

Get the Skinny on the 'Anti-Fat Pastor'

Steve Reynolds has served as senior pastor of Capital Baptist Church in Annandale, Va., since 1982. But, he admits he's always had an eating problem, especially when it comes to ice cream.

A few years ago, God spoke directly to his heart—and to his high blood pressure and diabetes—and told him to practice what he preaches and lose weight. After losing more than 100 pounds, he launched a weight-loss campaign in his church and community. He's written two books, and he recently sat down with Charisma Media to share his story.

C: Steve, talk about both of your books, *Bod 4 God* and *Get Off the Couch*. Losing weight obviously is a subject that's very near and dear to you.

SR: So far, I've lost about 123 pounds. I was about 340 pounds with high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes. I was digging my grave with a knife and a fork, and my favorite thing was ice cream.

Basically, I'm sitting here as a pastor, and I view myself as a temple trasher. I knew my body was the temple of God, but I wasn't honoring God in that way. The whole time I'm up there preaching to honor God with your body, and I've got gravy dripping down my chin. I was trashing the temple.

It took a long time, but God finally got hold of my heart, and I started thinking, "What do I need to do about this?" God started speaking to me and asked me, "What do you tell other people to do?" I tell other people to look in the Bible. He said, "Why don't you follow your own advice?"

I decided to look up the word *body* in the Bible and do a study

on it. I figured there has to be something great in there about it, and the word is in there 179 times. That was the basis of my first book, *Bod 4 God*. The four keys I discovered in those passages, I started applying them and lost the weight. When I got to 70 pounds of weight loss, I actually lost all three diseases. I'm prescription-free. I surrendered my fork to God, and God healed my body.

C: How did it feel to be disease-free?

SR: I was taking eight pills a day for high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes. Thankfully, I won't have that any longer. If that happens again, it's not going to be because I'm 340 pounds.

C: Other than God putting a bug in your ear about it, what was it that set you on the healthy path?

SR: It was kind of a slow process. I had those diseases for quite a few years. My new book, *Get Off the Couch*, opens up with a story I have with my wife. When I found out I had diabetes, she asked me if I was going to change and work on my habits. I'm ashamed to say this. I looked her in the eye and said, "Listen, they gave me pills and I'm going to take them. That's what I'm going to do, and we don't need to talk about this anymore." Unfortunately, she knew I meant it.

I was far from God—not just a little bit off, but hard-hearted.

Really, it was just a combination of getting older and wanting to live. I'm looking forward to heaven, but I just don't want to get there yet. Mainly, I want to be here for my family. Back in 2006, when I started this journey, I had my grandchildren on my mind. I wanted to know them and have a relationship with them. I wanted to be around. Recently, we just had our first grandchild, Olivia, and it was a blessing to hold her in my arms.

C: With your congregation, did you ever stop and think that, *If I'm not doing what I'm preaching, why should they do it?*

SR: I hate to cast blame, but I will cast blame. I put the problem of obesity in the church on the pastors, and a large percentage of us are overweight. Here we are, struggling, but nobody wants to talk about it. Nobody is saying, "Would you please preach on obesity?" It's like it will just go away.

There was one study I did just for me. When I finally got to the point where people were seeing that I was losing weight, they wanted to know how I was doing it. That's when I did the "Bod for God" sermon series. I thought people would be offended, but I found that's not true. It's a matter of humility, transparency, and it's in the Bible. It's in the Word of God.

We've initiated a whole wellness ministry called Losing to Live. So far, we've lost over eight tons, or 16,000 pounds, in our church. Hundreds of churches are doing this program. Churches are known for sickness, people asking for prayer. That's fine, and we need to do that. But why can't we be known as a church of wellness? We have what I call the greatest health book in the world, and that's the Bible. Why don't we teach the Bible and have people get well? I have a passion for helping churches to do that.

C: So, everything starts with you, the pastor?

SR: Yes, it does. There is tremendous influence with the pulpit. I'll never forget something Dr. Don Colbert said to me. He said, "People don't listen to their doctors, but they will listen to their pastor. I'm praying that God will use you to turn the hearts of the pastors."

There are very few pastors that will address this or talk about it. I told pastors, "What you eat in private, you wear in public." It's a matter of being humble and transparent. I had to get up there and say I was the biggest hypocrite in the

world for most of my adult life. I still need to lose weight. The point is to step up and teach the Word of God. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 says, "Teaching them to obey all things, teaching them to observe all things." The big thing we've left out is the teachings about the body related to health. Overeating and under-exercising are all part of honoring God with our bodies.

C: How much more weight would you like to lose?

SR: I would like to lose about 20 to 25 more pounds. What I'm doing is what I call my lifestyle program. I enjoy it. Wherever it settles, I'm OK with it. I want to keep those diseases as far away from me as I can.

C: What is the biggest change in your diet?

SR: The biggest addiction was that I had a big bowl of ice cream every night. When I say every night, I mean every night. I couldn't even get to sleep without having it. Moving away from that and replacing it with a healthy yogurt or something similar is best. Try to find something of a similar texture to replace your addiction. A lot of times that will meet the need in your life.

For me, it was about volume. Most people are emotional eaters; I am not. I was just a pure glutton. It was all about volume. After doing this ministry for quite a few years, I've seen people eat to soothe themselves, to comfort themselves. It's their friend and companion. Three cheeseburgers taste better than one, you know? It's all about portion control. Some foods are bad, and some are good, but just cut back the portions.

C: What kind of feedback have you gotten from your books?

SR: It's been tremendous. It's a lifestyle process. Transformation takes time. The books are designed to where you can take 12 weeks to a better body. You read until the end of each chapter, and we have something called the Victory Guide.

That's where you personalize and incorporate it into your life. When you use those techniques, it's very successful.

It's also been a great tool for evangelism. I found that people, if there's something that will work, they will come. It connects with the culture. People come to find out what to do about bread (what they eat), and they find the Bread of Life, which is Jesus.

Steve Reynolds, the "anti-fat pastor," has served as senior pastor of Capital Baptist Church in Annandale, Va., since 1982. He launched a weight-loss campaign in his church and community after he lost more than 100 pounds. His story has been featured in local, national and international media, including *Fox News*, *CNN*, the *Washington Post* and the *Chicago Tribune*.

Click here for an excerpt from Steve's book Get Off the Couch.