

WEIGHT!
A Better Way to Lose
Winning the Battle Through Spiritual Motivation

Chapter 2

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Third Edition

Is It Wrong to Long to be Thin?

Speak to some people of dieting or trying to lose weight, and you will get an immediate negative response. They react this way for a number of reasons.

A husband of an overweight woman may fear losing his wife to another man if she becomes slim and trim.

Some parents rest easier if their daughters are overweight just enough to thin down the number of young men who are interested in them.

Others see efforts to lose weight as carnal and unimportant since spiritual matters should have priority over physical matters.

What is the proper attitude toward weight control?

Is it ever wrong to long to be thin?

It is certainly possible to have wrong motives for desiring to lose weight.

The Pharisees gave gifts to the poor so the others would be impressed by their supposed generosity. Although these gifts were undoubtedly needed and appreciated by those who received them, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their constant grandstanding and call them hypocrites (Matt. 6:2).

Good works that spring from bad motives are sinful. And motives are expressions of the heart.

Both Jesus and James gave examples of even prayer becoming sinful when the motives for praying are wrong.

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward (Matt. 6:5).

Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts (James 4:3).

If Prayer can become sinful when improperly motivated, this must also be true of trying to lose weight. Under some conditions it is wrong to long to be thin.

Wrong Motives for Losing Weight

It is wrong to desire to lose weight to provoke lust. In the New Testament the word *lust* is usually a translation of the Greek word *epithumia*, meaning “a passionate craving.” When this passionate craving calls for breaking the moral law of God, it becomes evil desire.

Solomon tells of an immoral woman who invites a young man into her home to commit adultery (Prov. 7:7-23). She has her mind set on seducing this man and prepares for it.

She dresses to seduce.

She goes into the street at night where she knows he will pass and offers herself to him, assuring him that her husband is away on a business trip and that he will not return that night.

She even describes the preparation of her bed for his visit.

I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved works, with fine linen of Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning: let us solace ourselves with loves. For the Goodman is not at home, he is on a long journey: He hath taken a bag of money with him, and will come home at the day appointed (Prov. 7:16-20).

There is, of course, nothing wrong with making a bed beautiful; nothing sinful about coverings of tapestry and fine linen.

Perfume the sheets if you please...and if it pleases your spouse.

But when the motivation for all of these preparations is immoral, you have made a bad bed.

Provoking lust is always wrong, even when it masquerades as a desire for attractiveness and health. If lust is your motivation for losing weight, it is wrong for you to long to be thin.

Longing to lose weight will also be wrong for you if your motivation for losing is

personal pride.

Now our study is becoming sensitive.

Pride is popular today, even among Christians. Many over-weight people have felt inferior for so long that pride over becoming thin may seem justified.

Have you been longing for a time when you can outshine your thin friends whom you have been resenting, and who always seem to look just right?

Have you been waiting to get even?

Have you been fantasizing about showing off your new trim look in their presence and for once getting all the attention?

Your feelings, though understandable, have their roots in pride. Self-exaltation is always harmful and is best conquered by cultivating an attitude of gratitude for all achievements.

See how serious pride is to God:

The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the forward mouth, do I hate (Prov. 8:13).

When pride cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom (Prov. 11:2).

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the father, but is of the world (1 John 2:15-16).

Could it be that you have failed to get your weight under control because your motive to lose has been pride? Has a lack of humility kept you from needed self-control that comes from a selfless yielding to the Holy Spirit? Measuring the pride factor in your life might be the key to success in the losing those pounds.

Finally, it is wrong to long to be thin when losing weight may jeopardize your health.

While losing weight is usually healthful, an obsession with slimness can cost the diligent dieter his or her health; sometimes the drive to be thin has even led to death. This is especially true among those who have become the victims of anorexia nervosa, an eating disorder that usually afflicts young women in their middle or upper teenage years.

In her article, "Anorexia Nervosa: I almost Starved to Death," Dianne Lawson

tells of being so addicted to dieting that she counted every calorie she consumed, including those in the toothpaste she was using. Sometimes she would go two or three days without food to make up for eating a meal she could not avoid.

Dianne had started dieting to lose a few pounds, wanting to get down to 108. But before her ordeal was over she weighed only 70 pounds and had to be hospitalized to save her life.

At the time she entered the hospital, Dianne was having severe circulation problems and was fainting frequently. She says her skin had become ashen gray, and her blood pressure was very low. Her fingernails had seemingly ceased to grow. Her body had begun consuming her own muscles for nutrients and in the process had damaged her heart.

Thankfully, Dianne has recovered and as a result of her experience says she has come into new relationship with her family and with God. While she once thought of God as a supreme taskmaster, she now knows Him as the One who loves her and understands when she is alone or in need. Others have not been so fortunate and have permanently damaged their health by anorexic behavior. Some have died.

While most victims of eating disorders are from middle-class and upper-class homes, recent research indicates that eating problems are showing up in all economic classes and age-groups.

