

Biblical Living (14) – Eating Disorders (Part 2)

Eight Solutions to Disorderly Eating

- 1) If necessary, help the person move from a *victim* mentality to an *I'm responsible* view of his or her eating problem.

Biblically, eating practices are a matter of choice and habit, sin and righteousness.

James 1:14. *But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.*

Romans 6:12-13. *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*

Responsibility leads to hope: If you're *responsible* for how you are eating, then by God's grace, you can also *change* how you're eating.

- 2) Help the person see that his or her behaviour is sin in God's eyes, and encourage repentance. Again, this may be the first time the person has been told that his or her eating habits are *sin*. Therefore, be prepared for resistance.

Proverbs 28:13. *He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.*

Thankfully, the grace of full forgiveness is available through Christ, no matter how extreme or destructive the person's eating habits have been.

- 3) Teach the person the principle of Christ's lordship over his or her physical body.

Point: Christians who struggle with eating disorders need to be encouraged to exchange the lordship of food for the lordship of Christ.

Two grounds of Christ's lordship over our physical bodies:

1. He is Creator of our bodies. Christ is the Creator of our physical bodies (Col 1:16), and we have a steward's responsibility to care for them.

Psalms 139:13-14. *For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.*

2. He is Redeemer of our bodies.

Jesus Christ purchased you—body and soul—on the cross and joined you to Himself; therefore, you are to honour Him in your physical body.

1 Corinthians 6:15a. *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? ...*

Christians should serve one Master, not two.

1 Corinthians 6:12. *... All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.*

Applied to food:

Point: When a person consistently allows food to master him, he has given the lordship of his life over to another master besides Christ, and no Christian can serve two masters.

4) Establish the goal of eating for God's glory, rather than for self-focused goals.

1 Corinthians 10:31. *Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

Point: Increasing the person's general spiritual maturity will help motivate a counselee to change his or her diet and exercise. In other words, the goal for an anorexic or obese person is not to look good outwardly; it is to be more like Christ.

Character is the key; therefore, a change in diet is not enough. There must also be a change in desires, motivations, and attitudes.

You might be losing weight, but your weight loss is not glorifying to God because you are following a foolish, destructive fad diet.

You might be losing weight by following a strict diet; however, it's not glorifying God because you have merely traded the self-focused preoccupation of overeating for an equally self-focused preoccupation with appearance.

5) Expose and correct the lies the person has believed that has led him to eat sinfully.

Examples:

! *If I look like the girls in the magazines, then I will be happy.*

We are deceived into thinking that being beautiful is the answer to all of our problems. (Fitzpatrick, *Love to Eat, Hate to Eat*, 38)

In fact, the Bible always focuses on the inner beauty of the heart. 1 Peter 3:3-4. *Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.*

Proverbs 11:22. *As a ring of gold in a swine's snout so is a beautiful woman who lacks discretion.*

! *I'm more acceptable to God if I'm thin.*

Comment: This is a wrong view of justification.

If I'm thin as a rake handle, then I'm healthy.

Excessive thinness actually leads to a multitude of health problems. And regarding the anorexic's pathological aversion to being fat: when undernourished, the body eats muscle long before it eats fat; therefore, in spite of her grotesque thinness, an anorexic's body fat percentage is usually far higher than a normal, relatively fit woman's.

! *A small failure means I might as well throw away all restraint.*

! *Only I am qualified to decide whether I am fat.*

Anorexics are often stubbornly proud, rejecting all input regarding their diet and weight as they relentlessly pursue their destructive eating habits. This proud refusal to receive outside counsel is sin and needs to be repented of.

Proverbs 12:15. *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel.*

Proverbs 14:12. *There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.*

6) Expose and correct the the person's wrong motives for eating.

Key questions:

- What is the counselee trying to obtain by means of his destructive eating habits?
- Is the counselee using her eating habits as a *weapon* to punish herself or others?
- Are the counselee's eating habits an act of *worship*—bowing to the idol of the pleasure, emotional comfort, or attention and approval?

In other words, the anorexic is *worshipping* thinness and what she thinks thinness will get her. In the end, her false god is gradually killing her.

A sample list of wrong motives:

❖ *Weapon* motives:

1) Punishment of self

Doing dietary penance for sin or for violating some self-created eating rule:

Self-punishment for feeling unloved:

2) Punishment of others

3) Protection or shield from others

Some women who have been sexually abused in the past intentionally overeat in order to gain weight because experience has taught them to fear being attractive to men.

❖ *Worship motives:*

! Greed

The counselee worships the pleasurable sensations of eating, and therefore, vainly tries to recreate the experience of the first piece of cake by greedily consuming a second and a third piece of cake.

Ephesians 4:19. ... *they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.* (NIV)

Colossians 3:5. *Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to ... greed, which amounts to idolatry.*

! Comfort

Consolation by chocolate.

Observation: Food has replaced God as the primary source of this person's sense of comfort and well-being.

