not be well-suited. “Albatross” moments are often “more opportune times” (Luke 4:13) that Satan uses to regain a foothold in our life. Perfectionists often take comfort in routine and, therefore, can find these kinds of moments more emotionally disruptive.

Remember: What are a couple of occasions when an unexpected moment resulted in reverting to disordered eating habits?

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Reflect: How do we typically respond to an unexpected activity or free time? \_\_\_\_\_

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Plan: If you experience temptation in an unexpected moment, what is a wise response plan? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Evaluating Your Implementation

The chart on the next page is meant to help you assess how well your life restructuring plan is prepared to adapt to changes in each area of your life.

- The first column corresponds with the major headings and subheadings of this chapter.
- The second column is for you to identify the areas of needed change.
- The next three columns correlate with the "sound wave" criteria for measuring progress.
- The final column is to make notes about changes that need to be made to your life restructuring plan.

You will likely need more space to write than this document provides. This document is meant to help you sketch out general modifications to your life restructuring plan. If beneficial, these brief notes could be expanded in a larger document.

The primary value of this tool is as a conversation outline with your counselor, pastor, or accountability partner. Allow this to be an instrument that teaches you the value of regularly examining life with those who care about you and are committed to pursuing God with you.

A PDF copy of this document can be found at [bradhambrick.com/healthy](http://bradhambrick.com/healthy).

#### **Accountability Focus (IMPLEMENT):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly and to confront any contradiction between your words and life.

- When are times when this information on relapse would have been helpful? What would I have done differently?
- What evidence have I seen of each of the points of progress listed in this step (seven criteria and wave diagram)?
- What did I learn as I evaluated each of the areas listed in the "Looking for Progress" section?





### STEWARDSHIP OF LIFE AND BODY PLAN IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION

	Improvement in Intensity	Improvement in Duration	Improvement in Frequency	Needed Changes to Plan
<b>WHO?</b>				
Spouse				
Person 1				
Person 2				
Person 3				
Person 4				
Group 1				
Group 2				
Group 3				
Role 1				
Role 2				
Other				
<b>WHEN?</b>				
Time 1				
Time 2				
Time 3				
Season				
Energy Level				
Energy Level				
Before/After				
Before/After				
Life Transition				
Other				
<b>WHERE?</b>				
Home				
Work				
Activity 1				
Activity 2				
Activity 3				
Other				
Other				
<b>WHAT?</b>				
Entertainment				
Entertainment				
Entertainment				
Entertainment				
Albatross				
Albatross				
Albatross				
Other				

## Chapter 8

### “Tasting the Joy of Eating to Live Rather than Living to Eat” PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me.

**“I can see God’s faithfulness over the last [time since beginning this study].  
As I have experienced victory, my temptation has changed [describe]  
and my ability to focus on God in non-crisis times has been stretched [examples].  
I have come to realize that ‘healthy’ means more than a balanced diet.  
God has an entirely different agenda for my life [explain] than what I knew.  
I am learning to enjoy it and be comfortable in it.”**

**Memorize:** James 1:12-13 (ESV), “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Blessed” – The place where we experience the fullness of God’s blessing is *with God* more than *outside trials*.
- “Remains steadfast” – We do not have to “overcome” or “conquer.” We are merely called to remain faithful.
- “Under trial” – The temptations that call us back to our old eating habits would be among these trials.
- “Crown of life” – The “life” promised by the desires for thinness or comfort eating are offered to us in Christ.
- “Let no one say” – If unhealthy food rules convince us to turn from God, they separates us from our source of hope.

### Teaching Notes

“Negative body image is known to be the most difficult symptom to treat and the last to heal in recovery from eating disorder... Our goal is not that you stop caring altogether about your appearance, but that you come to accept what you can and can’t change without compromising your health or betraying your soul (p. 240-241).” Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*

“I’m at my goal weight and in the most dangerous place for a dieting success story. Hitting your goal weight is a blessing entangled with the curse. The curse being the assumption that freedom now means returning back to all those things we’ve given up for the past months (p. 177).” Lysa Terkeurst in *Made to Crave*

“I was hungry. I walked over to the food, and I ate a reasonable amount. I didn’t try to show Ed who was boss by eating a huge amount of food. And after I ate, I had a great time. The party became about the people, and the food became part of the background (p. 56).” Jenni Schaeffer in *Life Without Ed*

“Kathy is leaving a legacy for her children. She is breaking a family pattern in teaching her children to feel emotional pain and deal with it. What a gift to give to the next generation (p. 148)!... Giving up weight and food obsession involves moving into unfamiliar territory where wait no longer protects you from attention, intimacy, and vulnerability (p. 228).” Stephen Arterburn and Linda Mintle in *Lose It for Life*

“Most everyone who recovers goes through periods of feeling discouraged and hopeless. After all, a change which requires you to completely reevaluate your current lifestyle, overcome significant obstacles, step out of your familiar patterns, and proceed into an uncertain future, could not occur without some self-doubt, fear, and setbacks along the way (p. 27).” Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*

“I have learned I am stronger than I think and that strength isn’t in staying thin, but in getting healthy (p. 131).” Gregory Jantz in *Hope, Help, & Healing for Eating Disorders*

### Embedded Study

Are you enjoying where you are? Even if you are not “there yet,” can you identify aspects of this part of your journey that make it significantly better than where you’ve been? Unless you can answer “yes” to this question and take delight in that answer, perseverance will be grueling.

Striving without delighting is exhausting.

One of the keys to persevering, especially with a struggle as recurrent as food-related struggles (with which we have daily interaction) is the ability to enjoy an imperfect, in-process life. God does not just delight in you at the culmination of your sanctification. God delights in you right now. He invites you to agree with him; where he has you in this process is good. This provides the emotional stability and security to engage an unhealthy relationship with food.

