

Overcoming Eating Disorders

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

“Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ’s, let him of himself think this again...” (2 Corinthians 10:7a).

In a world where image equals power, and power equals control, people who want to succeed will take harsh measures to achieve their goals. For many people, however, success is not so much the issue as the love and acceptance that seem to come with it. Assaulted by cosmic images that promote worldly ideals, some people who already suffer from a poor self-image are caught in a cycle of destruction defined by eating disorders.

Food is a necessity, required by our bodies to function. Therefore, it is not surprising that food is at the center of a satanic strategy to keep people away from God and focused on themselves.

Only God can satisfy our deep needs and desires. He is always seeking us out, waiting to

be gracious and to reveal His thoughts of love and acceptance toward us (Jeremiah 31:3). Satan, on the other hand, has an exalted, angelic self-image that is grossly distorted from who he really is (Isaiah 14:16). In an effort to keep us from unmasking his true identity, he targets the self-image of Christians. John 10:10 says he comes to rob, kill, and destroy. One way is by keeping us from seeing who we are in Christ and from understanding that everything we have is because of God's grace.

This booklet exalts the "Bread of Heaven," our Savior Jesus Christ, as it exposes hell's conspiracy to promote disordered eating behaviors. Our intention is not to provide an exhaustive outline but to offer God's viewpoint of the spiritual activity involved and practical strategies for victory to the believer. Many excellent resources are available for those who wish to know more of the clinical aspect. Because of the severe complications associated with eating disorders, those who are struggling with this should consult their physicians concerning a plan of medical treatment.

Chapter One

SEARCHING FOR AN IDENTITY

A woman suffered through a childhood marred by sexual and emotional abuse. A man in her home sexualized everything about her life. “My body was ridiculed and violated, and it no longer belonged to me,” she said.

Continually, this young girl was physically molested and criticized whenever she gained the slightest bit of weight. She complained that her cries were ignored and that her body, which she quickly came to despise, became her only means of expressing her anger and frustration.

Her story points out a primary facet in the mind of a person with an eating disorder. Unable to see herself as a trophy of God’s grace, she struggled with accepting herself and how others would accept her. Because of years of mental and physical torment, she could not accept her physical appearance.

Eating disorders often evolve as a struggle

for power where there have been unrealistic expectations from self or others. A person who feels powerless and out of control in other areas of life may latch on to controlling his body through food. Many celebrities have stories related to eating disorders. Pop singer Karen Carpenter, who produced a string of No. 1 hits during the 1960s and '70s, died from heart failure—the result of years of anorectic behavior. The late Princess Diana of England battled bulimia; gymnast Cathy Rigby struggled for years. These are just a few of the many who seem to have had so much and yet suffered with eating disorders.

Often, when we think of eating disorders, we look for a sign that something is wrong. We have a concept of what someone with an eating disorder looks like. But eating disorders do not always relate to disordered appearances. Anorectics are not necessarily thin people, and binge eaters are not always obese.

Everyone has an area of natural weakness as well as an area of natural strength, and we have a choice in how we appropriate them. Eating disorders are behavior problems that involve much sublimation, withdrawing into a human provision to deal with very real conflicts.

Many sincere Christians bring this problem into their Christianity. It is their area of weakness, but the problem is the destructive effects. They do something in their natural strength outside of God's provision, trying to make themselves complete and to take care of their pain, guilt, or rejection. Even Paul used prayer as a human provision to deal with the thorn in his flesh. But God's provision in this case was not prayer but grace—grace to let God be his strength in his situation (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Anorexia and the Power of the Will

Anorexia is not a new phenomenon. In 1694, Richard Morton published the first medical case history of *anorexia nervosa*. The Latin term, coined by Sir William Gull nearly two hundred years later, means “a nervous loss of appetite.” That name misrepresents the true nature of this disorder, since people do not lose their appetite until the late stages of the disease.

