

FIND  
YOUR  
WAY  
Weigh

What a refreshing and biblical look at our struggle with weight! Shellie brings hope and practicality to this health journey. The companion study guide adds an opportunity to take a deeper look into ourselves and provides guidelines with accompanying scriptures; helping us make changes in our thought life and choices about food. Shellie outlines powerfully how we can “Find our Weigh.”

SANDRA MUNDIS – *Women’s global networker serving alongside her husband Greg executive director of Assemblies of God World Missions.*

Are you tired of being on a dieting roller coaster? Are you looking for freedom from the condemnation and frustration of failing so many times? Then, “Find Your Weigh” is just what you need. Shellie talks about allowing God to change your mindset about food. It’s an incredible journey of freedom from the struggles surrounding your weight and your self image. I encourage you to dive in and let God work through this incredible book and study.

BECCA KETTERLING – *Women’s Pastor, River Valley Church*

Shellie Bowdoin has written a book that will change your thoughts on weight loss. This is not a “diet” book but a personal journey that will encourage you in the area of weight management. Shellie has combined practical principles, personal journaling and biblical insight that will enable you to establish life habits that will bring positive results in your health, weight and mindset. Shellie’s desire is to help others and this book will accomplish that for many. I wholeheartedly recommend it.

DEBBIE COLE – *Host of the video series “Off-Script with Debbie” and Alongside Facilitator for the Northwest Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God*

As someone who knows the bondage of food and finding your worth in a number on the scale, Find Your Weigh was a breath of fresh air! Learning to really understand our thoughts around food is so important to healing that relationship, and Shellie outlines how to do it in an easy and practical way, rooted in Biblical truth. A must-read for anyone who struggles with food – which is all of us!

TAYLOR KISER – *Blogger at FoodFaithFitness.com*

Renew your mind . . .  
walk in freedom

FIND  
YOUR  
WAY  
Weigh

Shellie Bowdoin

 SOURCE  
f @sourcepublishing

FIND YOUR WEIGH

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This book is dedicated to my little family: Sam, Jay, Emily, and Mary Kate. Even when no one else was around, our little unit has been a source of immeasurable joy and contentment. I am blessed.

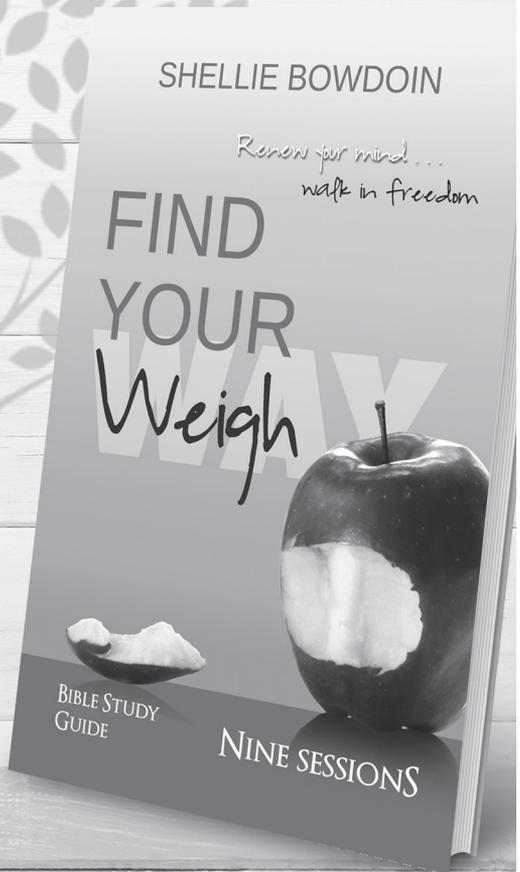
SHELLIE BOWDOIN

*Renew your mind...  
walk in freedom*

FIND  
YOUR  
Weigh

BIBLE STUDY  
GUIDE

NINE SESSIONS



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## Foreword

IT'S DEEPER THAN A DIET . . . a lot deeper. I'm not sure if people a thousand years ago thought very much about body shape, but today, we're obsessed with it. We can't keep our eyes off of the models in magazine ads, movies stars on the red carpet, and the gorgeous people we see in the grocery store or just down the row in our church services. Then, we look at ourselves in the mirror.

Comparison kills. Immediately, our focus is riveted to something other than God. Longing raises our hopes that we too can achieve the perfect form, but just as quickly, shame crushes us because we can never quite get there. Many of us live in that netherworld between longing and shame, or more accurately, with a toxic combination of longing and shame all wrapped into one.

There has to be a better way to think about ourselves. There is, and Shellie Bowdoin has found it. For her, the quest for truth, peace, and joy comes out of her own painful experiences of dozens of failed diets. After years of struggle, she finally realized the forkful of food wasn't the problem. It was the lies she believed that clouded her thoughts and gave her misplaced hopes and dreams. As a pastor, I know her struggles are shared by countless others inside and outside the church.

Beliefs, Shellie explains, aren't sterile, academic propositions; they come loaded with powerful emotions. She looks back at three powerful, misguided beliefs that controlled her life:

- If I believed I was helpless, I acted helpless.
- If I believed certain foods were too yummy to resist, I didn't resist.
- If I believed that the role of food was to entertain me, then I turned to food every time my mind was not occupied by something else.

But we're not helpless, we live for a higher purpose than passing pleasure, and our minds can be occupied with the splendor of God's greatness and grace.