With that as our starting point, let’s ask the question, “What does it look like to continue to follow God from *here*?” Chances are that you’ve put so much energy into getting “here” that it is not entirely clear how to prepare yourself for life after an intensive focus on change. What do you do when your life is not focused on changing your relationship with food? That is the topic of this chapter and the next.

In this chapter we will look at post-temptation temptations—those temptations that uniquely arise when we’re doing “better.” In order to help you finish strong, we will look at three subjects for this stage in your journey.

1. Common Lies and Distractions
2. Victory Changes Temptation
3. Preparing for Transition

### Common Lies and Distractions

Strangely “better” is not always easier than “worse.” You likely knew the terrain of an unhealthy relationship with food better than you know the terrain of living in a healthy relationship with food. That is the purpose of this section and the next—to prepare you for how challenges frequently mutate as you leave an old lifestyle for a new one.

One of the most effective ways that temptation mutates is by introducing new lies (or revised versions of old lies) and distractions. As you read through this section, you should be preparing to listen to yourself. When you hear yourself thinking these kinds of thoughts, you should consider that a warning sign indicating that you should talk with your support network. The discussion after each lie is intended to give you truth and perspective to counter these disruptive and unhealthy messages.

**“I deserve a break. I have been good for a long time now.”** When we talk about taking a “break” from our battle with sin it sounds very legitimate, but it leads to a return to sin. If you feel like you need a break, then it is important to make sure you are living a balanced, sustainable life. “Break” language indicates we feel like we’re “on a diet” rather than “embracing a lifestyle.” We’ve tried to avoid a “diet” mindset from the beginning.

Often one of the causes of an unhealthy relationship with food is unrealistic expectations about what you should be doing. Too often this same mindset is applied to recovery from disordered eating; an individual puts as much excessive effort into “getting healthy” as they did into the goals that drove them to become unhealthy. At best, this approach creates short-term relief. Wanting a break from “being good” is an indicator this pattern may exist in your life.

We can set ourselves up for relapse by picturing a “godly” life we cannot maintain. When this happens we feel justified in taking a break from what we perceive to be God’s expectations and move towards sin as our relief. Unrealistic expectations are the kryptonite of perseverance.

If, however, you assess your expectations and determine they are realistic but hard, then gaining the strength to endure and enjoy this lifestyle is what perseverance is all about (Rom. 5:3-5; James 1:2-4). Be sure to ask your support network to verify your assessment and for prayer or encouragement in this process of growth.

**“Now I can get back to focusing on what is important to me.”** This distraction buys into the notion that overcoming sin is merely about exchanging an unhealthy form of self-focus to a more functional form of self-focus. Hopefully you have already learned that legitimate pleasures are an essential part of resisting sin of any kind, but have also learned that the “focus” of our lives (i.e., what we worship and gives us meaning) cannot be self-serving.

Sin, even in the form of over-prioritized legitimate pleasures, will never remain self-serving. That is the way sin always likes to introduce itself, as your servant. But once it is allowed to move into your life, it mutates from servant to master. As you finish this study several hours per week may be added to your schedule; the time you’re no longer spending reading this notebook and reflecting. Be sure to use that time for God-centered, joyful living.

Chapter nine will help you think through that new (or renewed) life-orientation. The life God designed you to live will be incredibly satisfying; it will fit you perfectly because it emerges from how God designed you. So do not be concerned that “not focusing on what was important to you” will result in a drab life. God may give you back the same interests, but with a very different purpose and motivation (Matt. 6:33-34, Luke 9:23-24).

**“This is not working, because temptation is still present. No one else has to work this hard.”** Temptation only becomes easy (i.e., the sense of active-resisting dissipates) when you stop fighting. But as soon as the weight of temptation is removed by succumbing, the greater weights of guilt and consequence are placed on you.

“No man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good. A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of the German army by fighting against it, not by giving in. You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down... That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means—the only complete realist (p. 142).” *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis

Remind yourself that temptation is a sign of spiritual life. Only the dulling of one’s conscience can remove the sense of temptation in a sin-saturated culture. In a culture of excess we will perpetually be tempted to want “more” than a given moment, relationship, or salary can provide.

“When getting better makes you feel bad, it is hard to keep going, and many people stop trying altogether (p. 193).”  
Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*

Resisting temptation can make us tired. But you can now view this fatigue as a sign of growth; like the person whose muscles are tired after lifting weights. That is a very different experience than the exhaustion of a depressing-anxious relationship with food. Before you were experiencing the consequences of an imbalanced life (i.e., expectations, activities, values, etc...). What you are experiencing now is the fatigue of maintaining balance in a world that resists balance. The latter can be seen as a mark of God’s grace rather than evidence of being at odds with God’s design.

**“This is not worth it, because [insert desired outcome] is not happening.”** It is easy to want to be healthy so that... But, how we motivate ourselves is as important as what we accomplish with that motivation. Too often we want a healthy relationship with food for selfish reasons.

Removing the distraction of over-reliance on food for comfort can add to productivity. Alleviating the self-consciousness of legalistic food rules can free us to engage in relationships more authentically. But when these variables become the measure of whether our efforts to emotionally honor God are “worth it,” we have again mistaken the cause of our emotions for the cure.

If you are asking, “When will I get what I wanted?” remember what it was like to be in bondage to your food rules. You now have a better life and the opportunity for your productivity and relational quality to grow; before you had neither (quality of life nor opportunity to grow).

Counter this form of distraction with gratitude for the many ways God has proven faithful in your life. Use the increased confidence in God’s faithfulness generate a desire that God would produce whatever fruit in your life he deems as most beneficial for you.

**“[Blank] situation is now more important than my need to be healthy.”** Rarely would we say this out loud, or even allow ourselves to think it in these words. But this is the lie we believe when we place ourselves back in unwise or compromising situations for “practical” reasons. “Practical” becomes a user-friendly synonym for “more important.”

- “I need to work more hours (get less sleep and spend less time with family) because I really need to get ahead.”
- “I know this person is not emotionally healthy for me, but I miss them and think I’m strong enough to handle it.”
- “I know I was consumed by running a marathon but I think I can enjoy it without being consumed by it now.”