! Boredom

! Reward

! Avoidance

! Attention

! You are constantly preoccupied with your weight and figure.

! You are unable to receive compliments graciously.

! You regularly feel depressed or anxious because you are "fat."

! You are on an unhealthy quest for thinness, including dangerous eating habits or excessive devotion to exercise.

! You overspend on clothes, hair, and makeup.

! You refuse to have sex with your spouse because you feel "ugly" or "fat."

! You continually apologise for how you look.

! You regularly say things to elicit compliments from others.

! You continually compare yourself to others and how they look.

Ecclesiastes 4:4. *And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.*

Point: The sin of comparing leads to frustration, meaninglessness, and depression. Rather than compare, God wants us to wisely manage and to be content with the gifts, skills, and body that He has given us.

Paul's example of being content: 1 Corinthians 15:9-10. *For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am ...*

Point: Rather than focus on comparing his pre-conversion life unfavourably with the other apostles, Paul expressed contentment and embraced a thankful attitude toward God's grace.

Self-preoccupation is not appropriate for those who follow Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:15. [Christ] *died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.* (underline added)

7) Teach the person to guide his or her eating with thankfulness.

Thankfulness for overeaters and bulimics: If you can't thank God for the food you are about to eat without feeling like a hypocrite, then you probably shouldn't eat it, because *thankfulness* is the attitude of eating (1 Tim 4:3-5).

Point: Can you really thank God for that third piece of cake or the eighth piece of pizza?

Thankfulness for anorexics: Food is not evil; it is a gift from God both for nourishment and pleasure, and should be shared in *thankfully*, not treated as an enemy (Ecc 3:13; 5:18-20; 9:7-9).

8) Teach biblical self-control.

Self-control defined: *Self-control is the skill of saying "no" to sinful desires, even when it hurts.* (Ed Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave*, 215)

Note: For the anorexic, self-control might mean saying yes when it "hurts."

Self-control is a joint divine-human endeavour. Philippians 2:12-13a. *... work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you ...*

The *God is at work* part: Galatians 5:22-23. *But the fruit of the Spirit is ... self-control.*

The *work out your salvation* part: 2 Peter 1:5-6. *... applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance ...*

Restated: *Self-control* is a God-assisted choice to do what is right every time you have an opportunity to do what is wrong.

Observation: Self-control helps break the bad habit of acting on impulse.

Wrong thinking about self-control:

! It comes in pill form.

- ! It starts tomorrow.
- ! It is best in small, irregular doses.
- ! God must remove my cravings before I can exercise it.

Right thinking about self-control:

- 1) It is a Christ-assisted, moment-by-moment choice.
- 2) It gets easier with practice: habit becomes your friend.
- 3) It must be accompanied by a practical plan.

A sensible plan summarised: No diet or exercise plan fits everyone or every eating problem. The truth is, different things work for different people. However, two basic principles can summarise any sensible plan for those who overeat:

1. Eat a little less.
2. Move around a little more.

Some practical thoughts on eating plans:

- 1) Eat consistently. Your body prefers food in consistent quantities and at consistent times. Skipping meals is bad for your body and encourages gluttony later. To reduce your food intake, rather than skipping meals, get in the habit of eating smaller portions each meal.
- 2) Eat low GI foods. Foods that digest slowly make you feel full more quickly, reducing the temptation to overeat. They also make you feel full longer, reducing the temptation to snack.
- 3) Eat less fat. One of the basic rules of nutrition is that fat turns to fat, so reduce your intake of foods that have a high fat content.
- 4) Snack sensibly. Snacking isn't necessarily bad, just trade junk food for fruit or something low fat. Don't snack just because you're bored or just out of habit: the fact that you have a hunger pang doesn't mean that you have to eat.
- 5) Avoid crash diets. To lose weight, follow a diet plan that you can keep following with only small adjustments once you have reached your target weight. The primary goal of dieting is not to lose weight. It is to build wise, long-term habits in regard to nutritional content and portion size.
- 6) Eat out less. Fast food is not your friend.
- 7) Watch what you drink. Some people unwittingly consume half their day's caloric needs in the form of sugar water and bubbles.

- 8) Make no provision for the flesh. You can't eat what you don't have in the house. Don't keep the enemies of self-control in the pantry. Instead, have nutritional alternatives at hand.
- 9) Stick it out for a month. Your taste buds replace themselves once every twenty-one days. If you stick out a low-fat diet for a month, your taste buds will adjust.

Summary: Eight solutions to disorderly eating

- 1) Move from victim thinking to *I'm responsible* thinking in regard to your disorderly eating.
- 2) Acknowledge that destructive eating actions and attitudes are sin to be repented from.
- 3) Embrace Christ's lordship over your physical body.
- 4) Establish God's glory as the governing principle of your eating.
- 5) Expose and correct the lies that have corrupted your thinking about eating.
- 6) Expose and correct the wrong motives that underlie your destructive eating habits.
- 7) Use thankfulness to curb over or under eating.
- 8) Embrace biblical self-control