

How Your Looks Can be an Idol

Rein in those weight obsessions. Don't let eating consume your thoughts and control your life.

I have experienced both ends of the spectrum: I've been overly thin, and I've been overweight, so I can keenly identify with the frustration and pain of those who suffer from eating disorders.

During a six-year period in my life, weight dominated my thoughts. My struggle began years before I became a Christian, yet it continued after I'd become one.

I heard the gospel for the first time during a summer break when I was a college student. Becoming a Christian filled a void in me that I had tried to satisfy with so many other things.

I realized that God loved me just the way I was. I stopped my excessive exercising, dieting and drinking, and I began to look healthy again.

However, I had a new problem. Around Christian tables no one talked about calories or the vices of food. Food was a celebration. I celebrated with them, and before long I had put back on most of the weight I had previously lost.

During this time, I met John, who would become my husband. We got engaged at the end of the next school year, and I returned to my home in Indiana to prepare for the wedding.

I was a little overweight then, but by August I was totally out of shape, with only two months before my wedding.

My home was filled with turmoil, and I responded to it by eating. I binged or starved myself, and I became more and more discouraged, so I binged even more. Every diet failed, and I felt fat and ugly.

Day of Reckoning

With four weeks left until my wedding, I needed to rent a slip for my size nine wedding gown. I brought my dress to the store with me so we could determine the appropriate style and length.

My wedding gown buttoned almost entirely down the back. I stepped into it and pushed the sides together so the saleswoman could button it.

"Honey, something is wrong," she said as she shook her head.

"What do you mean?" I questioned.

"This must not be your gown. There is no way you fit into this dress! The buttons are this far apart!" She showed me the distance of three or four inches with her with her finger and thumb.

I was certain she was mistaken, "Here, it may be a little tight, but I'll push it in." I sucked my stomach in and pinched my waist with my hands.

Sweetheart, there has been a terrible mistake; this cannot be your gown. I still can't close it; the buttons will tear off if I try."

"Just get me the slip, and I'll try it on without buttoning the dress," I huffed.

"OK." She walked out, shaking her head doubtfully.

I whirled around to see the back of my gown. To my horror, she was right. It was impossible even to make the sides meet—let alone button the buttons.

I placed my order for the slip, gathered my gown and raced home. My parents had spent a lot of money on this gown. Now I wondered if I'd ever wear it.

The Truth

When I arrived home, I ran straight upstairs to my room. After hanging my dress in the closet, I grabbed my Bible, threw myself down on the hardwood floor and wept.

“God, how could You allow this to happen? I don’t eat all day, and still I can’t lose a pound. If I eat only an apple and a yogurt, I gain a pound. I binge and gain two pounds overnight! I’m tired of trying and failing. Why can’t I eat like a normal person?”

When the crying was done, a quiet settled over me. Then I heard a still, small voice: “Lisa, your weight is an idol to you.”

An idol! All I could envision was the picture of a golden calf I had seen in a children’s Bible. I remained quiet and listened.

“When you are lonely, you eat. When you are angry, you eat. When you are bored, you eat. When you are depressed, you eat. When you are happy, you eat.”

That about covered it. The voice continued: “You do not come to Me. You do not read My Word. You eat because it is easier.”

The still, small voice said: “You feel good about your self when you are thin and bad about your self when you are not. You are not Spirit led; your weight controls your moods and your life. It is an idol to you.”

It was all true. Weight dominated my thought life and tormented my rest. The tears flowed again, but this time they were tears of repentance. I saw how I’d drawn strength from my weight and not from God. I measured myself by the scales. I was worthy of love if I was thin, but I was not worthy if I was fat.

Once again the voice spoke: “If you’ll repent, I will heal

your metabolism. Do not diet, and do not weigh yourself. Separate yourself and fast for three days on juices and water, and I will rid your body of its cravings. I will teach you how to eat again. Write down the weight you should be, and put it in your Bible.”

I no longer had any idea what my weight should be. I got very quiet and listened again. A figure floated into my head; I scribbled the number down and hid it in my Bible.

I got up, grabbed the scales and placed them in the attic access in my bedroom closet. God had told me not to weigh myself. I would have to climb up there to get the scales, knowing all the while that I was deliberately disobeying God.

The next day would begin a new way of life for me. I was not fasting to lose weight; I was fasting to fellowship with God. I sensed His presence, and I sensed that He was pleased with me for repenting and choosing to fast and draw closer to Him.

GOD SUSTAINS

For the next three days, I drank apple-strawberry juice, straight or diluted, along with purified water. God sustained me. I went for walks and talked with Him. Then the fast was over and it was time for me to learn a new lifestyle. I would eat until I was satisfied—not until I was engorged.

At mealtime I thanked God that food was not my enemy. It would bring strength to my body, and in turn, I would worship God. Fear would try to attack me. Gluttony would try to entice me. But I refused to be mastered by my passions any longer. Inwardly I would listen and know when I was satisfied. Then I would not eat another bite.

I was so excited that God was developing this sensitivity in me; I never wanted to disobey it. Even when my family and friends encouraged me to eat more, I would just say, “No, thank you; I am satisfied!”

Three weeks had passed, and my wedding was just a few days away. I had no idea how much I weighed, nor was I even interested. But I did need to know that my dress would fit, so I tried it on.

Not only did it fit—it hung a little loose! I would be able to wear my dress!

My wedding was wonderful, and when I came home to change into my going-away outfit, God stopped me. He said, “Now you can weigh yourself.”

I got the scales down and stepped on them. The needle teetered between 110 and 120 pounds. I jumped off the scale and flipped through my Bible until I found the small slip of paper with the scrawled number.

I opened up the paper. One hundred sixteen pounds! I jumped back on the scales in disbelief; it was my exact weight!

God has been faithful to keep me at that weight independent of diet and exercise. I have trusted Him to watch over my weight as long as I keep food in the proper place.

Reordering the disorder of your weight and tumbling the food idol isn't about losing weight—it's about what you place your trust in. I had humbled my self with fasting, and God had healed me.

Lisa Bevere is the best-selling author of books including *Out of Control and Loving It!*, *The True Measure of a Woman* and *You Are Not What You Weigh*, from which this article was adapted. Lisa and her husband, John, live in Colorado.