

A 'Biggest Loser' Contestant Loses More Than Weight

✖ Stay-at-home mom Julie Hadden was 5 feet 1 inch tall, weighed 218 pounds and by medical standards considered morbidly obese when she pleaded with God to help her lose weight. But she had no idea He would use the hit reality TV show *The Biggest Loser* to help rid her of both the physical and spiritual weights that controlled her life.

Julie was able to shed the pounds and regain her self-esteem. She shares her story and tells about being a contestant on season four (2007) in her new book *Fat Chance: Losing the Weight, Gaining My Worth*. To hear her inspiring testimony, listen to podcast.

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Julie's Story: The Spiritual Side to My Weight-Loss Struggle

One of the most interesting aspects of being on *The Biggest Loser* was the ubiquitous presence of cameras and production crew. It wasn't uncommon for my teammates and me to be interrupted even during the most grueling of workouts in order to be interviewed for one segment of the show or another.

To be sure, it was a situation that elicited a mixed response: A break was always welcomed during one of Jillian's workouts, but who wanted to be punished by her upon returning to the gym?

Fairly early in the show, one of the production assistants pulled me from a treadmill and asked me to come outside to

talk on camera about my thoughts on the experience thus far. It was maybe two minutes into our little chat when I saw her swivel her head toward the cameraman and with a heavy sigh say, "Cut." Still the peoplepleaser of the bunch, I asked if I'd said something wrong.

"No, it's the bells," she said, and nodded toward the distance behind me. "We'll start over when things quiet down."

There were microphones everywhere on campus, it seemed. They were in our bathrooms, in our bedrooms and in the dining room where we ate every meal. There were precious few locations that weren't wired up with a mic, but Hollie and I found each and every one and swapped secrets the entire season long.

Jillian pitched a massive fit every time anyone interrupted our workouts. I later learned from production crew that they used to draw straws to determine who had to enter the gym to remove one of her team members for an interview.

I had been so focused on whatever it was I was saying that I had failed to notice the majestic church bells pealing their noontime chime. I looked toward the church that I could not see and closed my eyes as the bells finished their song. I thought my faith was stuck in Jacksonville, God, but you're clearly here with me now. I sat perfectly still while I awaited his reply, anxious for conversation with the one I'd kept at a stiff arm's length.

"I know you thought you were alone here," he seemed to say, "but I've been with you all along."

"Here?" I thought with a small, wry smile. "They let you come to Hollywood?"

Every 15 minutes from that day forward, I noticed those church bells ringing. They chimed on the quarter-hour, on the half-hour, at fifteen 'til and when the top of the hour came-how had I missed them before?

Regardless of what we were doing, sound technicians would curse and all production activity would cease. But for me those bells weren't a source of frustration; they were a reminder to talk to God.

I was away from my church, my pastor and the familiar to-dos of my youth, and yet it was in the midst of that utterly stripped-back state that I came face to face with God. My rules were being replaced with relationship, and my faith felt fresh and new.

While I worked out on campus, much of the spiritual knowledge that I'd acquired as a kid came to mind. (Six-hour workouts could even drive pagans to pray.)

I recalled the verse in Psalm 139 that says my body is fearfully and wonderfully made. I remembered 1 Corinthians 6:19, which says that our bodies are temples of God. I was reminded that my body had been created to worship him, and that my frame was intended to be strong.

I thought also about Bible characters who exhibited strength in the midst of tough situations. The one that rose to the surface immediately was the story of David and Goliath—a reference even Jillian would cite to motivate me toward greater success.

During a long treadmill-run, I'd think about tiny David facing the nine-foot-tall Philistine with nothing but a few smooth stones, and I'd regain faith in the fact that despite my small size, I could and would prevail.

"You're going down, thunder-thighs! You don't stand a chance, big belly!"

My "insurmountable" circumstances were nothing for my mighty God. He had been faithful to give me a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reclaim the life he so badly wanted me to live, and I wanted more than anything to be found faithful in

return.

With each dawning day and every small goal achieved, my faith in the goodness of God rose. I had spent most of my life seeking purpose, security, companionship in a thousand different places. I'd just never looked to Him.

As I began to look to God to supply every single thing I needed, I witnessed Him releasing me—"saving" me, as it turns out—from the things that had held me captive for years: legalism, an overemphasis on trying to please people, fear, heaviness both in my body and in my heart.

At every turn, He was fulfilling His promise to help me bear up under what life had thrown my way.

"God is faithful," 1 Corinthians 10:13 says. "He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

There were plenty of temptations for me on campus, but you try sneaking a Snickers with the God of the universe standing right by your side. "I'm with you in this struggle," He'd remind me, "and with My help, you're capable of making choices that are wise."

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