When we're obsessed with our bodies, we inevitably obsess about food, which leads to dashed hopes, hidden fears, and crushing shame that we just don't measure up. But as our hearts increasingly focus on God's character and we learn to relish our identity as His loved, forgiven, treasured children, we can find peace. The freedom God wants for us isn't found in trying harder but in trusting more. We can finally get off the rollercoaster of diets and discouragement, but only if we find a better ride. And we have.

In her book, bible study and videos, Shellie encourages us to have clear, reasonable goals, the grace to accept the body God has

given us, and the patience to stay with healthy habits whatever our shape may be.

When Becca and I met Shellie on a trip to Thailand and heard her story and her dreams for her book, I immediately realized that she had put her finger on the heart issue that is so often missing in diet plans. Read this book, engage in the Bible study, listen to the Spirit of God whisper that you're God's dear child, and reorient your mind around the truth that you mean more to Him than the stars in the sky. With that perspective, your heart will be focused on the right thing . . . or more accurately, the right Person. You'll find a beautiful blend of freedom and determination.

If you struggle with longing and shame about your shape, you need Shellie's message. Don't miss it.

## Rob Ketterling

Lead Pastor of River Valley Church, Burnsville, Minnesota

Author of *Front Row Leadership*, *Change before You Have To*, and *Fix It!*

## Acknowledgements

I share a lot about myself in this book, but there are many things I do not say. Our lives are but a tapestry of shared moments and experiences of those we've known and walked with along the way.

My thoughts go first to my husband, Sam, who has stood by me, supported me and believed in me for well over half of my life now. We've grown up together and I have never doubted his love for a second.

I also give hugs to my extended family that has loved us and, at times, longed for us when we've been worlds apart. Your constant support gives me confidence because I know that I always have my own personal fan club...just because.

I think about all the women I have had the privilege of knowing. My heart has always been to inspire and motivate women to live lives of purpose. During the near-decade I lived in Laos, I met some great ladies from all over the world. My time as president of the Women's International Group was a pivotal time of stretching and preparation.

I've been blessed to have many special girlfriends along the way and each of them has sewn seeds deep within my heart. Whether or not we are together physically, these seeds continue to grow and bloom in my life.

There was always something in me that wanted to write a book, but I honestly never thought I would sit down to do it. My son's departure to college left an empty space in my heart and home for a while, but in the end I realize his absence was really the impetus for this whole journey. Thankfully, time does heal and the scars left behind help to make us just that much stronger.

I am so grateful that two kids, Jay and Mary Kate, call me mama. That is one of my most cherished titles I will wear for the rest of my life. They both make me a better person...and hopefully a little more patient one 😊.

When it comes to the nuts and bolts of this book, I could have never done it without the awesome Source Publishing team. All of you talented people have made me look so good and I am immensely grateful.

And lastly, I highly value God's hand on my life. If I have any piece of wisdom to share or insight to give, I fully acknowledge that it all comes from he who so richly bestows good things to those who seek him.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shellie". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent loop at the end of the word.

”THEN YOU WILL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND  
THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE.”

JOHN 8:32 (NIV)

## Chapter 1

# Introduction

PICTURES DON'T LIE. I LOOKED at my photo and was stunned by what I saw. When had I allowed myself to gain so much weight? Quite frankly, I had become accustomed to the number staring up at me from the dreaded platform of uncertainty, better known as a scale that sits in the corner of my bathroom floor. But somehow, I had convinced myself that women should just expect their weight to steadily increase.

After all, I had already tried, unsuccessfully, to lose weight on two separate occasions earlier that fall. Both times I had started out with drive and determination only to give up when the scale did not reward my Herculean efforts like I thought it should. Despite those failed attempts, that photograph brought on mental plans of the new diet I would launch yet again when the New Year came around.

How many times have you stood in this same place? Was it a picture or did you find yourself standing in the closet without one viable option to wear? We've all felt the frustration of pants that are too tight. There you are again, standing there, struggling to find

clothes that still fit, only to conclude that your only real option is to put on the same go-to outfit you've been wearing everywhere... because it's the only thing that's still comfortable.

For me, this wake-up call rang out loudly and clearly on November, 2014. At first, it was inconceivable to even consider cutting back on food with the holiday season looming just around the corner. In fact, over the years, I had convinced myself that holiday weight gain was a foregone conclusion. After all, no one can resist the draw of rich holiday foods, right? That's when it hit me! I was not in charge of my body or my choices about food. Somewhere along the way, I had surrendered control of my eating to the pleasure of food and the taste of food.

I decided then and there that something had to change. I did not make an elaborate plan, nor did I go on a swan song binge before I hit the all-too-familiar diet road. I just made a decision that, from that day on, I was making the choices, and conscious choices at that, about the food I ate. It was time to find out what was behind my life-long rollercoaster ride with food. But this time, I wasn't just going to treat the symptomatic weight like I had always done in the past. I decided to explore my thinking about food and try to get a handle on it once and for all.

To be honest, I didn't have a clue what I was doing, but God did. For so many years I had approached my weight as merely a physical issue; something I had to "get a handle on." I got myself into a mess yet again, and it was up to me to summon the fortitude and willpower to get myself out. In essence, I'd pushed God to the

sideline of my weight struggle. He had been waiting 30 years for me to finally call Him into the game.

The issue of weight and food is often taboo in Christian circles. We freely discuss everything else: jealousy, pride, depression, and other addictions, but food issues are conspicuously absent. Could it be that we don't like to bring attention to our food struggles because they're just so obvious? Unlike other struggles that can be hidden from prying eyes, many of us view our weight as an open advertisement of our failure, our inability to control our eating. Consequently, we feel that if we actually admit to our weakness, then we are obligated to fix it.