In the United States, one percent of all girls between the ages of 10 and 18 develop *anorexia nervosa*. Ten percent of these young women—nearly 20 thousand—will eventually die as a result of the complications. Vanity and an inordinate desire to be attractive are often reasons

for their behavior. Particularly at risk are those who come from families with a genetic history of major depression, obsessive-compulsive disorders, and anxiety. Nearly half of all anorectics meet the diagnostic criteria for depression, and almost as many are defined as obsessive-compulsive.

The behavior of people with anorexia includes a preoccupation with dieting and thinness that leads to excessive weight loss and masks underlying psychological problems. They develop an intense fear of becoming fat and have an inability to correctly perceive their body weight or shape. They may deal with food in strange ways, often collecting recipes, hiding food that they refuse to eat, cutting up food into extremely small pieces, eating alone (which is considered a sin in some cultures), or counting calories obsessively. These behaviors are kept very secret.

Anorectic behavior affects the entire body. Besides the less obvious side effects such as night vision impairment, a common risk is damage to the heart muscle, often resulting in an increase in the risk of cardiac arrest. Because digestive enzymes are depleted, the liver then cannot maintain the proper level of protein in

the bloodstream. This affects brain function, tissue maintenance, and a host of physical requirements, which in turn affect mental and emotional health. This is obviously a masterful plan of the enemy to starve and destroy a soul who was created by God to be filled with love, joy, peace—the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Bulimia

Bulimia nervosa is a disorder characterized by the purging of food, usually following an episode of binge-eating or rapid consumption. This purging can involve self-induced vomiting, the overuse of laxatives, and compulsive exercise. Unfortunately, people who are bulimic punish themselves because they cannot accept themselves as they are.

As with anorexia, the root of bulimia is a desire for control in lives and circumstances that otherwise seem out of control. Through sublimation, this disorder temporarily supplies a sense of purpose. A bulimic has usually reasoned out that his behavior is useful, because he can consume large amounts of food without the consequence of gaining weight.

Binge Eating

Binge eating involves uncontrolled overeating that is usually kept secret. People with this condition engage in frequent binges, but unlike the bulimic, they do not purge away the food. Their binge episodes are quickly followed by intense feelings of guilt and shame. As with the anorectic and bulimic, the intake of food is used as a dysfunctional means of coping with psychological problems.

Nearly 40 percent of obese people are thought to be binge eaters. And recent reports show that obesity is the second leading preventable cause of death. Danger signals include eating when one is not really hungry, frequent and varied stages of dieting, and a feeling of not being able to stop eating. High blood pressure, poor cholesterol levels, gall bladder disease, diabetes, and certain cancers are among the medical consequences of binge-eating behavior.

Getting Help: A Battle of Wills

As we have seen, low self-esteem, perfectionism, sexual identity confusion, abuse, depression, deception, and power struggles are seven leading causes of eating disorders. A myth about eating disorders is that they are primarily

a woman's problem; however, increasing numbers of men are being found to have them. An eating disorder is not a vain, attention-getting device. The people who suffer with it usually do not want to be found out. If anything, they are living in fear, struggling to cope with deep anxieties, seeking to avoid criticism at all costs.

A primary fear they have is that they will lose control and be told what to do. Their behavior patterns cannot be arrested by manipulation. In fact, those with eating disorders have become master manipulators with tremendous ability to hide their disorder.

Having looked at eating disorders from a natural viewpoint, we will go a step further to look at the supernatural cause behind them.

Chapter Two

CONTROLLED BY A LIE
OR BY LIFE?

A woman in her twenties, who was bulimic for five years, recently testified that her condition is completely gone. She said that the problem definitely was too big for her and that alone, she was powerless against the projections that came against her.

“I was powerless, but there was a provision,” she said. “God loves us enough to have a plan for a full life and to set us free from this addiction.”

This woman grew up in a very legalistic home. First came thoughts that she was eating too much, and then the projections became increasingly worse. She explained how the devil searches out weaknesses and contrives ways to destroy our lives. But God had the victory through His Word, the Holy Spirit, and unconditional love revealed through the Body of

Christ.

Another woman felt that she had no control over anything in her life. Her husband was abusive and had saddled the family with numerous debts. She was constantly forced to spend days at home alone with her children. There was nothing she could do about it. She reasoned that the behaviors that caused her anorexia gave her a measure of control.