When you find yourself trying to justify altering or relaxing the changes you made in chapters six and seven, recall this lie as a red flag in your mind. This is why it was important for you to document the changes you made throughout this study. It needs to be clear to you when you are “un-changing” the changes that provided emotional freedom.

Those changes were not made to help you become “strong enough” to walk on enemy turf. Those changes were made because our enemy is stronger than any of us and can only be resisted on the home turf of God’s wisdom. Do not fall prey to thinking that victory won under the protection of God’s wisdom can persist when we fall back into the arena of worldly wisdom commonly called “common sense.”

## Victory Changes Temptation

Galatians 6:1-5 speaks to both the temptation of those who are “caught in any transgression” and the temptation of those “who are spiritual.” Anyone who is in the latter category has spent time in the former; there are not saints who have not and do not struggle with sin. As you have progressed through this study, you have begun to move from one category (bondage) to the other (freedom). Below are four new temptations that emerge as we experience victory over sin.

**Disappointment from New Heights:** Poverty hurts differently when you’ve known wealth. As you live in a healthy relationship with food, recurrences of disordered eating habits may create a stronger response of guilt than you knew before.

“The more time I spend in recovery, the worst each relapse gets (p. 136).” Jenni Schaeffer in *Life Without Ed*

When disordered eating was “normal,” it was less startling. It can be tempting to allow this intensified guilt to fuel a major sense of failure and begin berating yourself. You must recognize (intellectually and emotionally) that God’s grace is sufficient and necessary for falls from any “height” (in quotation because this is our category more than God’s).

A protection from this temptation is to remember that spiritual maturity does not mean independence from God’s grace (see next point), but a greater reliance upon it. **Read I Timothy 1:12-20.** Notice that towards the end of Paul’s ministry he saw himself as more of a sinner than at the beginning (Acts 9). Paul uses this realization as an encouragement to young Timothy (v. 18-20) because he realizes it is the reliance upon grace that is the essence of his message—the gospel (v. 16).

**Maturity and Independence:** We often are deceived into thinking that spiritual maturity should cause us to be less reliant upon God. “So God can focus on the people who are where we used to be,” we might think. This is a most dangerous mutation in our temptation. It is like a great oak tree thinking its height means it no longer requires the soil. As soon as it detaches from the soil, its height only serves to quicken its fall and increase the damage that is done.

Maturity can only be expressed as greater dependence upon God. Maturity requires this humility like trains require tracks. **Read Galatians 2:18-21.** Notice that Paul warns against rebuilding what was torn down (v. 18). This is exactly what a false view of maturity does. It is from this warning that Paul lays down the principle that maturity is less of me and more of Christ (v. 20). Like a caterpillar matures into a butterfly, we are called to mature into something different from what we started. We started “grounded and crawling” in our independence from God (the essence of sin). We mature into those who embrace dependence upon God as the wings God intended to provide us with freedom. The caterpillar must die so the butterfly can soar.

**Pressure of New Opportunities:** With growth comes opportunity, and not necessarily because we are seeking it. Managing your life and emotions well almost inevitably brings more “opportunities.” We may get confused about whether a particular opportunity is God “opening a door” or Satan “setting a trap.” But we can be sure with maturity will come opportunities to offer others the hope we have received (II Cor. 1:3-5).

To help yourself see this change as a blessing, begin keeping a list of new responsibilities and opportunities God brings into your life. Give thanks for them regularly. Remember they are tokens of God’s grace; not burdens. Remember that gaining a healthy relationship with food is not the end of your journey.

Your unhealthy relationship with food was sapping your energy to do things God called you to do, stealing the time in which you would do them, and undermining the confidence that God would bless your efforts. Be discerning about not overloading on these opportunities that you lose the balance you’ve created. But don’t allow this discernment to make you passive towards changing the world around you (more on this in chapter nine).

**Having “Answers” Instead of Questions:** As you mature and receive new opportunities, you will likely be looked to for more answers. Your responses to the challenges of life are becoming serene and hopeful, so people will want to know how you would approach their challenges. You begin to get the privilege of joining people at earlier stages in their journey of responding to disordered eating in healthier ways.

This is a time when pride can return in more subtle and socially-acceptable ways. We must never think that because a question is brought to us that we are the source of its answer. We must never mistake the glory of the answer for the glory of the vessel (2 Cor. 4:7-18) that has been entrusted with carrying that answer.

**Read James 3:1-12.** Notice that James is writing to Christians coming out of a struggle (dispersion by religious persecution; see James 1:1) who are now rising to the position of teacher (v. 1). He warns them about the temptation and power of their words in this new role. The message is that the awesome power of influence (bridle and fire images) should keep humble those who are coming into new positions of influence.

## Preparing for Transition

This third section of chapter eight may feel like a change of pace. That is because it no longer has disordered eating as its focal point. This section asks the question, “What should my life begin to look like now that it’s not focused on changing an unhealthy relationship with food?”

**Make sure you are in a small group.** Trust takes time. If you have been going through this material with a counselor or mentor, the baton of trust will soon be passed from those more formal-private relationships to more natural-authentic relationships. One-way helping relationships are not long-term healthy as your primary source of support and encouragement; which need to be experienced in two-way friendships.

“Research indicates that supportive relationships, whether with friends, family, helping professionals, or mentors, are key to helping you recover (p. 191).” Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*

The primary location in which this occurs is small groups. The lessons (cognitive and emotional) that God has taught you in the course of this study have been enhanced, protected, and applied largely because of the relationships in which you learned them. This is why it is wise for you to begin getting plugged into a general small group if you are not already. If you need help identifying which small group would be a good fit for you, talk with your counselor, mentor, or a church pastor.

Many of our small group leaders at The Summit Church have attended this training on “Gaining a Healthy Relationship with Food.” They care about the subject and are familiar with the content. It would be completely at your discretion whether to share with the leader why you chose their group.