Studies indicate that 95 percent of eating disorder victims are women. As many as one out of five women in college may be either anorexic or bulimic (a condition where the victim is obsessed with both food and weight, leading to bouts of gorging and self-induced vomiting. Up to 20 percent of women between the ages of fifteen and thirty are victims. Males, however, are also becoming subject to eating disorders with increasing frequency.

In their book, *There's More to Being Thin Than Being Thin*, Neva Coyle and Marie Chapian explain:

The anorexic or bulimic person has exaggerated fears of becoming fat, even though she is close to normal weight. A high percentage of people with these eating disorders are women. They overreact to society's dictates of beauty and femininity and feel exaggerated pressures to be thin.

In her article, "Dying to Be Thin," published in *Family Circle* magazine, caroline Adams Miller describes her seven year nightmare as a victim of bulimia and says she had come to blame society for expecting woman not only to be bright, witty, exuberant, and beautiful, but also to fit into size-4 designer jeans.

This common thread of trying to live up to the expectations of others seems to run through most of the stories of those who long to be thin to the point of jeopardizing their health and risking their lives to achieve it. They feel they must conform to the pressure of their peers, their families, or society even if it destroys them.

Do not embark on any weight loss program for the wrong reasons, including a desire to please others or to conform to the image of the so-called beautiful people who flaunt their figures and builds on television screens and the covers of magazines. God loves you as you are, and if you truly need to lose weight, He will enable you to do so in a way that will contribute to the good health and the abundant life He desires for you.

Now that we've considered some of the wrong reasons for wanting to lose weight control. Generally it is not wrong to long to be thin.

Knowing How Thin You Should Be

Longing to lose weight is not wrong when you weigh more than you should for your height and frame.

Size and weight charts are available from your doctor and at many bookstores. According to the Mayo Clinic, however, you may not have to diet despite what the height-weight charts say if you have a sense of energy and well-being, normal blood pressure, normal triglyceride and cholesterol levels, and if you are satisfied with the way you look.

Consulting with your family doctor about what you should weigh, considering your height and frame, will be time and money well spent.

After you have gathered all this information, remember that you are unique and that you are important to God. You have a special place in His plan, and finding that place is more important than conforming to the dimensions of a skinny world.

I visited a man a number of times in an effort to lead him to faith in Christ. He had been quite successful as a farmer and businessman but now was rather withdrawn from

social contacts. He always seemed to appreciate my visits and concern for him, yet he would not respond to my message.

Finally, I discovered the reason for his reluctance: he was afraid that in coming to faith in Christ he would lose his individuality. He feared that salvation would make him “just another Christian, one of the crowd “headed for heaven.”

Nothing could be farther from the truth.

It is true God loves the world, but He loves you as an individual. There is a particular place for you in the body of Christ that no one else can fill. Your gifts and talents have been given to you so you can carry out your role in the church.

For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And is the ear shall say, because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him (1 Cor. 12:14-18).

Each of us is equipped exactly as God intends for our good and His glory, including the height and frame He has given us which should always be kept at its best.

When my friend saw that he was unique in God’s eyes, he was ready to receive Christ as his Lord and Savior. He wanted to get in on God’s plan for his life.

Your uniqueness is precious to your Heavenly Father.

Accepting this truth will set you free.

The Dangers of Obesity

Desiring to lose weight in order to improve your health and lengthen your life will always be right.

Being overweight can be deadly.

Dr. Jules Hirsch, chairman of a fourteen member panel of doctors and nutritionists assembled by the National Institute of Health, called obesity a killer that is just as dangerous to health as smoking. As reported in Time magazine, Dr. Hirsch warned that the public tends to regard obesity as something more involved with appearance than health but that in reality it is a very pervasive health hazard in many systems of the body.

Explaining some conclusions of the panel, Claudia Wallis writes:

According to the panel, the hazards become significant for a person who is 20 percent or more above the desirable weight as determined by the Metropolitan Life Insurance tables. By these standards, about 34 million American adults and one out of every five people over age nineteen are obese. Of these, 11 Million qualify as severely obese because they exceed their desirable weights by 40 percent or more.

What are the specific dangers to these overweight people?

They have three times the normal incidence of high blood pressure and diabetes, an increased risk of heart disease, a shorter lifespan, and an unusually high risk of developing respiratory disorders, arthritis, and certain types of cancer.

A severely obese woman, for example, has five times the normal risk of developing cancer of the uterine lining and an increased risk of breast cancer and cervical cancers. Men who are significantly overweight have an increased chance of developing malignancies of the colon, rectum, and prostate.

Hirsch, a professor at Rockefeller University, added another shocker by saying that relatively small amounts of excess flab, even five pounds, can be dangerous, particularly to people already at risk for hypertension and diabetes.

And here's a surprise: where you carry your extra weight can influence your health. Studies show that people who pack their flab as a potbelly or a spare tire are more apt to suffer from heart disease, stroke, and diabetes than those who carry the same amount around their hips and thighs. This may chalk up another point for the value of exercise.

All of these warnings by the experts have led *Time* reporter, Claudia Wallis, to wonder if in the future we may see the following warning on candy wrappers and refrigerator doors: THE SURGEON GENERAL HAS DETERMINED THAT OBESITY IS DANGEROUS TO YOUR HEALTH.

