

LOVE
to EAT

HATE
to EAT

Elyse
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1

FROM HEARTACHE TO A SENSE OF PURPOSE

*“Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do,
do all to the glory of God.”*

—1 CORINTHIANS 10:31



I want you to know who I am and why I am so interested in this topic. I want you to understand my journey—I’ll bet we’re really not very different. Struggling with eating, dieting, and even bingeing and purging has been an abiding part of my whole life. The truth is that I have struggled with my weight for as long as I can remember. Even as a child, I remember the embarrassment of having to buy “chubby” clothes at the department store; of never being able to dress or look like the other girls (“That’s not a style that would look good on you, dear,” the saleswoman would say); of being the brunt of fat jokes (my uncle asking me if I was going to subdivide and build because I had so much acreage); and the humiliation of knowing that others were looking at how much I was eating. To add to all this, I grew up near the beach in Southern California—and all of my friends wore bikinis

during the summer. I remember saving my money and buying one in ninth grade, thinking that I was going to lose weight so that I could wear it in the summer. I never did.

I know the heartache and devastation of being chronically overweight. This isn't something that just happened to me as a child. Even after I became a Christian as an adult, I would pray night after night that God would help me to lose weight. I would imagine how wonderful my life would be if I could just wake up thin the next morning. I read ads about liposuction and dreamt of the day when I could get a shot or take a pill and be instantaneously "normal." I would diet and diet and do well for a time only to find myself entrapped again. After I had my three children, the problem just seemed to get worse and worse. How could I weigh so much? How could I ever change? I would get depressed and—you guessed it—go eat to try to give myself some pleasure.

It wasn't until I began to understand that God had something more important in mind than merely my looking good that I started to change and be thankful. God has taken this struggle of mine and turned it into blessing. He's used it to get at strongholds of self-indulgence, worry, fear, and pride in my own heart and He's produced fruit from it that comforts and encourages others. Because I now have this perspective, I'm able to rejoice over God's goodness.

I'm writing this book because I know the despair of hopelessness. I know what it's like to start a diet and to get derailed from it, sometimes only making it a day or two. I know the shame of jealously looking at other women who wear a size 8. But I also know the joy of conquering this problem and of helping hundreds of other women do the same thing. I know that you may be thinking, *Yeah, but I'm different*. I always felt that way. My confidence in telling you that you can change is not because I think that I have all the answers. It's just that I know Someone who does. As you read through this book, you'll meet other women who have struggles just like you and you'll see that there is a God who

really is faithful to free us and change us. You *can* have hope!

Marsha's Story

Marsha had practiced habits of bulimia since she was in high school. She had been troubled by her gradual weight gain in the ninth and tenth grades, and although she tried to diet, she just couldn't seem to resist her favorite foods. She didn't want to leave her friends when they went out for french fries after class, but she knew she couldn't resist the food, either. So, she began to force herself to vomit whenever she ate something that she thought she shouldn't eat. As the years passed, Marsha continued to use vomiting (along with laxatives and diuretics) to try to control her weight. Because she knew that she could always "get rid of it," Marsha would sometimes go on a binge and eat incredible amounts of food in a short period of time.

The youngest of three sisters, Marsha's motivation was to stay as thin as her siblings. So even after marriage and childbirth, she continued her practices. At first she thought these behaviors were "no big deal," but eventually her body started to show the effects of her habits. Her salivary glands were swollen from the constant irritation of vomiting and her teeth were eroding from exposure to her stomach acids. As a Christian she thought that what she was doing was wrong, but she just didn't know how to stop. She had tried to quit scores of times, only to find herself once more standing over the kitchen sink in shame and helplessness, hoping that no one would discover what she had done. She, too, felt the despair of hopelessness. It seemed that her life was spinning out of control. Why couldn't she stop? She was disgusted with her behavior. Every time she threw up she was filled with shame and anger. Why couldn't she just get over this? Where was God?

Angela's Story

Angela had always been a compliant daughter and an above-average student. Although she fought from time to time with her mother, she was not rebellious. She seemed to love and respect her dad, who was the pastor of a large evangelical church. From all outer appearances, they seemed to be the perfect family.