**Learn accountability and encouragement on a broader scale.** Walking through this material with someone else may be the first time you have experienced ongoing, Christian accountability and encouragement. Accountability is not just for life-dominating struggles. It is part of God’s definition of “healthy.” People who do not have relationships in which they are honest about their struggles, seeking accountability and encouragement are people who are becoming “unhealthy.”

As you move from a counseling or mentoring relationship focused primarily upon disordered eating to a general small group, you may wonder what accountability and encouragement will look like now. The seven points below are meant to guide you in the kind of relationships you are looking to form with your small group.

1. Voluntary – Accountability is not something you have; it is something you do. You must disclose in order to benefit from the relationship. Hopefully, the positive experience you have had going through this material will encourage you to remain transparent and vulnerable.
2. Trusted – The other person(s) is someone you trust, admire their character, and believe has good judgment. You are encouraged to join a small group now so that you can build this trust before graduating from your formal counseling or mentoring relationship.
3. Mutual – Relationships that are one-sided tend to be short-lived. In the small group you will hear the weaknesses and struggles of others as you share your own. You will help carry their burdens as they help carry yours (Gal. 6:1-2).
4. Scheduled – Accountability that is not scheduled tends to fade. This is why small groups that meet on a weekly basis are an ideal place for accountability to occur. Everyone knows when to meet and has a shared expectation for how the accountability conversations will begin.
5. Relational – We want spiritual growth to become a lifestyle, not an event. This means that we invite accountability to be a part of our regular conversations, not just something that we do at a weekly meeting. It should mean that there are times when we are doing accountability and don’t realize it.
6. Comprehensive – Accountability that exclusively fixates on one subject tends to become repetitive and fade. It also tends to reduce “success” to trusting God in a single area of life.
7. Encouraging – Too often the word “accountability” carries the connotation of “sin hunt.” When that is the case, accountability is only perceived to be “working” when it is negative. However, accountability that lasts should celebrate growth in character as fervently as it works on slips in character. This means asking each other questions about discouragement in addition to questions about temptations.

**Have a plan for future study.** We walk forward. We drift backwards. For some time now you have been a part of an intentional, structured process. If you leave that structure without a continued plan for deepening your understanding and application of Scripture to the struggles of life, you will regress. Ephesians 5:15-16 calls us to intentionality; recognizing time minus direction equals decay not growth.

Step seven of this study referenced many resources that would be beneficial for you. Doubtless several of them sounded interesting to you. Go back and identify the one you believe you would most benefit from reading. If you cannot identify one that stands out, then it is recommended you study “Finding Your Identity, Security, and Confidence in Christ” ([bradhambrick.com/identity](http://bradhambrick.com/identity)) as a resource to help you solidify your progress.

This entire study has been filled with devotional Bible studies. If you have not been taking the time to read the passages and reflect on the devotional thoughts / questions that accompany them, consider using those as a guide for daily Bible reading. This will be a way to reinforce what you’ve learned in this study and further solidify the biblical basis for what you’ve learned.

**Make a formal transition plan.** Write out your transition plan.

- List the things that need to be in place before you “graduate” from your formal counseling or mentoring relationship.
- List the important practices you have begun in this study that you will need to maintain. Write out what the “yellow flags” (don’t wait for the red ones) would be that you should address seriously if they appear.

Review your plan with your counselor or mentor. Get their input on what needs to be added to the plan. In consultation with them, decide what aspects from that list need to be brought into the accountability conversation with your new small group before you graduate.

### **Accountability Focus (PERSEVERE):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly and to confront any contradiction between your words and life.

- Have I assessed and understand the new forms that temptation may take as I experience victory?
- Have I made and begun to implement as transition plan that is wise and comprehensive?

## Chapter 9

# “Food Simply Fueling the Life God Intended”

### STEWARD all of my life for God’s glory.

**“God has shown me great grace; grace greater than my sin.  
I am learning what it means to live out of my new identity in Christ.  
That has pushed me to ask the question,  
‘How can I be a conduit of God’s grace to others?’  
As I have sought God, examined my life, and consulted with fellow believers,  
I believe this [describe] is what it looks like for me to steward God’s grace now.”**

**Memorize:** James 3:16-18 (ESV), “For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Jealousy and selfish ambition” – Chances are emotions like these were what initially drove your disordered eating.
- “Will be disorder” – When emotions like these motivate us they inevitably produce disorder in our lives.
- “Wisdom” – Wisdom applied is what we’ve been seeking throughout this study. That is healthy.
- “Harvest” – When we live according to wisdom, we do not have to look to the future with dread or fear.
- “Sown in peace” – You should not be “sowing in peace” in the sense that you are content with your body.
- “Those who make peace” – We are salt and light in a body-obsessed culture by being body-content Christians.

### Teaching Notes

“I finally am at the place where I can truly say I want a better life more than I want to lose weight (p. 150)... If you have an eating disorder you are, on some level, living a superficial life. We’re not saying your life lacks meaning, but rather, you’ve lost track of the true meaning of life (p. 221).” Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb in *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder*

“I reached what I call fully recovered—a place of laughter, relationships, dreams, passions, fun, positive body image (in a perfectly imperfect body), and, of course, inevitable life challenges like overcoming perfectionism... I often say that I am fully recovered from my eating disorder but not from life (p. 198).” Jenni Schaeffer in *Life Without Ed*

“Protecting your health is the same thing as protecting the vehicle through which God wants to change the world (p. 45).” Gary Thomas in *Every Body Matters: Strengthening Your Body to Strengthen Your Soul*

“Food obsessions involve time and energy that take you away from other activities (p. 213).” Stephen Arterburn and Linda Mintle in *Lose It for Life*

“When food, weight, and body image consume your life, you have probably lost touch with what it means to enjoy life... Now that you’ve begun your journey toward health and wholeness, you can start to think about living—and enjoying life—again (p. 219).” Gregory Jantz in *Hope, Help, & Healing for Eating Disorders*

“We are seldom at a loss to describe what is wrong or bad in our lives or what it is like to be stuck. But we are often at a complete loss to describe what we want instead (p. 111).” Jenni Schaeffer in *Life Without Ed*



### Embedded Study

If the law of God can be summarized in a positive command, then we must end this study talking about how to “run to” God rather than merely how to “run from” sin. Life is not about what we avoid, but what pursue. How we run to God’s design for our life finds a unique expression in each person’s life. For this reason, you will do most of the writing in this chapter. It is your life that is being stewarded for God’s glory.