“Food—my eating habits—became the one thing that I could control,” she said. “Everything else was out of my hands.”

For this woman to suggest that she had “control” is a lie. Clearly, the devil was controlling her. According to John 10:10, the devil comes to destroy, and the one suffering from an eating disorder must recognize it for what it is—evil controlling the person. Anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating are dangerous and false counterfeits that substitute for the life of the risen Christ in us.

The Power behind the Attack

“Behold now behemoth, which I made with thee; he eateth grass as an ox. Lo now, his strength is in his loins, and his force is in the navel of his belly. He moveth his tail like a cedar:

the sinews of his stones are wrapped together. His bones are as strong pieces of brass; his bones are like bars of iron" (Job 40:15-18).

"Behemoth" in this passage refers to demon armies that work to hinder and destroy our self-image and our immune system through alcoholism, gluttony, anorexia, and bulimia. The work of these armies is to bring about physical problems, notably to the kidneys, causing them to dysfunction and preventing the cleansing of toxins from the blood. This can trigger further metabolic collapse and can cause weakness associated with the decreased production of blood cells.

Generally speaking, eating disorders are the product of satanic infections. Satan sponsors such behaviors to steal, kill, and destroy. These disorders are designed by hell to afflict the emotions and wear out the body. For example, medical studies have shown that bulimia can take ten to twelve years off of a person's expected life span. Besides an increase in hair loss and skin problems, gum diseases and dental decay are accelerated because of stomach acids when vomiting is involved.

When we are caught in this cycle to the point where our physical health is impaired, the nat-

ural effect is mental then spiritual depression. Because they are so closely connected, the physical, mental, and spiritual effects are progressively intensified the longer the cycle continues. Nothing can provide the self-love needed so desperately by every person who suffers with an eating disorder—*nothing*, that is, but the personal love of the risen Lord, Jesus Christ, and the fellowship in His Body.

The Role of Cleaving Spirits

All of these disorders are rooted in a spirit of self-destruction. The person who does not surrender to Calvary and receive the exchanged life of Christ is trapped by a spirit of arrogance, disguised in the false humility of a need. They live in a lie that is being sold to people who think they need something beyond God's plan and provision for their lives. The spirits involved are called "cleaving spirits," demons that cling to the emotions and enslave people as they struggle to meet their needs through the flesh.

Eating disorders are a tool of the enemy in spiritual warfare. A satanic spirit causes many people to take on a form of guilt, blaming themselves for things that happened in their past. In truth, it is not about them but what Satan is pro-

jecting to them.

In James 3:14-15, this process is clearly revealed. First, demons want to make believers earthly minded, then take over their souls with earthly thinking. Then, specific demons will absolutely control and energize one or more areas of a believer's life with satanic projections. These projections are received as thoughts or impulses to reinforce bad memories of circumstances stored in the soul and to control that person's reactions to similar situations in the future.

We can be disciplined in exercising and eating properly and have fun doing it, free in who we are. There is nothing wrong with a desire to be fit, as long as that doesn't become our singular goal. Satan, however, promotes self-critical thoughts: "You're not thin enough" or "You need to eat more. *Fill up your emptiness.*" We may become very critical toward our bodies and begin what seems to be a very beneficial exercise program. But with an already strong-willed temperament and a tendency toward perfectionism conflicting with a poor self-image, some people overcompensate. They develop an obsession with exercising that becomes a form of bulimia.

Balance is so important in every aspect of life. We need to eat, we need to exercise, we

need to work, and we need to rest. With all of it, we need order in our lives. The thoughts we receive can be so confusing, yet God, who created us, has not changed His mind (Malachi 3:6). His Word defines the criteria for physical, mental, and spiritual health. It is ours for the asking.

Chapter Three

DELIGHT YOURSELF IN THE BREAD OF LIFE

“And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst....

“I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.

“I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (John 6:35, 48-51).

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with

all the fulness of God" (Ephesians 3:17-19).

Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life from heaven. This is why Satan desires to corrupt our perception of food. Except we eat His flesh and drink His blood spiritually, we have no life in us (see John 6:53-58). Through wrong concepts about food, the devil seeks to promote wrong thinking about Christ. We only become complete by the spiritual provisions Christ has for us.

Choosing to Think with God

Even our failure is a small gap already accounted for in God's economy. Ephesians 4:23 says, "And be renewed in the *spirit of your mind*," or, "the mind that is in you." The change is not in the mind, as if it were a change of opinion; but, it is in the *spirit* of the mind, which gives the mind its material of thought. When our spirit is one with the Spirit of God, simply because we choose to agree that He is right, then we will have the right material to think with and to make right choices.

Psalms 37:4 says that when we choose to delight ourselves in the Lord, we are no longer involved in our "need." Instead, we focus on glorifying Him. Delighting in the Lord brings fullness (see Ephesians 3:19). Then, God gives us

the desires of our hearts. When we are operating from a place of fullness, whatever we do, whatever we eat, we do to the glory of God. We can exercise, not because we have to, but because we want to do it. We do it because we are complete in Christ, and we love what God is making us to be.

Being filled with the Spirit protects the body from satanic projections such as eating disorders. Without condemnation, the Spirit brings victory to us by God's way, with God's truth and God's life. Grace isn't given so we can serve the devil's provision in the flesh. It is given to keep us from falling and to receive forgiveness when we do fall.

It is important for us to remember that a person with an eating disorder is not his sin. We need to be shown how to see ourselves as complete in Christ and fully accepted as we are. Satan wants to rob us of the glory of God that comes from securing our lives in His Word and His promises. We must remember that no matter what we do, God will never leave us nor forsake us.

Seeing God's Way to Victory

“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient

for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

If we struggle with eating disorders, we have to know what Christ has done for us. He died for all of our sins on the Cross (1 Peter 2:24), and His Blood washes us clean (Hebrews 9:14). He does not reject us at any time (Hebrews 13:5). There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). Remember, He even loved us while we were still His enemies (Ephesians 2:3-4).

He loves us with a great love, and as believers, we are only complete in Him (Colossians 2:10). Even with all of our shortcomings and failures, we have tremendous value in Jesus' eyes. As He deeply cares for us, He also wants to take care of us (1 Peter 5:7).

We cannot win any victory apart from letting the Savior work in our lives. While Jesus walked on the earth, He was always occupied with people's needs. He helped many, healed multitudes, delivered untold numbers, and even fed thousands miraculously. He wants to do the same for our problems, addictions, and sins. He wants to deliver us, heal us, and make us complete in

Him.

This Savior accepts you, loves you, and wants to help you just as you are. You don't have to do or be anything; just receive life from Him through the Word and the Spirit (Psalm 116:12-13). Open your heart and let His healing love flow through you and deliver you. You will begin to realize the true beauty you have in God's eyes.

The Finished Work means that Jesus Christ shed His blood and died for us and as us on the Cross. He was buried, rose again, and ascended to His throne in heaven, defeating the enemy once and for all. As born-again Christians, we are heirs to His ascended life. We don't have to do the work anymore—just receive and believe.

Experiencing Our Victory

Furthermore, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the demons of the air, which are the energizing force behind those eating disorders. In understanding God's true heart for us and in experiencing the Power of God through the Holy Spirit and the Word, Satanic strongholds are broken.

The way to have victory over a bondage like an eating disorder is outlined in 2 Corinthians

10:3-7. The spiritual battle here is fought in our thought life. But we can experience the victory that Christ has already won for us (Romans 8:37).

In eating disorders, either we are feeding our body wrongly to fill the emptiness inside, or we won't feed ourselves to punish our guilt or relieve the rejection we experience. As believers, we have to learn how to feed our soul and spirit with the right spiritual food from the Word of God.

