

Here's the Spiritual Connection to Your Emotional Eating

My emotions used to be very well-hidden, buried under more than 250 pounds of flesh. I never wanted them to raise their ugly heads or be noticeable in public. I just wanted them to stay put and act nice, not get all in a wad where I'd have to deal with them. I've learned, though, that life is messy so we might as well feel it. But that lesson was a long time coming.

I have always valued what I know much more than what I feel. Many times though, actually most of the time, my behaviors ruled me. For years, my emotions were partnering with the evil one to end my physical existence on this earth.

I was allowing the thief to steal, kill and destroy me (see John 10:10) He really has no authority to do this unless I allow him to, but because he was plying me with sweets, I fell right into his trap.

My Mind Is the Problem

Still, I thought my mind was the biggest issue I was dealing with. I thought if I could just change my thoughts, I could change my behaviors. That's true in part. My mind governs my feelings. It remembers how I feel about things after I am cognitively unaware I even feel that way.

That's why I can know processed sugar and breads are unhealthy for me, but when I try, I can't stop eating them. I can't understand why I keep being drawn back to them. I have an emotional connection to the food that I don't even remember or haven't thought about in a long time.

It's that old conundrum. "I want to do what is good, but I

don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway" (Rom. 7:19, NLT). This is a very emotional response to the problem. It's not rational. It's not well thought out. It's emotional, plain and simple.

Emotional Eater

For years, though, I denied I had any problem with emotional eating. When I would hear the term "emotional eating," I would always picture someone depressed, sitting in a room crying and eating ice cream, cookies, pizza and chips. I didn't see my eating like that.

I ate to be happy, to celebrate, to give myself a reward. Yes, I would eat when I was sad, overworked, frustrated, angry, lonely or felt unloved. However, I didn't see those times as the predominant ones. I ate because it provided one way for me to have fun and still keep my emotions at bay.

I Used Food to Medicate

I used food to even out my feelings. I didn't really want to deal with being frustrated or extremely happy. I just wanted everything to be on an even-keel, flat line.

I never wanted to be out of control. I did not know how to express healthy emotions, because in my family, emotions were either over-expressed or suppressed. I saw both extremes in my parents. So I held my emotions in, and I ate them away. That way, I had the appearance of being put together. Of course, it was all a ruse.

Food anesthetized any pain I felt to the point I didn't have to feel. I could face any situation with calm, whether it was emotionally charged or totally depressing.

Soul Needs

We are all created as triune beings—body, soul and spirit. Just like my body needs water, nutrition, exercise, air,

sunlight and sleep in order to be healthy, my spirit needs to be fed with prayer, Bible reading and study, worship and fellowship.

It stands to reason if my body and spirit need things, so does my soul. My soul can be characterized as my mind, will and emotions. In other words, the soul is the part of me that governs my behavior. I understand the mind and I know the will, but it's the emotional part of me that often is an enigma.

It is the emotional-relational part of me that needs affection, attention, love and significance. If it does not get these, it will seek a way to get them. If I am scared of emotions or don't know how to express them and want to keep them hidden, I am resourceful. I will find a way to do that even if it is not a healthy way.

Food Hid My Emotions

My mechanism for hiding emotions was to eat comfort food, especially food that contained sugar and flour. To learn how to express emotions without hiding behind foods was difficult. I had to go back and confront some of my deep fears and emotional issues.

I did battle with my own demons. My emotions felt like beings with claws that wouldn't let go of me, but were always waiting to pounce on me. As I went through and confronted each one, though, it became easier and easier to allow God to set me free from the bondages of my past, the emotions that were pulling me back into my old habits.

I processed years of wrong thinking, uncovering root issues and forgiving people as God revealed situations where that was so needed. I learned it's not difficult to shake off these issues if I just trust God in the process. Now one of my most favorite things to do is to lead people through this process

and straight to the throne of God. It clears our lives, restores our foundations and gets us ready for transformation.

I hadn't completed my inner healing when I started my healthy eating journey, but I had gotten to the point where I saw clearly my model of using food to anesthetize pain was only heaping on more and more pain on me in the way of pounds.

Surrender Is the Key

I had always tried to lose weight by being mustering up all the self-control, strength and courage I could. When I put my mind to something, I can usually do it. It was exactly this mindset that negated my feelings and paralyzed all my good intentions. I could lose weight, but I could not stay away from the foods that were addictive to me so I'd put it right back on again.

Admitting that I am a sugar addict became my lifeline to God. When I admitted my weakness and surrendered the foods I had been using as coping mechanisms, that's when God stepped in with His grace and strength. That's when my life-saving journey really began.

Remember how I had been allowing the devil to steal, slaughter and destroy my very existence? Jesus reminded me that He had a different goal in mind for me. He wanted and still wants to give me everything in abundance, more than I expect—life in its fullness until I overflow! It's what He wants for you as well.

Embracing God-Given Emotions

Changing my mind was not so much the issue as changing my heart. I had to realize that it is OK to feel my emotions, even if it feels like I am naked and uncovered in front of the whole world. I began to realize there is no reason to hide. I embraced my God-given emotions and handed the negative, life-sucking ones to Him.

When I started to do that, amazing things began to happen. I began to feel again. I fell more in love with myself, my husband, my children, my family and others.

Moreover, I lost over 250 pounds. I fell madly in love with life, every crazy, exciting, over-the-top, messy, corny, wonderful part of it. I stopped trying to control everything and everyone. I allowed myself to get angry at injustices. I screamed with delight at exciting, mind-expanding moments. I allowed myself to feel deep sadness instead of running from it. I entered into mourning with those who were mourning.

These days, I am able to laugh out loud because joy does come in the morning, throughout the day and in even in the middle of the night. I even allow myself to cry real, sloppy, wet tears because they wash my soul of the garbage that tends to collect there.

It's OK to be emotional, because God gave me and you emotions to help us feel alive. It's more than OK to feel, really feel and embrace your emotions. Without emotions, we are just hollow shells going through the motions of life. Put the "e" back in, and those empty movements become beautiful emotions that give life meaning.

What's really amazingly glorious is that today I can unequivocally say, I am completely and totally in love with Jesus and the messiness of people, situations and life all around me! Loving Him completely has set me freer than free.

Yes, that is a bit emotional, but I wouldn't have it any other way!

Teresa Shields Parker is the author of five books and two study guides, including her latest, Sweet Journey to Transformation: Practical Steps to Lose Weight and Live Healthy, and her No. 1 bestseller, Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds. She is also a blogger, spiritual weight loss coach (check out her coaching group, Overcomers Academy) and speaker at .

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