The goal is that you would find things that you could give yourself to more passionately than you once gave yourself to your food rules. But not just temporal, slightly healthier things that would quickly become the next edition of ruling desires; and not things that you give yourself to in private so that they foster selfishness and excess. Rather, eternally significant things that you give yourself to in a community of faith to maintain endurance, temper desire excess, and become an example to others.

**Read Luke 11:24-26.** This is a terrifying warning about removing sin without also replacing it with God’s purposes for your life. When we replace sin with a “God-ignoring healthy life” (contradiction acknowledged) we become very proud, and defensive about further change. Our idols (chapter three) become temporarily functional so the warning system of life consequences is muted. Then, when our idols cease to satisfy, and become disruptive again, we are less likely to return to God, the Bible, and the gospel because “they didn’t really work the first time.” We go looking for “deeper and more meaningful” solutions. Indeed, “the last state of that person is worse than the first (v. 26).”

**Read Ephesians 2:8-10.** In this study we have traveled through the Gospel (v. 8-9) to good works (v. 10). The nine steps are merely the gospel in slow motion. We are not now exiting the gospel in order to do good works, but cultivating the fruit of the gospel. Paul says that there are “good works” that “God prepared” for every believer and that these should define our daily lives (“that we should walk in them”) (v. 10). This should give you hope that there are answers to the questions you will be asked in this chapter. You have the confidence that comes from the promises of Scripture that God has a design for your life and wants you to know what it is.

As you read through and answer these nine questions, remember God’s patience and timing. There will be some aspects of God’s design that you can engage in immediately. But there will also be ways you want to serve God that will require you to mature more or be equipped before you are prepared to fulfill them. The main thing is to begin to have a vision for life that involves being God’s servant and actively engaging that vision where you are currently equipped.

**I. Am I willing to commit my life to whatever God asks of me?** This is a “do not pass go” question. If your answer is “no,” it will bias the answers you give to each subsequent question. Do not get lost in guilt or pretend that your answer is “yes” (both responses would lead you back into sin). Rather, identify the obstacle. What is the cost you are unwilling to pay? It may be that this subject becomes a key element in your “plan for future study” (chapter eight).

Are there specific things you believe God is asking of you? Be sure to record your thoughts on this question before reflecting on the subsequent questions.

**2. What roles have I neglected that God has placed me in?** The first part of being a good steward of one’s life is to fulfill one’s primary roles with excellence. When Paul says in Ephesians 5:17 that we are to “understand what the will of the Lord is,” he goes on to describe God’s design for major life roles (spouse, parent, child, and worker in 5:22-6:9).

**3. What are my spiritual gifts?** Stewarding your life for the glory of God involves utilizing the spiritual gifts God has given you. God gives spiritual gifts that coincide with the calling He places on each individual’s life. Read Romans 12:1-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:1-30. If you need further assistance discerning this, talk to a pastor about taking a spiritual gifts inventory.

**4. For what group of people (age, struggle, career, ethnic, etc...) am I burdened?** From God’s earliest covenant with people His intention was to bless us that we might be a blessing to others (Gen 12:2). By investing your life in those you have a burden for allows you to be other-minded and find joy in it.

**5. What am I passionate about?** At this point in the stewardship evaluation, you can begin to see Psalm 37:3-8 fulfilled in your life. What are the God-exalting “delights” in your life (v. 4)? What wholesome things can you give yourself to and you are more energized afterwards than before you started?

**6. With what talents or abilities has God blessed me?** These don’t have to be spiritual gifts. Read the amazing description of abilities God gave Bezalel and how he used those abilities to serve God (Exodus 31:1-11). Think through the skills and expertise you have accumulated in your life.

**7. What are my unique life experiences?** Both pleasant and unpleasant experiences should be listed. We are sometimes tempted to think that God can only use the good or spiritual experiences of our lives. God is glad to use our successes (Matt. 5:16), but God also delights in displaying His grace by transforming our low points for His glory (2 Cor. 1:3-5).

**8. Where do my talents and passions match up with the needs in my church and community?** We should seek to steward our lives in cooperation with our local church. God’s way of blessing and maturing those we serve is through the Body of Christ, the church. By identifying where your gifts, burdens, passions, and abilities fit within or expand your church’s ministries, you are maximizing the impact service can have on those you are seeking to bless.

**9. How would God have me bring these things together to glorify Him?** This is not a new question, but a summary question. Look back over what you have written. Talk about it with your Christian friends, family, mentor, or pastors. Dedicate a time to prayerfully ask God to give you a sense of direction. Then begin serving as a way to steward your life for God’s glory.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” Matthew 5:6

#### **Accountability Focus (STEWARD):**

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly and to confront any contradiction between your words and life.

- Are there any necessary changes I have omitted that would prevent me from taking this step?
- Is there advice or counsel I should seek before completing this step?

## Appendix A



### WHO I AM IN CHRIST

Adapted from Bob Kelleman, RPM Ministries ([www.rpmministries.org](http://www.rpmministries.org)) and, Excerpted from *Soul Physicians*.