One day, however, when Angela's mother happened to pass by Angela's room, she noticed Angelica's emaciated body, which apparently had been hidden by the clothes she wore. Terrified by the sight, her mother made an appointment with the family physician. "Anorexia? How could she have anorexia?" her mother and father asked when the physician diagnosed the problem. It was then that Angela admitted to an intricate scheme of secrecy and dishonesty. When she had requested privacy, which included eating most of her meals in her room, it was to help hide her anorexic practices. Her parents had just chalked it up to adolescent behavior. They were aware that she was overly concerned about what everyone was eating and that she spent an enormous amount of time at the gym, but they had never imagined that their little girl was struggling with such a terrifying behavior. Why was she enslaved to this so-called desire for "perfection"? As the family talked, Angela admitted that she knew that what she was doing was wrong, but she just couldn't get herself to stop. Why couldn't she be like the other girls? Where had she gone wrong?

Different Yet Similar

The stories of Marsha, Angela, and me seem to be very different, don't they? Each one of us had what seems to be very different problems. Each of us were at different levels of natural and spiritual maturity. I was a Christian, yet I had a lifetime of habitually eating too much. Marsha, too, loved the Lord, but was enslaved to times of bingeing followed by

purging and utter despair. Angela's commitment to Christ had always been part of what it meant to be her father's child, but now she struggled with an unquenchable desire to avoid any hint of weight gain. She had to be in control of every morsel of food and every ounce of weight. So in terms of our eating habits we were all very different, and yet all of us were totally consumed by the tyranny of food and eating.

If you struggle with any of these same problems I just mentioned, then you know what I mean when I refer to "the tyranny of food and eating." *Tyranny* is just the right word to use when it comes to the way many of us think about food, dieting, and our weight. Tyranny is oppression. It is enslavement. It means that we're dominated by thoughts and habits that torment and overpower. "What will I eat next?" "How much do I weigh today?" "What do others think of me?" "Why can't I get free of this?" "Why can't I be like others?" The same questions fill our thoughts over and over as we agonize day after day, looking for answers. Sometimes we try again; other times we just give up in frustration and discouragement. What's more, we feel constant confusion because we're unsure of how our eating habits relate to our Christian faith, if at all. We wonder about God's role in our lives and our response to Him. Where is He? What are His answers? It seems as though He should be able to help, but why isn't He answering our prayers? Why do we still struggle so?

Over the last ten years, I have agonized over these questions myself. I have also listened to hundreds of other women who were laboring to find answers to the same questions. As I have sought to minister to these women, I've learned that the Lord offers wonderful solutions to the problems of overeating, bulimia, and anorexia. I've written this book to share with you what I've learned on my journey from tyranny to freedom. It's my hope that you will find it helpful.

In the first ten chapters of this book we will look at the themes that are similar in each of these behaviors, and we'll discover practical guidelines for growth in godliness in our eating. In chapter eleven, we'll examine the areas that are distinctive to each behavior: anorexia, bulimia, and compulsive overeating. Chapter 12 offers some helpful encouragement, and finally, the section entitled *Practical Steps for Further Study* includes materials for personal application as well as questions for further study.

A Necessary Step

Before you begin to apply the principles in this book, you should visit your physician for a complete checkup so that you can be certain that the problems you are facing are not physiological in origin. Sometimes problems with eating and weight gain or loss are physical in origin. These problems may require medical attention. Don't assume that your problem is just an emotional or spiritual one. Prior to choosing any diet or exercise plan, you should have your doctor's consent. Also, if you are presently suffering from physical maladies because of obesity, bulimia, or anorexia, you will need to seek and follow your physician's advice. This book is not meant to take the place of any medical care that may be needed, but rather to augment it with spiritual and practical guidance.

A Sense of Purpose

Marsha began to grow in her relationship with God when she tried to answer the questions, "What am I doing here? What is the purpose of my life anyway?" She somehow sensed that her bouts of overeating and throwing up weren't part of what life was supposed to be about.

What about you? Do you believe that there is some purposeful design and meaning to your life, or do you feel you are just an evolved combination of molecules spinning

aimlessly through a chaotic universe? For instance, is it just a coincidence that you happen to be here, now, reading this book? If you are a Christian, you *can* know that God does have a purpose for your life—and you can also be sure that His purpose is good. (If you aren't sure whether you're really a Christian or not, please take time now to read over "How to Really Know If You Are a Christian" at the end of this book.)