The Good Life

Slimming down then, may contribute more to life than a good feeling when looking in the mirror. According to respected health authorities, taking off extra pounds contributes to good health and probably to the length of life.

Richard Ely, a busy pastor, has been tasting the joy of improved health increased

vigor since he recognized being overweight was a spiritual problem and set out to conquer it. In a letter to me describing his new way of life, he says:

I had been struggling with my health for five or six years. It was beginning to take a toll on my ability to keep up with my responsibilities in the ministry and at home. The more stress I experienced, the more I ate, and the problem just kept growing. I found myself worn out by two or three in the afternoon with many more hours still to go.

I had to admit that it was a spiritual problem for me, food was an escape for me from the stress and pressure of the ministry.

Pastor Ely cut down his calorie intake and gained strength to do so daily by committing his problem to the lord. He found the first three days to be the most crucial because of experiencing withdrawal from sugar and feelings of hunger, but he persevered and has been successful in losing his excess weight. But reducing calories was only part of his program. Exercise was equally important. He wrote:

I began a walking program, one to two miles a day and gradually worked up to thirty to forty miles per week after three months, and I did fifty to seventy-five sit-ups per day.

I've lost fifty pounds and feel like a new person at home and at work. I've been involved in physical activities that gave up ten years ago, and I'm enjoying them also. I feel better about myself, and I now realize that Satan was defeating me in this area of my life, and I didn't realize it.

I have people tell me they afford the time, but this isn't valid. They can't afford not to spend the time.

The key is maintenance. I've told myself most people can go on a diet and lose it, but keeping it off is the key. I'm maintaining my desired weight by keeping up my walking, and I'm eating about 2,500 calories a day. I've discovered that the time walking is a precious time when I can talk and listen to the lord and enjoy the beauty of His creation.

You must structure your diet and exercise program to fit you. That is critical if you are going to be successful. Also, realize you have a serious problem and treat it as a spiritual struggle.

*In Christ,
Richard Ely*

When your goal in losing weight is better health, you have proper motivation, and it is not wrong to long to be thin. But there is another proper reason for longing to lose: the desire to demonstrate the power of God working in the through you, enhancing your personal witness for Christ and bringing glory to God.

To God Be The Glory

Bill Pauley, a minister, weighed 384 pounds and had a 58-inch waist. He said that

buying a car was like buying a suit-he had to be fitted. When he wanted to weigh himself, he went to the butcher shop to use the scale. He recalled:

I will always remember the time I boarded the airplane and sat in one of those tight seats. I could hardly get into it. When the stewardess asked if my seatbelt was fastened, I told her I could not get it around me in the first place; and in the second place, if there were a crash, she would not have to worry-I would be stuck to the seat permanently!

For the most part, Bill had been able to laugh off his heavy-weight appearance. He seems to have followed the if-you-have -a-lemon-make-lemonade policy, and he had even developed a fine string of jokes about his weight to use as openers in his meetings. Then one day he found himself in a situation that wasn't funny.

While he was the speaker in youth meetings in central Illinois, he heard about a statement made by one of the teenage girls there. She had said, "If Mr. Pauley can eat, then I can smoke."

That girl's observation was an eye-opener to Pauley. Later he said, "For years I had criticized smoking and drinking and had preached the Word of God without applying the matter of temperance to myself. It was not until I heard what this girl had said that I became convicted of overeating."

Bill Pauley claimed the power of God and went on a diet. He lost 179 pounds, and his waist went from 58 inches to 36 inches. He ended his weight problem and gained the victory as a demonstration of the power of God working in him. His success in this formerly neglected area of his life improved his witness for Christ and brought glory to God.

In church where I ministered, the Sunday School superintendent and the church pianist were husband and wife and were both overweight. A class was started in the church using my book *Weight! A Better Way to Lose* and my weight control seminar on cassettes. Both the superintendent and the pianist joined the class and began losing weight.

Each Sunday the superintendent and the pianist came before the congregation to carry out their service for the Lord and were thinner than the week before. The whole church began to rejoice in what God was doing in their lives, and on the Sunday they announced a total weight loss between them of 100 pounds, the congregation broke into

applause over their victory. Their newfound discipline was a good testimony to their church of deeper commitment to Christ. And God was glorified.

There are many gains in achieving desired weight control: improved health, fewer emotional hang-ups, even a longer life, to name a few. But the most important reason for losing weight may be the impact your lifestyle has on others as you demonstrate God's power working in you, making it possible for you to become the disciplined person you need to be to conquer your weight problem. When that is your goal, you can be sure it is not wrong to long to be thin.

Questions for Application

1. Pastor Ely said that being overweight was a spiritual problem for him. How do you react to this statement?
2. If a friend or family member has anorexia, what symptoms would you notice? What symptoms could help you identify a bulimic person?
3. Can you think of other wrong motives for losing weight that were not discussed in this chapter?
4. How can success in weight control affect your relationship to God?