<p><b>Salt of the Earth</b> Matthew 5:13</p> <p><b>Light of the World</b> Matthew 5:14</p> <p><b>A Disciple of Christ</b> Luke 14:27; John 8:31</p> <p><b>Christ's Witness</b> Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8</p> <p><b>Set Free From Sin</b> John 8:32, 36</p> <p><b>I Have Abundant Life</b> John 10:10</p> <p><b>I Have Peace</b> John 14:27; 16:33</p> <p><b>Clean in Christ</b> John 15:3</p> <p><b>Bearer of Lasting Fruit</b> John 15:4, 5, 8, 16;</p> <p><b>Completed in Christ</b> John 15:11</p> <p><b>Overcomer of the World</b> John 16:33</p> <p><b>Not of This World</b> John 17:16</p> <p><b>A Christian, "A Little Christ"</b> Acts 11:26</p> <p><b>Freely &amp; Fully Justified</b> Romans 3:24, 26, 28, 30</p> <p><b>Sanctified</b> 1 Corinthians 6:11</p> <p><b>A Saint</b> Philippians 1:1; 4:21, 22</p>	<p><b>Redeemed</b> Romans 3:24; Ephesians 1:7</p> <p><b>Credited with Christ's Righteousness</b> Romans 3:21-26; 4:3-24</p> <p><b>Dead to Sin</b> Romans 6:2</p> <p><b>Raised to New Life</b> Romans 6:4</p> <p><b>United with Christ in His Resurrection</b> Romans 6:5</p> <p><b>My Old Self is Crucified</b> Romans 6:6</p> <p><b>No Longer Sin's Slave</b> Romans 6:6-7</p> <p><b>Alive to God</b> Romans 6:11</p> <p><b>Not Under Law, but Under Grace</b> Romans 6:14</p> <p><b>A Slave to Righteousness</b> Romans 6:19</p> <p><b>No Longer a Sufferer of Condemnation</b> Romans 8:1</p> <p><b>Not Controlled by the Flesh, but Controlled by the Spirit</b> Romans 8:9</p> <p><b>Predestined to be Conformed to the Image of the Son</b> Romans 8:29</p> <p><b>More than a Conqueror in Christ</b> Romans 8:37</p>	<p><b>Competent to Disciple Others in Christ</b> Romans 15:14</p> <p><b>Sanctified by the Holy Spirit</b> Romans 15:16</p> <p><b>Acceptable to God in Christ</b> Romans 15:16</p> <p><b>Holy in Christ</b> Ephesians 5:26; Colossians 3:12</p> <p><b>Blameless in Christ</b> 1 Corinthians 1:8</p> <p><b>God's Fellow Worker</b> 1 Corinthians 3:9</p> <p><b>God's Field</b> 1 Corinthians 3:9</p> <p><b>God's Building</b> 1 Corinthians 3:9</p> <p><b>God's Sacred Temple</b> 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 6:16</p> <p><b>Washed in Christ</b> 1 Corinthians 6:11</p> <p><b>Bought and Redeemed with a Price</b> 1 Corinthians 6:20</p> <p><b>A Growing Reflection of the Lord's Glory</b> 2 Corinthians 3:18</p> <p><b>Renewed Inwardly Day by Day</b> 2 Corinthians 4:16</p> <p><b>A New Creation</b> 2 Corinthians 5:17</p>	<p><b>A Minister of Reconciliation</b> 2 Corinthians 5:18</p> <p><b>Christ's Ambassador</b> 2 Corinthians 5:20</p> <p><b>Christ's Spiritually Pure Virgin</b> 2 Corinthians 11:2</p> <p><b>Rescued From This Present Evil Age</b> Galatians 1:4</p> <p><b>Crucified with Christ</b> Galatians 2:20</p> <p><b>Redeemed from the Curse</b> Galatians 3:13-14</p> <p><b>Chosen to be Holy</b> Ephesians 1:4</p> <p><b>I Have God's Resurrection Power Actively Working in Me.</b> Ephesians 1:17-19</p> <p><b>Saved by Grace</b> Ephesians 2:5, 8</p> <p><b>Raised Up with Christ</b> Ephesians 2:6</p> <p><b>Seated with Christ in the Heavenly Realms</b> Ephesians 2:6</p> <p><b>Christ's Workmanship</b> Ephesians 2:10</p> <p><b>Prepared in Advance in Christ Jesus to do Good Works</b> Ephesians 2:10</p>
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**A Dwelling in Which  
God Lives by His Spirit**  
Ephesians 2:22

**Strengthened with  
Power by God's Spirit**  
Ephesians 3:16

**Rooted and  
Established in Love**  
Ephesians 3:17

**I Have Power to Grasp  
God's Great Love for Me.**  
Ephesians 3:18

**Filled to the Measure  
of All the Fullness of  
God in Christ**  
Ephesians 3:19

**New in the Attitude of  
My Mind in Christ**  
Ephesians 4:23

**Light in the Lord**  
Ephesians 5:8

**The Fruit of My Life is  
Goodness,  
Righteousness and  
Truth**  
Ephesians 5:9

**Cleansed**  
Ephesians 5:26

**Together with the Bride,  
I am Presentable,  
Radiant, Without Stain  
or Wrinkle or Any Other  
Blemish, But Holy and  
Blameless**  
Ephesians 5:27