This mentality essentially closes us off from God's supernatural power. He assures us that His power is best manifested in our lives through our weaknesses. Paul actually wrote about this theme on nine different instances in the New Testament. God actually does some of His best transformative work by displaying his miraculous power through our weaknesses. He takes what we cannot do on our own and shows us that we were never meant to. He can transform our struggle into a tangible display of His intimate concern, but this can only happen when we admit that our weakness with food is much more than a physical issue we must overcome.

## My Background

Prior to that November day, I had lost the same 25 to 40 pounds at least ten times in my life. In fact, I grew accustomed

to having two different-sized wardrobes in my closet: one for the smaller me and another, for that inevitable time when the weight came back. Despite my efforts, there was always something in the back of my mind that just assumed I would eventually gain the weight back when my self-control took another nosedive.

My journey with food started when I was still in middle school. I was short and pudgy at a time when most of my friends gave little thought to food because of their quick pubescent metabolisms. Eventually, I did reach my full height in high school and the excess weight finally came off. Actually, in retrospect, I realize that growing out before growing up is a typical growth pattern in my family. My son actually matured in the same way.

However, the insecurity of being the “fat girl” in those early years undoubtedly affected how I viewed food. As a young teen, I really had little control over my weight, which was largely the result of a delayed growth spurt. In fact, I often secretly resented my friends who could eat anything they wanted and still maintain their slim be-jeaned figures while I was stuck shopping in the husky section.

The early insecurity I felt about my weight eventually permeated my whole mindset and relationship with food. In my youth, I had watched my peers eat whatever they wanted with seemingly no effect on their weight. They were all thin at a time in development when one’s outward appearance was so highly valued, while I seemed powerless to do anything to change my

weight. Somewhere along the line I convinced myself that I was powerless against the draw of food.

I developed an attitude of helplessness with food, convincing myself that I could not resist its lure or the constant cycle of weight gain and weight loss. Consequently, I have ridden the rollercoaster of weight loss and gain most of my life. While the insecurity of being an overweight teenager consistently motivated me to keep my weight within a specific range, I was never able to keep it in check for good. Despite my best intentions, food always seemed to win and I regularly felt guilt over my lack of self-control.

### How Did This Book Come to Be?

I need to stop here to explain something foundational to this book. I didn't just suddenly figure out this link between my adolescent helplessness and my inability to resist food. It was a process and that's what *Find Your Weigh* is all about.

This is not just another diet book. Instead, it's a shared journey of self-discovery. I am not a professional medical specialist, a nutritionist, or a trained fitness professional. Instead, I'm a middle-aged child of Christ who finally stepped off of the weight roller coaster after going up and down my whole adult life.

Over the years, I've watched countless talk shows where medical professionals would explain how overeating typically has emotional roots, but I never internalized their message. I've watched fitness trainers with chiseled bodies tout the benefits of

healthy eating, but I just figured they had genetically stronger constitutions than I did.

Somehow, even as a seminary-educated Christian, I missed the heart-mind connection that echoes through the pages of scripture. God's word consistently takes us back to the attitudes of the heart: the repository for all of our hopes, dreams, emotions, and desires. We are then expected to conform our minds to Christ by believing He is who He says He is and that He earnestly longs to walk with us through every area of our lives.

But, our hearts and minds have to work in tandem. What's more, we have to come to the point of acknowledging that no area of our life is beyond God's reach or unworthy of His attention. My weight wasn't my own physical problem to conquer; it was the very area where He desired to display His strength in the midst of my weakness.

I had to bring my food struggles into the light. In this transparent atmosphere, God helped me engage my heart and my mind to explore my thoughts and expectations. Only then, did I finally uncover what was behind my behavior with food. What's more, I understood, once and for all, that food is not my enemy, nor can food do anything to me that I don't allow.

## Food Is a Vital Part of Life and Living

So, why is food such a big deal? For a person who struggles with weight, food can be an all-consuming proposition. Either

you want it, you are upset that you ate too much of it (again), or you are making a plan to stay away from it.

Basically, the diet industry runs and thrives on this conundrum. It is banking on the fact you will eventually come to steps two and three. Then, they can swoop in to offer you the “solution” to your problem. Often these solutions involve staying completely away from all those “bad” foods that are the source of all your frustrations and pain.

What these diet solutions do not seem to address is how to extricate food from your memory, emotional framework, and cultural experience. Diets don’t take into consideration the fact that food is a vital part of the human experience and a God-given blessing.

### Food Deprivation Does Not Work

Each year, Americans shell out around \$40 billion dollars on weight loss plans and products.<sup>1</sup> However, even after all the shakes are consumed and the calories are counted, The New England Journal of Medicine estimates that most people regain one-third of their weight back within the first year and return to their baseline within three to five years.<sup>2</sup> This is not ground-breaking news. We all know how hard it is to maintain weight loss after a diet. In fact, I bet a lot of you, like me, have experienced this firsthand.

**For a person who struggles with weight, food can be an all-consuming proposition. Either you want it, you are upset that you ate too much of it (again), or you are making a plan to stay away from it.**

The \$40 billion Americans spend on diet plans each year is a weighty amount, for sure. But those billions represent aspirations rather than effort. Dieters who want to fit into thinner jeans for more than a few months or years need to find a diet plan that will fit into their lifestyle for just as long. If we're wasting billions of dollars on fruitless diets, it's likely the fault lies not with Jenny but with ourselves.<sup>3</sup>

## Food Is an Integral Part of Our Memories and Cultural Identity

I think the biggest reason for our multiple diet failures is the fact that food and our cultural formation are two tightly bound concepts. Think back to some of your fondest childhood memories. Likely, you picture holidays or vacations you took with your family. Does food enter the equation? Of course it does: returning home on a college visit to see your mom's legendary chocolate cake awaiting you on the table, chatting on the back patio as steaks sizzled on the grill, or joining hands around a Thanksgiving table filled with your favorite foods.