Marsha's questions aren't anything new. In fact, in the seventeenth century a group of Christians in England who were writing about their faith began by asking the question, "What is the chief end of man?" That was their way of asking, "What is our main purpose in life? Why are we here?" They answered by writing, "The chief end of man is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever."¹ Stop and reread that statement. Think about it. It's one of the most important truths that you will ever know. They believed that the primary purpose of life was twofold: First, they believed that you and I were put here principally to *bring glory* to God. I know that's kind of an astonishing thought—but, actually, that is the purpose of all of God's creation, isn't it? The mountains, the stars . . . why, the Bible says that even the trees "clap their hands" in giving glory to God. You can read about that in the Old Testament, in Isaiah 55:12. In the New Testament the apostle Paul puts the same thought this way: "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Okay, you may be thinking, everything is supposed to glorify God. But just what does that mean? What that means is that everything we do—whether we're eating, drinking, reading a newspaper, driving our car, *whatever* we're doing—is to be done with the attitude and in such a way as to cause others around us to say, "Isn't God great! Isn't He wonderful! Isn't it great to know Him through His Son?"

Isn't that an astonishing thought? You and I can bring glory to God. It's not as though God needs us to let others know how great He is; it's because of His abounding grace

and mercy that He has allowed us to be involved in this great plan and purpose.

Marsha was surprised to learn that God wanted to use her life—yes, even her eating habits—to show others that He was real and that He could change people. There are non-Christian members of my family who have seen how strong and good God is because they have seen that I have changed. My hope is that they will want to know more about God because they have seen my changed life. That's one way for me to “glorify” God.

The first step in learning to live a life that glorifies God is to realize that *every* part of our lives is lived *before Him*. You might think that God wants us to glorify Him only in those parts of our life that we might call “religious,” such as going to church or praying or reading His Word. Or, it may seem that glorifying God is just for really spiritual people, like Billy Graham, or perhaps church leaders or pastors. But it's not just strong Christians who can glorify Him, nor is glorifying God limited to the spiritual realm. The Bible says we can look at *all* of our life as belonging to Him and as an avenue through which we can bless Him.

Remember, Paul said that we can glorify God whether we eat or drink or in *whatever* we do. What that meant to Marsha was that she could start thinking about ways to please God and point others to Him in every part of her life. Does God really care about how much we eat? Does He really care about whether or not we make ourselves throw up? Yes, God really cares. He cares because He loves you and me, and He cares because He created us to sparkle and shine with His light for others.

Let's return to the question, Why are we here? The Christians in England gave a two-part answer. They realized that we exist not only to glorify God, but also “to enjoy Him forever.” God's plan is for you to *enjoy* Him! The same God who is the creator of the entire universe, who holds everything in its place by His power, who isn't bound by either time or space, also wants you to have such a close relation-

ship with Him that you can say, “I really enjoy God. He satisfies my heart.” The psalmist put it this way: “Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psalm 73:25-26). When you begin to get a picture of the sweetness, purity, and loveliness of the Lord, you will realize that all that the world has to offer is insignificant in comparison to Him.

Do you think about God in this way? Do you love worshiping Him? Spending time with Him? Thinking about Him? Do you want your entire life to be a song of worship and praise to Him? Do you find that He is your source of joy?

Angela had never thought of God as someone to enjoy. She knew that she should obey Him, but she didn't know anything of the delightfulness of His nature. To her, God was just a bunch of rules and regulations. She had missed the great wonder of His love and the sheer joy of spending time with Him. As she began to incorporate into her life the truths that she could glorify God and enjoy Him, she found that her tyrannical concern about how she looked began to fade in importance. Imagine being face to face with Jesus now. Imagine His kind voice, which always speaks the truth because He loves you more than anyone can imagine. Indeed, God loves His children, and you can have everlasting joy and peace because of it.

Today, God invites you to glorify and enjoy Him. He really is altogether lovely, isn't He? My hope is that what I've just shared helps to give you a right picture of God. He wants to use your life to glorify Himself and to bring you great joy. That is possible even for you. I know that because I've come to see that it is possible for every one of His children, including me, Marsha, and Angela.

Sit down. Kick your shoes off. Say, “Whew. God loves me and with His power, I can change.” Won't you join me in receiving those truths in your heart . . . today?