**Blameless and Pure;  
a Child of God  
Without Fault**  
Philippians 2:15

**Conformed to His  
Image through  
Christ's Resurrection  
Power**  
Philippians 3:10

**My Citizenship is in  
Heaven**  
Philippians 3:20

**I Can Do All Things  
through Christ Who  
Strengthens Me**  
Philippians 4:13

**God Meets All My  
Needs through His  
Riches in Christ Jesus**  
Philippians 4:19

**Qualified to Share in the  
Inheritance of the Saints**  
Colossians 1:12

**Rescued from the  
Dominion of Darkness**  
Colossians 1:13

**Holy in God's Sight –  
Without Blemish, and  
Free From Accusation**  
Colossians 1:22

**Sin is Defeated and  
Disarmed in My Life**  
Colossians 2:14-15

**I Died with Christ to  
the World**  
Colossians 2:20

**My Life is Now Hidden  
with Christ in God**  
Colossians 3:3

**Blameless and Holy  
Before God's Presence**  
1 Thessalonians 3:13

**Sanctified by God  
Through and Through**  
1 Thessalonians 5:23

**Kept Blameless by  
God in My Whole  
Spirit, Soul and Body**  
1 Thessalonians 5:23

**God Placed Within Me  
His Spirit of Power,  
Love and Wisdom**  
2 Timothy 1:7

**A Good Soldier**  
2 Timothy 2:3-4

**A Victorious Athlete  
in Jesus Christ**  
2 Timothy 2:5

**A Disciplined, Hard-  
Working Farmer**  
2 Timothy 2:6

**Purified from Sin in  
and by Christ**  
Hebrews 1:3

**Saved Completely**  
Hebrews 7:25

**God's Law is in My Mind  
and Written on My Heart**  
Hebrews 8:10; 10:16

**My Conscience is  
Cleansed**  
Hebrews 9:14

**Set Free from Sin**  
Hebrews 9:15

**My Sins are Done  
Away With and Taken  
Away in and by Christ**  
Hebrews 9:26-27

**Cleansed Once for All  
- Guiltless**  
Hebrews 10:2

**Made Perfect Forever  
in and by Christ**  
Hebrews 10:14

**Redeemed from My  
Old Empty Way**  
1 Peter 1:18-19

**Purified by Faith  
in Christ**  
1 Peter 1:22

**Born Again of  
Imperishable Seed**  
1 Peter 1:23

**A Living Stone,  
Being Built into a  
Spiritual House**  
1 Peter 2:5

**Along with All the Saints,  
I am a Holy Priesthood**  
1 Peter 2:5

**Along with All the Saints,  
I am a Chosen People**  
1 Peter 2:9

**Along with All the  
Saints, I am a People  
Belonging to God**  
1 Peter 2:9-10

**Called Out of  
Darkness into Christ's  
Wonderful Light**  
1 Peter 2:9

**Through God's Divine  
Power, I Have Everything  
I Need for Life and  
Godliness**  
2 Peter 1:3

**I Have Escaped the  
Corruption in the  
World Caused by Evil  
Desires**  
2 Peter 1:4

**An Overcomer of the  
World, the Flesh and the  
Devil Because Greater is  
He Who is in Me, Than  
He who is in the World**  
1 John 4:4

**I Stand Before God's  
Glorious Presence  
without Fault and with  
Great Joy**  
Jude 24

**Freed from my Sins by  
Christ's Blood**  
Revelation 1:5

**Part of the Pure Bride  
of Christ – Clean,  
White and Righteous**  
Revelation 19:7-8, 14

## Appendix B

### How to Start a Conversation with Someone for Whom You Are Concerned

You may have come to this study out of concern for a friend or family member more than your own unhealthy relationship with food. If that is the case, then you are likely thinking, “I would love to have conversations like the ones in this study, but I don’t know how to get them started. When I’ve tried, my friend has gotten defensive and the conversations went nowhere.”

This challenge is real. You are not the only concerned friend or family member to have this experience. By the time an eating disorder has become severe enough to be noticed by others, it has usually generated a set of beliefs that result in thinking, “If you don’t support how I eat, then you don’t support-love me.” That makes starting a meaningful conversation on this subject very difficult, but vitally important.

We will start with some general guidance and then examine differences in approach that exist when you’re the parent of a minor who struggles with an eating disorder. The authority a parent has over a child allows for more options, but it does not negate the importance of the matters we’ll discuss first.

#### Generally Relevant Principles

**Seek to Understand:** You don’t have to “get it” to be understanding. Starving, bingeing, excessive exercise, or comfort eating may not make sense to you. That’s okay. You’re frame of reference for an experience is not the standard your friend has to meet. You can gently and patiently ask questions that show you want to understand. Realize, until you show yourself willing to try to understand you firmly establish yourself as an “outsider” to their struggle.

Of the resources referenced in this study, the one (in my opinion) best-suited to help you understand the thinking process of someone with anorexia and bulimia is *Life without Ed* by Jenni Schaefer. Jenni writes in a transparent and humorous first-person style that is very relatable.

**Don’t Personalize:** Parents can be tempted to ask, “What have we done?” out of guilt or as a means to be less confrontational. Friends can phrase things in similar ways. This is unhelpful in three ways. First, it promotes a form of blame-shifting from the beginning that has a propensity to sabotage the likelihood of completing the full journey of recovery. Second, if the rationale is acceptable, it also becomes a criticism of you. This kind of emotional-relational risk is not likely to be engaged in the early stages of recovery. Third, the relational awkwardness created adds to the emotions of the conversation and makes it less likely your friend will engage.

**Identify Qualified Care Options:** When your friend says “yes” to help, you want to already know who the most qualified individuals are in your area. Often the window of willing cooperation can be short, so you don’t want to waste that time seeking a good referral. Begin now compiling that list.

You can offer to be a counseling advocate; someone who goes with the individual to counseling for support. Some counselors are more open to this than others. One reason for getting information about the best eating disorder counselors in your area is to know whether this is something they would be open to. That way you don’t offer something that is not viable.

**Identify Healthy Recovered Individuals:** Do you know people who have experienced an eating disorder similar to your friend and are now living a healthy life? Don’t set up a “blind date.” That doesn’t honor your friend’s autonomy. But offer to coordinate an opportunity for them to talk. A conversation with a “real person” who has struggled like they’re struggling can be an important part of becoming willing to seek help.

**Accept Your Limits:** You can offer help. You cannot force your friend to seek help. As soon as you forget this, and you will be tempted to, the dynamics of the conversation will change radically. Avoid power struggles where you try to leverage emotions or facts to coerce change. You will lose. Avoid being a food detective. When evidence is gathered in an intrusive manner it becomes a reason not to change. Don’t debate “thin enough” or “too thin.” Even if you “win” the debate, you will have damaged the relationship and reduced the likelihood your friend will engage with the help you’re encouraging.