I can't even count the times my family sat around the table reminiscing about our favorite family vacation only for the conversation to turn to some food that we all enjoyed. Food is linked with virtually all celebrations and milestones. Food is a vital part of our life experiences. We love nothing better than to sit around the table with those we love.

1 Timothy 4:4 reminds us that, “Everything God created is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.” If we are to take God at His word, then it’s reasonable to assume that it is possible to engage our hearts in enjoying food for the blessing that it is while still utilizing our minds to eat it in a measured, focused way.

So, why do we think that we can just cut certain foods out of our lives, presumably for good, and then continue on as if they never existed? The Bible and modern-day research say we can’t, so it’s time to figure out a new way of thinking about food that actually includes eating all forms of it in a thoughtful, considered way. A new food mindset is the only way to actually have your cake and eat it too!

**A new food mindset is the only way to actually have your cake and eat it, too!**

## What Can You Expect?

Over the course of my weight journey, I have concluded that weight loss is attainable at any age. I know there is a lot of expert advice out there. I have read countless websites and blogs written by dietitians, doctors, and ripped personal trainers. Undoubtedly, their advice and insights are extremely helpful. But sometimes, it just helps to talk to a normal, everyday person who has walked the same path.

Typically, my diet attempts were always preceded by excessive thought and self-chastisement. Then, I would embark on yet another diet to punish myself for past indiscretions. Each and every time, I would diet to get myself back on the “right” track and inevitably the right track would involve self-denial and self-deprivation. Does this sound familiar?

The real problem was that I was running in the wrong race. As God’s child, I had access to a storehouse of resources. He literally had the A-team ready to run alongside me, but I had never considered asking for His help. It was time to tap into His life-giving power.

Have you also divorced your food struggle from the other emotional areas of your life and just figured you are on your own when it comes to your weight? In retrospect, I now recognize that’s how I consistently approached my food struggles. Despite the fact that God’s word is filled with promises that assure us of His abiding presence and His empowering strength in the midst of our weaknesses, most of us are determined to conquer our desire for food on our own.

Thankfully, I finally found a way to stop the lose/gain cycle and put myself in the driver’s seat when it comes to food. Your journey will not be just like mine, but this book will walk you through my process and set you on a course of self-discovery.

I can honestly say the more out-of-control my weight was at different points in my life, the more I thought about it and the

more weight issues would consume my thoughts and existence. Admittedly, there were times when I elevated food to such a degree that I often looked to it before I looked to God. Now, I am asking you to channel your thoughts about food into positive, meaningful change and allow God to focus your action toward developing food habits for a lifetime of future success with food.

In the process of *finding my weigh*, I have developed a series of tips and strategies for approaching food and establishing a healthy food mindset. This book is not a diet plan; however, it does contain a lot of practical tips and suggestions for healthy habit formation.

Still, I realize that each person's process will be a little different. Some of you will find success just by mirroring my experience, while others will want to use this book as a companion to another proven long-term weight program, like Weight Watchers. Regardless of how you choose to proceed, I encourage you to think past the traditional diet routine.

We can't predict what tomorrow holds, but I can promise you your tomorrow is fashioned by today's choices.

Today can be your day to start a new journey. You can recapture control over your body and your

**Channel your thoughts about food into positive, meaningful change and allow God to focus your actions.**

life by surrendering your food struggle to God. But remember, lasting success will only come with lasting change. Instead of looking for another diet or another workout plan, it's time to alter your relationship with food for good by asking God to help reveal what you truly believe about the food you eat. Only then can He enable you to eat with awareness and establish eating habits to follow for the rest of your life.

I did it and, for the first time in my life, God helped take weight off its pedestal in my head. Now, I am living fully and freely in Him.

**Your tomorrow  
is fashioned  
by today's  
choices.**

## Chapter 2

# Developing A Weight Loss Mindset

IF YOU ARE ANYTHING LIKE me, then you have been lured into buying a magazine because the front cover offered the key to unlocking the secrets of weight loss. And likely, you've tried countless approaches to shedding the pounds.

Personally, I have done calorie counting, diabetic exchanges, low carbohydrates, frequent small meals and no sugar, to name a few. Admittedly, each diet method worked for a season. In fact, I can think of multiple diet scenarios that culminated with a big smile and a satisfactory number on the scale. However, as soon as the diet was “over” it was only a matter of time before my weight started creeping up once again.

The pay-for-progress mentality is an interesting one. Somewhere along the way, we buy into the idea that we can only get what we pay for or that something is only worth trying if it comes in a program or has a catchy title. While this is typically true for a lot of things, I no longer think this philosophy fosters life-long success with weight. Take a moment to make a list of the techniques or programs you have used when trying to lose weight.

**People who successfully manage their weight eventually come to the realization that successful weight maintenance never ends.**

Why didn't these programs bring lasting results? Because, they never really got to what makes you over-eat in the first place: your head. What's more, most of these programs could not be incorporated seamlessly into your daily life. People who successfully manage their weight eventually come to the realization that successful weight maintenance never ends.

