

Dealing With Body Image/Weight From a Biblical Perspective

1. Why Body Image, Weight (and Eating) are Sensitive, Difficult Topics

- Why is it hard to talk about these issues, even from a spiritual perspective?
 - If you haven't controlled your eating/weight, the problem might be evident.
 - Eating and weight are very personal so it's easy to hurt feelings.
 - We don't want to make laws.
 - We are afraid we will create problems in our young people.
- How do we typically deal with these issues?
 - Avoid them (in sermons; in conversation)
 - Excuse them
 - Joke about them
- Is “how we eat” a spiritual topic?
 - The Bible addresses gluttony
 - The Lord says we are to “*glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's*” 1 Corinthians 6:20
 - We must evaluate our attitudes and behaviors in the light of God's word
 - We should view eating/weight as God views them.
- Why is it hard to discern what's right and wrong in this area?
 - There **are** some medical/genetic causes for weight gain.
 - Food is a blessing!
 - “*He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the service of man, That he may bring forth food from the earth, And wine that makes glad the heart of man, Oil to make his face shine, And bread which strengthens man's heart.*” Psalms 104:14, 15
 - “*Go, eat your bread with joy, And drink your wine with a merry heart; For God has already accepted your works.*” Ecclesiastes 9:7
 - Food is a necessity, so we can't avoid it all together (we have to achieve moderation).
 - The Bible does not specify any “godly diet” or “godly weight.”

2. Finding Balance Between the Extremes

- We do recognize sinful extremes exist, so we have to find middle ground (righteous thinking/behavior)

“starving yourself to death” <-----> “eating yourself to death”
(sin) (sin)

- We must avoid extremes in how we FEEL about our physical bodies.
 - being obsessed
 - devoting self to fitness/weight/appearance (idolatry)
 - constantly worrying
 - hating ourselves
 - feeling worthless
 - comparing self to others
- We must avoid extremes in how we ACT about/with our physical bodies.
 - flaunting ourselves; showing off (acting in an ungodly manner)
 - devoting inordinate time & money
 - disregard our appearance
 - dismissing our weight and physical health as unimportant

– We find the correct approach in the word of God.

- Understand that your value is unrelated to your appearance or your weight.

*“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For **you were bought at a price**; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20*

*Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— **4** but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, **which in God’s sight is very precious.** 1 Peter 3:3, 4, ESV*

*“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet **the inward man is being renewed day by day.**” 2 Corinthians 4:16*

*““For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or **what will a man give in exchange for his soul?**” Matthew 16:26*

- Remember that Satan is a liar, and wants you to believe you are worthless.

*““You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for **he is a liar** and the father of it.” John 8:44*

- Understand that you are responsible for your body and you should be a good steward of what God has given you.

*“For **bodily exercise profits a little**, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.” 1 Timothy 4:8*

3. What Biblical Principles Apply to Eating and Weight?

- ✳ **We must be good stewards of what God gives us.**

*“Moreover it is **required in stewards that one be found faithful.**” 1 Corinthians 4:2*

*“Or do you not know that **your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you**, whom you have from God, and **you are not your own**? For you were bought at a price; therefore **glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.**” 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20*

– We understand how this applies to

- smoking
- drug use
- anorexia/bulimia
- extremes in food choices

– We know that being seriously overweight causes health problems, including

- type 2 diabetes
- ischemic heart disease
- high blood pressure and stroke
- congestive heart failure
- metabolic syndrome
- certain types of cancer
- gastroesophageal reflux
- osteoarthritis
- low back pain
- gout
- gallbladder disease
- fatty liver disease
- reproductive problems in women
- pregnancy complications
- pulmonary problems, including sleep apnea
- deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism
- reduced life expectancy

(cf sources below*)

- What do these problems do to our ability to serve in the kingdom?
- What keeps us from applying the Good Stewardship principle to eating and weight?
 - It's a sensitive topic; we don't want to talk about it
 - We're defensive about our own physical condition
 - Our culture insists that you and your personal choices are okay no matter what
 - Our culture insists we have no right to "judge" others
 - We have tried and failed to apply this principle successfully, so we give up
- Does mismanaging what God has given us glorify Him?

*** We must exercise self-control.**

*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, **self-control**. Against such there is no law." Galatians 5:22, 23*

*"But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge **self-control**, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor **unfruitful** in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 1:5-8*

*"And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. Now as he reasoned about righteousness, **self-control**, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." Acts 24:24, 25*

*"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, **without self-control**, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" 2 Timothy 3:1-5*

*"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is **temperate** in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I **discipline my body and bring it into subjection**, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." 1 Corinthians 9:24-27*

temperate: egkrateuomai, to exercise self-restraint (in diet and chastity) (Thayer)

discipline: hupopiazō, to hit under the eye; i.e. subdue (Thayer)

- Does losing self-control glorify God? Does an undisciplined life glorify God?

*** God condemns gluttony.**

*"Do not mix with winebibbers, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; for the drunkard and **the glutton will come to poverty**, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags." Proverbs 23:20, 21*

*"**And put a knife to your throat if you are a man given to appetite.**" Proverbs 23:2*

*"Whoever keeps the law is a discerning son, but a **companion of gluttons shames his father.**" Proverbs 28:7*

*"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such **do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly**, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple." Romans 16:17, 18*

*“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, **whose god is their belly**, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.” Philippians 3:18, 19*

- Does putting our physical desires first glorify God?
- When does eating become gluttony? To answer, begin with the basic relationship between eating and weight gain: When # calories eaten exceeds # calories used, we store the excess as fat. Is storing fat inherently sinful? No. Can storing excess fat make you violate other spiritual principles? From that answer, work toward an understanding of what is reasonable eating and what is excessive.