Second Corinthians 10:4-6 reveals what goes on in the mind when we continually feed ourselves the wrong things. For example, if we start thinking a wrong thought, it turns into a 'high thing', which exalts itself against the knowledge of God. This high thing consequently leads to a wrong imagination in the soul. We now believe our wrong thoughts to be true and real. Then, this strong imagination turns into a satanic stronghold, where the demonic atmosphere controls this area of our lives, and we are completely taken over by this behavior through demon armies.*

Practical Steps toward a Supernatural Victory

The first step to experiencing our victory in Christ, therefore, is when we begin to think

about and dwell upon right thoughts and Bible doctrines through our own study, through a godly pastor-teacher, and by attending a local assembly where we will be built up by godly believers. Instead of fighting an eating disorder, we begin to rest as we feed our soul and spirit with the right food from God's Word, the Bible.

If we experience certain problems, we should go on a crash-diet of the Word of God. Study specific doctrines and thoughts from the Word that answer our problems. For instance, if the problem is a feeling of emptiness, we need to study the filling of God. If we feel unaccepted or unloved, we need to study the acceptance and love of God.

As we learn what the Word gives as provisions for our problems, we can revenge disobedience with obedience. We are starting to learn how to implement the Word by faith. As Philipians 4:9 says, "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you." When we obey the Word of God by faith through the power of the Holy Spirit, we will be filled with the peace of God beyond our needs. And Philipians 4:13 adds, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

By acting on the Word by faith, we grow from strength to strength and become stronger and stronger in Christ and His provision for our lives. By taking up our cross, we can truly experience what Christ has done for us and in us, and we no longer have to live in bondage to any eating disorder ever again.

God Has Prepared a Table for Us

There can be such victory in Christ! Instead of living in bondage, receive freedom from a new kind of thought life, and begin to realize that you are *completely* loved by God. Categorical doctrine—specific and relevant words from the Bible—will become your hedge against enemy. The table of grace will be your provision in the midst of your battles (Psalm 23).

When Satan attacks, we have strategies in the Word of God. From his experience as a prisoner, Paul wrote about the release we can find in the worst circumstances by letting the Word dwell in us richly and singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord (Colossians 3:16). Barriers of oppression come down, and we are able to focus on the Lord and His provision. Then, seeing beyond ourselves, we will begin to minister to others.

Let's draw near to the Body of Christ and see the presence of God come in as we relax on purpose and allow the Holy Spirit to minister to our souls.

**Grace Publications has released several booklets that describe in detail the spiritual warfare being waged in the atmosphere between the Kingdom of God and Satan's kingdom of darkness. For more about this subject, read Dealing Precisely with Demons, Exposing Satan's Armies, and Operating in the Authority of God's Kingdom, by Pastor Carl H. Stevens.*

CONCLUSION

As with everything connected to Satan and his plan, the problem of eating disorders was defeated at Calvary. It is a fact that every sin—past, present, and future—was judged in Jesus Christ’s body as He hung on the Cross, where He bled and He died for every one of us. He took back the keys to death and hell from Satan. Now He lives and reigns in heaven because of the plan of the Father and the power of resurrection by the Holy Spirit. We can experience that same supernatural life when we draw near to Christ (Ephesians 1:20-23).

Every child of God needs to understand that we have been made to reign in life by one, Jesus Christ (Romans 5:17). We have been sanctified, set apart as God’s own, forever. Now, the issue is to believe and receive what *God* has to say about us.

In Christ, we have a new mind (Philippians 2:5) and new mercies every morning (Lamenta-

tions 3:23). If we fail, we get up and go on in a self-image that is based upon our heavenly position (Ephesians 2:6). God is for us (Romans 8). Everything is new, continually. In time we will see the fruit of His love toward us. We will manifest a new life style, a new response to negative stimuli, healthy emotions, and a cleansed conscience.

Because of God's goodness, we have an eternal purpose for our lives. His purpose doesn't include dealing with attitudes of resentment, guilt, and shame—it removes them. We are clean and our past is gone forever, never to be brought up again. By the grace of God, we will relate to ourselves in our position: hid in Christ and seated above.

Just let God love you with the truth, and He will set you free.

If you or a loved one has an eating disorder, we recommend Weigh Down Workshop because of their practical approach from a godly, Christian perspective. For further information, write Weigh Down Workshop, Inc., P.O. Box 689099, Franklin, TN, 37068-9099, or call 1-800-844-5208. Their website address is www.wdworkshop.com