## How to Finally Wrap Your Head Around Your Weight

When struggling with weight, we are consistently bombarded by our ever-increasing feelings of weakness and our seemingly decreasing sense of self-control. Inevitably, I had to come to terms with these emotions and feelings in the context of my faith.

### Lack of Self-Control

In one of the New Testament's best known narratives, the Apostle Paul lists 9 essential character qualities for holy living, commonly referred to as the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.<sup>4</sup>

I have often wondered why self-control was included in this list. The other character traits fall into place quite easily in my thinking, especially in regard to my relationships with others. But, the whole

issue of self-control seemed to hit on a more personal level. This is probably because my struggle with weight always seemed to put me at odds with the issue of self-control, primarily because my life story with weight constantly reminded me of how out of control I was.

Now, some who know me would look at me and say, “Shellie, you have never struggled with weight like many others do.” And this brings up an interesting point: Is the person who gains 100 to 200 extra pounds more out-of-control than the person who repeatedly goes through the difficult process to lose 25 to 30 pounds only to allow them to creep back again and again? I would answer that indeed both types of people are out of control!

Thinking back to all of my “successful” diet attempts, I would estimate that I have lost around 150 pounds in major multiple-month diets in my lifetime. This does not count the two-to-three week diets that are too numerous to count. This puts me in the category of the majority of overweight adults who carry an average of 20 extra pounds.

As a Christian, I had prayed numerous times for God to give me the strength to overcome my struggle with food. But I ultimately had to get to that point that I was willing to put some action behind my pleas, which is so often what God wants us to do in the first place.

Had I put action behind my prayers before? Yes, I had successfully navigated a host of different diet strategies that

**Consider your own thinking about food, rather than just focus on the symptom of weight that results from eating too much of it.**

inevitably required a significant level of energy and dedication. But, these diets were always targeted for the short-term. Although I never realized it at the time, I never intended to maintain the same level of determination once I lost the weight. In fact, the self-control required to successfully navigate those diets was all but forgotten once I no longer saw a bigger me in the mirror.

So, in essence, I always got what I prayed for. I asked God to help me lose the weight and to give me determination to stick with my diet plans and that's what I got. Never had I considered asking for God's help to end my struggle with food for good.

I believe this critical distinction is what made this time so different. I wasn't looking to merely lose weight. Instead, the idea occurred to me that I should actually consider my own thinking about food, rather than just focus on the symptom of weight that results from eating too much of it.

Many times, what we attribute to our own creativity or intuitiveness is actually revelation. I had successfully navigated multiple diets in the past, but I had never once considered addressing my actual thoughts and mindset about food along the way, which proved to be the missing piece of the puzzle.

## Target Faulty Thinking with Truth

Once I figured out what made me tick with food and my assumptions about food, then I could target some of my faulty thinking with truth. Jesus had a discourse with his disciples in which he discussed the concept of knowing the truth and following what we know to be true.

He said these words, “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:32, NIV) When Jesus entered public ministry, he chose these 12 men to be part of his inner circle. He told them that they would learn to know the truth and that truth would set them free.

In John 8:32, Jesus proclaimed that he was the way and the truth. So, how did his disciples finally come to know him as the truth? They spent extensive time with him, they asked him questions, and they learned from his day-in-and-day-out example.

Eventually, the truth of Jesus became clear to them and they developed a keen sense of purpose and direction. That’s why the Christian faith continues to thrive to this day.

So, what does this all have to do with our weight struggle? Each of us has a truth and a belief system that informs our relationship with food; however, that truth is yet unknown. If we consciously knew what made us click with food, if we understood exactly what propels us and causes us to feel so helpless to its draw, then we would do something about it!

**Once you get a handle on the truth about food and your relationship and response to it, then you will be free to exercise more self-control.**

That's why I believe this journey of self-discovery is so essential for uncovering our expectations, attitudes, and mental blocks with food. If we can spend an extended time period exploring and questioning our thoughts and actions with food, then we can establish sustainable habits and practices that will set us free to pursue lives where food does not have the final say.

Once I got a handle on the truth about food and my relationship and response to it, then I felt free to exercise more self-control. For the first time, I felt like I was in control of my relationship with food. More importantly, that inner struggle with food disappeared. You know what I'm talking about. It's that inner self-talk that goes on when your will and your mind are at odds with each other over a particular food choice.

You will probably recognize this scenario because it has played out in your own head. You tell yourself you will not eat any sweets today, then lo and behold, you arrive at work to find out it's your boss' birthday and he has treated the office to a donut feast. The self-talk begins, "I can't have a donut... They look so good.... You have got to stay strong.... Why is there always something tempting to eat?... Maybe just half.... But that was so yummy.... Maybe one more bite, or the rest of this donut.... Ok, I have to stop.... But that was so good.... Maybe a bite more and then

no lunch.... Ok, then half.... Might as well finish it...  
Ok, now no lunch....(3 hours later after blood sugar  
has tanked).... I won't make it to the end of the day  
without lunch.... Man, I blew it AGAIN!"

Does this sound familiar? It's a scenario for failure  
and self-condemnation that I have cycled through  
hundreds of times. But finally, I developed a new  
framework of grace that took me from the position  
of victim to overcomer in my relationship with food.

I finally realized that it wasn't enough to change  
my habits for a few weeks or a few months to achieve  
my weight goals. Instead, I had to put on new habits  
and a new way of approaching food for a lifetime.  
"You were taught, with regard to your former way of  
life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted  
by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude  
of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to  
be like God in true righteousness and holiness." (Eph.  
4:22-24, NIV)

If you are struggling with your weight, then you  
already know you've got a lot of habits that have got  
to go. Basically, you have become a slave to the same  
old habits and patterns with food. So, no matter how  
many times you have attempted to lose the weight in  
the past, you still end up right back in the same place.

