

Spiritual Secrets to Losing Weight—and Not Gaining It Back

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish, but to fulfill” (Matt. 5:17).

Once a dear friend told me she had changed her morning routine: “Every day, before I eat breakfast, I drink a mixture of honey, lemon juice and vinegar.”

I blended the flavors together in my mind and immediately asked her why in the world she would drink such a concoction, having a personal preference for hazelnut coffee to start my day. She told me she was drinking it in order to lose weight. Now, at the time she shared this with me, she hadn’t lost any weight, despite her faithful adherence. And a few weeks later, when she apparently had had enough of this beverage, she still hadn’t lost any weight.

I hear a fair share of weight-loss testimonies—both successful and unsuccessful. What never ceases to amaze me is the tendency ingrained in us humans to look for a set of rules to follow. We, by nature, like a firm set of regulations; we want to know the parameters and stick to the guidelines, whatever they may be. I believe there is a measure of security found in following rules, and there is nothing wrong with wanting to feel secure. There is a problem, however, when our passion for guidelines causes us to miss the point.

Let’s be honest. In this day and age, information on nutrition is widely and readily available from many different sources. We are saturated with good advice on healthy living from magazines, television and the internet.

The issue is not so much ignorance as it is a desire for rules. In other words, if you tell me exactly what to eat, when to eat and how much to eat, I'll stick to it, and I'll expect to see results.

Our verse for today is taken from the Sermon on the Mount, found in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus makes a point that would utterly confound the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes during His entire earthly ministry, and that was the distinction between a mere adherence to the law and an understanding of the essence of the law.

The big picture is not that you chew your food at a slower rate and take longer to complete a meal. Yes, that may be important in terms of satiety signals, but it is not the big picture. The big picture is not whether or not you eat past six in the evening. Making sure you drink a specified number of eight-ounce glasses of water each day is not the big picture. Unfortunately, the truth of the matter is that unless we grasp the big picture, the rules don't do much in the long run.

The big picture relates to the character traits (or character flaws) that prevent us from making permanent changes for better health. So if our daily menu represents the letter of the law, then such attributes as self-control, discipline, moderation, sobriety, subjecting the flesh and resisting temptation would represent the essence of the law.

Any dietitian can prescribe a 1,200- or 1,600-calorie meal plan, but no dietitian can make us practice self-control. A popular diet might favor proteins over carbohydrates or vice versa, but no diet plan—no matter how popular—can tell us how to subject our flesh and resist temptation.

One person may enjoy a slice of pie operating with a mature level of self-control, while another person may eat celery sticks and be severely lacking in self-control. The first

person will enjoy the foods he eats yet maintain a healthy body weight; the second person will tolerate celery sticks for a season, then resume the bad habits that contributed to their weight problem, and in the long run, find themselves weighing more than when they started.

Legalism hurt the ancient Palestinians, and it hurts us today. Never forget that it is the essence of the law that matters, and learning the essence comes by way of the Holy Spirit {eoa}.

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