*** Jesus expects us to be good examples.**

*“**Let your light so shine before men**, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” Matthew 5:16*

*“For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard of violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, **self-controlled**, upright, holy, and **disciplined**.” Titus 1:7, 8, ESV*

*““Judge not, that you be not judged. “For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. **“And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?”** “Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? “Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” Matthew 7:1-5*

- Can we teach credibly about self-control in speech, thoughts, sexuality, etc. if we do not control our own eating habits?
- Does out-of-control eating dim our light to the world?

*** Idolatry is sin.**

- Anything we allow to control us can be an idol.

*“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, **whose god is their belly**, and whose glory is in their shame--who set their mind on earthly things.” Philippians 3:18, 19*

*“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but **I will not be brought under the power of any**. Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” 1 Corinthians 6:12, 13*

*““Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and **self-indulgence**.” Matthew 23:25*

self-indulgence: akrasia, want of self-restraint; excess, incontinency (Thayer)

- Do we love food more than obedience to God?

*“I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; **I have treasured the words of His mouth More than my necessary food**.” Job 23:12*

4. How Do I Know If I Have a Problem?

To find out if your desire for food is controlling you, ask yourself:

– **When do I eat?**

- when I'm stressed (but not really hungry)
- when I'm angry “ “ “ “
- when I'm sad or depressed “ “ “ “
- when I'm bored “ “ “ “
- whenever food is available

– **Do I often use food as an alternative to what God has provided for spiritual comfort—prayer, reading the word, relationships with other Christians?**

– **When do I stop eating?**

- only when I run out of the food I was eating
- only when I am embarrassed to eat any more
- only when I'm so full that I feel ill, or will be sick if I continue

– **What physical consequences result from the way I eat?**

- I never feel hungry (because I feed myself nonstop)
- I often have indigestion or discomfort from being over-full
- Sometimes even though I know I will experience discomfort from eating (e.g. too late at night; too soon after a meal), I eat anyway
- I experience continuous weight gain
- I am experiencing health problems because of my excess weight

– **What behaviors accompany my eating?**

- I don't want people to know how much I eat
- I hide food so that others will not know what or how much I will eat
- I lie about what I eat

– **How does eating affect my relationships with other people?**

- even though I might not be hungry, I eat the last piece of a favorite food before someone else can get it
- I hide food so that others will not get it
- when someone tries to talk to me about my eating, I get angry even though I know what they are saying is true

– **What kind of diet appeals to me?**

- a temporary diet which promises quick weight loss, so I can go back to my usual habit of unrestrained eating
- a diet in which I can eat "all I want" of something (so I don't have to restrain myself as much)

5. Do I make excuses?

– “Even though I am very overweight, I don't eat too much.”

- Do you mean that you **like** the way you currently eat, and don't **want** to change it?
- Do you mean the amount **seems** reasonable to you? (Make sure it really is!)

ATLANTA - More than three-quarters of obese Americans say they have healthy eating habits, according to a survey of more than 11,000 people.

About 40 percent of obese people also said they do “vigorous” exercise at least three times a week, the telephone survey found.

“There is, perhaps, some denial going on. Or there is a lack of understanding of what does it mean to be eating healthy, and what is vigorous exercise,” said Dr. David Schutt of Thomson Medstat, the Michigan-based health-care research firm that conducted the survey.

The survey also found that 28 percent of obese people reported snacking two or more times a day, only slightly more than 24 percent of normal weight people who said they did.

But the survey failed to ask people what — and how much — they ate, noted Dr. Jeffrey Koplan of Atlanta’s Emory University.

“The questions leave out quantity,” said Koplan, who chairs an Institute of Medicine committee on progress in preventing childhood obesity.

Source: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14140990/>

- Do you mean that although in the past you did take in an excess of calories, you no longer do so? (Good! Now the question is, do you have damage to undo?)
- “I can’t lose weight.” Do you mean...
 - Your body will not respond to a calorie deficit by burning fat?
 - You do not want to change?
 - You do not have the will to do what is necessary to change your eating/exercise habits?
 - You have tried and failed?
 - You would like to change but you don’t know how?

6. What Should I Do if I Have a Problem?

- First, make sure you have an accurate understanding of what you are actually eating.
- Understand and accept the math: Generally speaking, if you have a calorie excess, you will gain weight. If you establish a calorie deficit (via diet and/or exercise) you will lose weight.
- Consider fasting as a SPIRITUAL exercise (not for quick weight loss!) if you can do so safely.
 - Eating is one of our most basic physical desires
 - If we can abstain from eating, we can control ourselves in other areas
 - Fasting is excellent practice in self-control
- If you do find you have a spiritual problem with eating/weight, treat it as you would any other spiritual problem:
 - Admit your areas of weakness and sin
 - Love God and righteousness more than self and food
 - Repent and ask God for wisdom and help.
 - Learn about the physiology of hunger, eating, digestion (leptin, ghrelin etc.)
 - Map out exactly HOW you will change (# calories you need, how you will change habits, etc)
 - Accept new limitations and the loss of your “freedom”
 - Build hedges—around what you buy, where you go, who you eat with, when you eat
 - Be accountable to others
 - When you fail, repent and renew your efforts
 - Remember that you are God’s child, and He loves you! If you need to change, He will help you do it.

* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obesity_associated_morbidity “Obesity associated morbidity”

<http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/understanding.htm#genetic> “Understanding Adult Obesity”

http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/health_risks.htm “Do You Know the Health Risks of Being Overweight?”