**Don't Ignore Lying or Stealing:** “My eating habits don't affect you,” can become a Teflon statement when raising concerns to your friend. While it is not completely true, it is true-enough to disarm you in conversation. But when you notice lying or stealing food, that line of offending relationship has been crossed in a way that invites a different type of conversation. These are not “gotcha moments,” because the health of your friend is more important than the offense. But your friend has crossed a line (indicating the struggle is getting worse) that gives you a more legitimate reason (even in their constricted thinking) to talk.

**Avoid Criticism or Shaming Language:** We want to avoid anything that says, “What's wrong with you?” Instead, we would rather know, “What's going on?” Even if their school, work, or social performance is declining, that is not the issue and we need to be careful not to frame the conversation in a “you need to be more productive-engaged” way. Our concern is their well-being, not their performance, and that needs to be very clear.

**Be Concrete and Don't Use Weak Examples:** This is as close as we'll get to a debate strategy. When presenting your concern, don't use speculative examples. If you use five solid examples of things that are significantly unhealthy and one speculative example, where is your friend going to focus if they'd rather avoid the issue? The evaluation tool from chapter one and forms of impact in chapter three should help you formulate concrete reasons for concern. Health examples tend to be more concrete than emotional or relational changes.

**Sympathize that Recovery Would be Hard:** Make sure your “you can do it” attitude doesn't come across as “this will be easy.” When that happens, your hope reveals how little you understand. A demeanor that emphasizes “it is worth it” and “we will support you all the way” are much better at communicating realistic hope.

**Don't Under-Estimate Loving Persistence:** Often the person knows they're being unreasonable. They're afraid the people who care are going to give up on them because they're being so difficult. Even if you're being tuned out, realize that your patient-loving persistence proves to your friend that they're not “too far gone” yet. Even if a conversation gets shut down, try to end it with, “I love you. I'm praying for you and I'm here for you. I'll give you space, but I'm still available.”

### Additional Guidance for Parents of Minors

**Get Professional Medical Help:** You have the legal authority and moral responsibility to seek and require help when your child's health is in danger. Your child will punish you with painful words (e.g., “I hate you”), tantrums, and threats (e.g., “I'll run away” or “I'll never talk to you again”). You need to be strong enough to require help while your child is at an age these interventions can be required. However, this should be towards the end of efforts described above and not an ultimatum early in the discussion of this subject. Voluntary engagement with recovery is a large factor in whether recovery will be successful.

**If Hospitalization Is Recommended, Do It:** If a physician or counselor is recommending hospitalization, it is likely because they see physical changes that could be life-threatening. The malnourishment and extreme fatigue from excessive exercise of eating disorders can result in death. Therefore, you should heed these recommendations even if it means upsetting your child. Ask the physician to sit down with you and your child to explain their rationale for their recommendation, so that it is clear why this is happening and that the doctor is not merely serving as your mouthpiece.

**Be Willing to Participate in Family Counseling If Recommended:** If there is any defensiveness in you towards this recommendation, it may be your first point of identifying with the mindset of your child. Being part of the process might mean we were part of the problem. Being part of the problem might mean changing things we don't want to. But being healthy individuals and a healthy family must take precedence over our preferences. If we want our loved one to seek the help they need, we must model the same humility to seek help that we might also benefit from.

### Conclusion

This appendix is not a “full proof method” for ensuring your friend or family member will engage with the concerns you have for them. But it is intended to provide guidance on how to allow your concerns to have the best opportunity to be heard. Bathe your efforts in prayer and seek the guidance of people who know you well as apply these materials.



## Appendix C

### What Do I Do Now?

A plumb line of the Summit counseling ministry is, “We don’t do events; we create resources.” That means you should be asking yourself, “What can or should I do with this information now?”

We have created a series of brief videos that answer that what-now question from several different perspectives. Each of these can be found at:

[www.bradhambrick.com/whatnow](http://www.bradhambrick.com/whatnow)

[www.bradhambrick.com/healthy](http://www.bradhambrick.com/healthy)

#### Personal Study or Small Group

Question: I’ve been to several of the Summit counseling seminars and notice there appears to be a couple of different kinds. You frequently recommend studying them as a small group or with a friend. That seems like a great idea, but since I haven’t done that before I’m not quite sure how to start something like that. Do you mind giving me guidance?

#### Pursue Personal Counseling

Question: After attending this seminar I realized I would like to pursue counseling to help me grow in this area. It sounded like there are several different options available. Would you mind explaining to me what those are and how I could connect with the one that best serves me need?

#### Leveraging My Workplace

Question: I’ve heard rumors that I’m supposed to be able to use the Summit counseling seminars to leverage my workplace for gospel influence. My first impression is that it sounds awkward and intrusive; like I’m telling people they’ve “got issues” or “need help.” But I’m also worried about putting up Christian material that might be offensive to some people who visit my workplace. But I would at least like to hear what you’ve got to say. How would this work?

#### As a Professional Counselor

Question: I’m a licensed counselor (LPC) and came across the Summit counseling seminars. I’m excited to see the church addressing these kinds of subjects, and I’m curious how you might see someone in my position (or a LCSW or LMFT) using the materials. I can see recommending them to my clients who are open to an overtly Christian aspect to their counseling, but it seems like there could be more uses than just counseling homework. Could you share your thoughts on how those in private practice might use these resources?

Our goal in Summit counseling is to (1) equip the church to care for one another and our community with excellence; (2) provide quality counseling services that allow our people to get involved in the lives of others with confidence – knowing additional, experienced care is available to come alongside them if needed; and (3) create ways for our members and other Christians in our community to leverage their workplace and careers for greater gospel impact in their spheres of influence.

We hope this seminar and these videos give you a vision for how this can happen and stirs a passion in you to be a part of God’s work of redeeming and restoring hurting individuals and families.