**It isn't enough  
to change your  
habits for a  
few weeks or a  
few months to  
achieve your  
weight goals.  
Instead, you  
have to put  
on new habits  
and a new way  
of approaching  
food for a  
lifetime.**

Here's the thing: you can't just expect to remove a huge chunk of your daily choices and behaviors and then go on with life as usual. Instead, you've got to establish new eating habits and new behaviors with food to put in place of the old, ineffective habits that were ingrained in your old way of life.

If approached purposely, you can establish a new mindset and approach to food that makes sense for you. In fact, it will make so much sense that you won't ever need to resort to your old habits again.

Ok, so what do you say? Are you ready to put off those old habits that haven't served you at all? Are you ready to get to the bottom of your struggles with food? You are about to embark on a journey of self-discovery to determine what you really believe about food. You will uncover some interesting assumptions and some seriously flawed thinking over the next several weeks. But hopefully, you will gain some powerful insights to set the foundation for a new successful future with weight.

## Journaling

Insanity has been defined as doing the same thing over and over again, while still expecting different results. Does this sound like your typical weight gain and weight loss scenario? Here's the thing: weight is only the outward symptom of your behavior with food. But, your behavior with food comes from your thinking about food.

Healthy mindsets with food are not forged by strict diets or short-term behavior modification. They are established for a lifetime. Essentially, if you really want to win over your weight, take the “finish line” out of your thinking.

I honestly believe that you can change your way of thinking, but you cannot expect to get rid of one mindset without putting a new one in its place. What will be your plan for overcoming your weight gain/loss cycle with food?

To *find my weigh*, I took a completely different approach from anything I had tried in the past. I decided to record my thoughts along the way through journaling. When it comes to journaling in terms of weight, most people think of calorie counting, which I have done on several past diets.

The traditional idea of food journaling involves writing down every morsel that goes into one’s mouth in order to keep an accurate calorie count. Typical food journaling may also include the number of food group servings consumed. This type of journaling emphasizes the diet mentality because it focuses entirely on calorie restriction as a means for weight loss.

**If you really want to win over your weight, take that “finish line” out of your thinking.**

**Take steps to break your unhealthy habits and realign your portion expectations.**

After years of yo-yo dieting, I finally got off the weight merry-go-round by setting a prolonged 50-day period to journal my thoughts about food as I took steps to break unhealthy habits and realign my portion expectations.

To uncover your thinking about food, you will write about your frustrations and small victories, noting when you feel the hungriest. Pay special attention to the foods you find especially difficult to resist. Most importantly, record your self-talk, the internal dialogue that bounces around in your head when you face temptation.

When you've only ever framed the activity of eating in physical terms, it's natural that you've allowed your physical desires to call the shots. Consequently, your behavior is conditioned to respond to your senses alone; if it looks good or smells good, then the body says, "Eat it!" In Romans 12:2, we are told, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will." The discipline of daily writing helps reveal patterns that you have conformed to for years; habits that you were previously unaware of. Only after you have consciously acknowledged your behavior can you ask

God to help you transform your thinking and renew your mind when it comes to food.

Quite frankly, when I first started, I didn't know what to expect from this exercise, but I was fed up with my inability to manage my weight. I decided it was time to get to the bottom of it. Slowly, an epiphanic thought took shape in my head after the first week of journaling. Ah yes, I just said, "epiphanic!" Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines this as the adjective form of epiphany:

epiphany : a moment in which you  
suddenly see or understand something in  
a new or very clear way

My weight gain was a symptom of some seriously flawed thinking about food. I finally realized that I had always felt powerless with food. Honestly, I truly believed that I was unable to resist food and its draw. In retrospect, others who so confidently choose the most sensible menu items or pass on the yummy desserts have always perplexed me. I guess I just figured that my willpower was either broken or misaligned.

However, the process of journaling helped pinpoint specific beliefs that caused me to make wrong food choices. In essence, I began to see how my actions with food were directly aligned with my expectations, beliefs, and food mindset. Basically I was acting on my beliefs.

Once you bring your behavior out into the light of day, God can then shine His truth on it. You've likely asked yourself, "Why

Once you bring your behavior into the light of day God can then shine His truth on it.

did I eat that?” on more than one occasion. In fact, you’d admit that you’ve acted in ways that didn’t even seem reasonable in retrospect. That’s because your head wasn’t in the game. Instead, you were acting purely on physical impulse.

Reading back through my journal entries, I can see that the light bulb turned on sometime around the end of the second week. God was literally transforming my thoughts through my writing. Until that point, my observations largely centered upon the physical sensations and behavioral modification that dieting requires. My thoughts all conformed to the typical way I had always acted and reacted to food. However, I eventually started to notice how essential my mind was to the whole process. Here is an excerpt from my journal entry:

#### Day 12

*Alright, today I am back on track. It is becoming more and more clear to me that the true key to weight loss and management is in the mind. Of course, weight gain is caused by excess food; however, I am the one who ultimately makes the choice of what, when, and where I eat. I like this idea... I have a choice. If I overeat one day, I can choose to right things the next day without heaping on unwanted feelings of failure and discouragement. Just get back on track; finished and done.*

Initially, my journaling was an experiment. I had no idea if journaling my thoughts about food would benefit me at all. Of course if I had known what a powerful impact it would have on my food habits, I would have done it a long time ago.

As I mentioned earlier, food is inextricably linked with who we are. It is an integral part of our cultural memories and emotions. If you can accept that premise then you should be able to take the next logical step.

## How to Journal Your Thoughts about Food

Starting today, you will begin journaling your thoughts, expectations, and self-talk to *find your weigh* with food.

For the next 50 days, you will end each day by writing down your thoughts about food. There are no rules for your writing, except that your writing must center on the theme of food. Here are some ideas of various thought processes to consider.

### Observations

#### *Sights, sounds, and smells that triggered a reaction*

- What foods were particularly hard to resist? Why?
- Would you be satisfied to have a few bites? Why or why not?

### *Actions you performed out of habit*

- Do you waste a lot of calories on thoughtless foods or beverages? (ex. drinks)
- Do you eat without even thinking about the food? (ex. eating while working, eating in front of the television, eating in the car)
- Do you eat out of bags or bowls without considering the amount?
- Did you eat by the clock, instead of cues from your body?
- Did you eat to be social?
- Did you go straight to food out of anger, stress, or boredom?
- When approached with a large variety of foods, do you just dive in without a plan?

### **Frustrations**

- Does exercising self-control make food feel less fun?
- How did exercising self-control make you feel?
- Did you feel unworthy of God's love and patience or did you feel impatient with yourself?
- What disappoints you?

## Self-talk

- Record your inner dialogue...that battle that goes on in your head when you are considering eating “just one more piece,” or “paying for it tomorrow.”
- What goes on in your head when you are considering a snack?
- What thoughts come to mind when you see tempting food?
- Did you battle feelings of self-condemnation?
- Did you feel like your battle was more spiritual than physical?

## Expectations

- Do you have expectations of your food? (ex. my food should entertain, comfort, or calm me?)
- Do you expect the temptation of food to be more than you can handle?

## Assumptions

- Do you automatically assume you will overeat in certain situations? Why?
- Do you assume that certain foods must be served with calorie-laden sides?

- Do you assume that you have to have a particularly calorie-laden food for a particular event or occasion?
- Do you assume that you can only be satisfied with a particular food if you eat lots of it?

This list is just a starting point, but it should give you an idea of the thought processes you need to target through your journaling. The 50-Day Journal begins at this point in the book for a couple of reasons:

1. Hopefully, you now have a better idea why you should even consider journaling to uncover your true thoughts about food.
2. I have explained why the traditional diet model is ineffective.

Starting today, begin your 50 days of journaling. The *Find Your Weigh* journal is located at the end of the book for easy reference.

### **How to Utilize the Scale**

Do you have a love-hate relationship with the scale? Has the number on the scale ever brought tears to your eyes? It has to mine. Most of us are accustomed to using the scale to measure our weight. That is all fine and good as long as we stop there. However, the struggle comes when we allow the number that we see to determine how we feel about ourselves. This is the point where we chose helplessness over hopefulness.

I have definitely had my struggles with the scale and I have launched into a number of self-berating sessions, but ultimately it wasn't feelings of shame or helplessness that finally propelled me forward in my journey with weight.

First, let me say that I believe the scale is a great tool for keeping weight in check. In fact, I think it is the single most effective way to maintain a consistent weight because it is not influenced by our emotions or denial. The dial measures one thing: pounds.

Since settling into a comfortable weight for my height and lifestyle, I have utilized the scale on a daily basis to monitor my weight each morning before I eat any food. I allow myself a 5 pound range that runs 2 pounds below and 2 pounds above my body's set point. This range takes into account various metabolic changes, like water retention.

Consistent monitoring allows me to take immediate action when the weight starts to creep up. It's much easier to address a weight gain of one or two pounds rather than waiting until you've gained 10 pounds! Usually, a one or two pound gain can be remedied with a week of increased movement and by cutting down on sweets and carbohydrates.

### *3-Week Exception to Daily Weighing*

How many times have you been compelled to weigh yourself and then wished that you hadn't? For me, the disappointment of seeing unsatisfactory numbers has been enough to derail some of my best weight loss efforts.

Despite its extreme value for weight maintenance, the scale can be immensely burdensome and emotionally deflating when you are first trying to lose weight. In the beginning, your weight can vary widely from day-to-day or even hour-to-hour.

So, what does extreme fluctuation mean for weight loss? I noticed an interesting trend in my last few unsuccessful diet attempts. I would take a few deep breaths and make a game plan. Then, after a few days of deprivation and headaches from sugar withdrawal, I would stand on the scale to find no change. In fact, at times the number actually increased!

Now, I'm not new to the weight loss routine. I am quite aware of the physical demands of the first weeks; however, I used to get reassurance from the scale after the first few days. So, a downward movement on the dial would really give me the push I needed to continue on. However, this is not always the case at different stages of our lives. Consequently, valiant attempts to establish new eating habits can crash and burn largely because of the scale.

For years, I had grown accustomed to the consistent reassurance of the scale to propel me along. But, the realities of fluctuating water weight can make numerical weight loss almost imperceptible in the first weeks. You see, the scale only measures your actual weight at any given moment; it is not intuitive. It doesn't take hormones into account, nor does it distinguish the extra weight of new muscle. It doesn't know that you are retaining water because you took in a little too much sodium.

Consequently, the real possibility exists that you can stand on the scale at the end of a long week only to feel deflated and defeated by the number staring back at you. I can count three separate attempts in the year prior to my breakthrough that were derailed after a week or two when the pointer just refused to budge.

Our relationship with the scale can be a love-hate one. We want to pick it up and kiss it when we are doing well and we all can say a few things about what we want to do with it when the number is less than pleasing! Unfortunately I, like many of you, have looked to that simple contraption for validation. Let me say this loud and clear, the scale can only register your weight. It does not display your integrity, confidence, or self-worth. Only you can do that. How?...by remembering that God's opinion of you is the only one that counts. He goes to great lengths to convince you of your value as His child throughout the pages of scripture.

I have come to the conclusion that constantly stepping on the scale in the initial stages of weight loss can be counterproductive. This time, try to avoid the scale for the first 3 weeks.

I got the idea to avoid the scale from several articles I read on the Paleo diet. While I didn't agree with all aspects of that approach, I did like their suggestion

**God's opinion  
of you is the  
only one that  
counts!**

that the scale fails to provide the best feedback for determining success in weight loss or management.

Now, to a girl who has always lived and died by the scale, this was a revolutionary concept, so I settled on the three-week mark for banning the scale. Does this sound impossible to you? I did it and it really helped jumpstart my weight loss efforts.

### **It's Time to Start Moving**

You knew this was coming or you should have. Food is only one part of the equation, albeit a very large part. But there is one last piece that still needs to find its way into your life. If you want lasting success with weight...exercise.

Credible research confirms that food consumption is the number one consideration in weight management, because our bodies basically process food calories for energy: 3,500 calories equal one pound. Each person's body burns a specified amount of calories each day to function. Therefore, once the person consumes the number of calories his body needs in a day, the rest are either burned off through physical activity or stored as fat.

Wow, that all sounds so simple; however, the reality is not quite so cut and dry. While it's true that each person's body burns a certain amount of calories,

**The scale can only register your weight. It does not display your integrity, confidence, or self-worth. Only you can do that!**

that amount depends largely on how much fat a person carries and how active she is.

While this whole scenario is not particularly simple, I want to make sure you make one important observation. You must get your food consumption in check to have lasting success over weight. Increasing your fitness level will help you accomplish this in two important ways:

**Exercising for a sustained period of time burns calories.**

This allows for a greater calorie deficit when you are actively losing weight. Then, once you settle in at a comfortable weight, you can eat a little more in a normal day because the extra calories will be burned off through exercise.

**Weight training and weight bearing exercises build muscle.**

Muscle tissue burns more calories at rest than fat tissue, which means the greater your percentage of lean muscle tissue, the more calories your body will burn at rest.

**Exercise**

So, you've tried to convince yourself that you don't have time for exercise.

**You must get your food consumption in check to have lasting success over weight.**

This is an easy conclusion to come by considering the hectic schedules many of us keep; juggling our work and family obligations. Actually, people didn't use to have to plan their exercise. Their daily lives were full of exertion and movement. Now, our lives have become so convenient that we hardly have to get up from our chairs except to eat and go to the bathroom. Exercise has become something you do, something you have to plan for, or in many cases, something you ignore. Along with the time element, we should also add the sensationalized perception that gyms are full of only super-fit people wearing cute workout outfits.

Webster defines exercise as, "physical activity that is done in order to become stronger and healthier."

Wow, that really simplifies the whole issue, doesn't it? It does not say anything about wearing spandex or joining any special programs. It boils down to engaging in any activity that will promote your health and make you stronger.

I want to challenge you to add movin' it to your current perception of exercise. Movin' it just means adding movement to your days. I have traditional exercise days and I have movin' it days. On my designated "exercise days," I actually go to the gym for group classes. But, that doesn't mean that I stop there. The other days I focus on movin' it, which usually means adding spurts of walking throughout my day.

Remember that steps are steps, so you can increase your movement by adding another lap from the living room, through the kitchen, down the hallway and back at the top of each hour or every time you get up from your chair. I bought a pedometer that measures my steps. It is amazing how much additional exercise you can fit into the day if you focus on making small, thoughtful changes to your routine.

### Fitting Exercises into Your Day

There are only so many hours in the day. So, it can be really frustrating to consider losing weight or getting fit when you can't see where it will fit into your busy day. While it is possible, it is a scenario that requires some extra planning.

Have you found yourself asking the question, "How can I lose weight when I sit all day?" Here are some practical tips for adding movement to your work days and focusing your weight loss efforts.

#### Practical Step

##### Move It Throughout The Day

- Is your building multi-storied? If so, take the stairs.
- Park further from the building.
- Walk at least 10 minutes of your lunch break.

**Today, I'm  
movin' it!**

- If possible, buy an exercise ball to sit on instead of a chair for at least a portion of the day. Doing this requires you use muscle control to maintain your balance.
- Lift your legs off the floor and hold them for periods of time. This will work your stomach muscles.

### Practical Step

#### Plan a Weight Loss Competition

Everything is better when done with a friend and that includes weight loss. Consider organizing a weight loss competition with some of your co-workers. There are a lot of free materials available on the internet to organize a competition at the work place.

I have organized two competitions in the past and they were both hugely successful. One tip is to have winners in two categories: weight lost and inches lost. This helps to level the playing field and also encourages participants to engage in physical activity and fitness instead of concentrating solely on food and calorie restriction.

A friendly competition can be very motivating, not to mention it makes it super easy to find someone to walk with at lunch or after work!

Practical Step:

Exercise at Least 20 Minutes

You are much more likely to fit your exercise in if you do it immediately after you return home from work before other chores and responsibilities start vying for your attention.

Remember, a journey always starts with a step!