

i'll start  
again  
monday

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# i'll start again monday

BREAK THE CYCLE OF UNHEALTHY EATING  
HABITS WITH LASTING SPIRITUAL SATISFACTION

**LYSA TERKEURST**



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*I'll Start Again Monday*

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*To the girl with a weary heart who feels so very alone in this struggle that seems like it will never end . . . Let me be the friend who comes alongside you to say: you are seen. You are loved. You are prayed for. Jesus is with you, and so am I. We can do this. So, let's link arms and face this journey together.*

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# introduction

## *Finding Your “Want To”*

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**A typical book on healthy lifestyle choices should** contain lots of talk on vegetables, calories, colon cleanses, and phrases like “you must” and “you should.”

I have a problem with all that talk. It’s not the “how to” I’m missing. It’s the “want to” . . . really wanting to make lasting changes and deciding that the results of those changes are worth the sacrifice.

In light of this admission, I think it’s only appropriate to be honest with you about a few things right up front.

1. I am emotionally allergic to typical books on healthy eating.
2. Not once in my life have I ever craved a carrot stick.
3. I am not overly excited about giving up two of the greatest delights of my taste buds—Cheez-Its and box-mix brownies. In fact, I’ve asked God if it would be such a terribly difficult thing to swap the molecular structure of Cheez-Its for carrot



sticks. They're both already orange. And, really, how hard could that be for someone who's turned water into wine?

4. I wasn't sure I had any business writing a book like this. I'm a simple Jesus girl on a journey to finding deeper motivation than just a number on my scale for getting and staying healthy.

I'm not writing this book to beat your taste buds into submission or because I've discovered the magic diet to get you skinny by tomorrow. I'm writing this book because I've struggled way too long with my food choices and my weight. Because I've said, "I'll start again Monday" a thousand times—only to disappoint myself by breakfast. And word on the street says most of my girlfriends fight this draining, dissatisfying cycle day in and day out as well. Which brings me to the fifth thing you should know about me:

5. I started this journey weighing 167 pounds. To some, this is a horrifyingly high number. To others, 167 is a dream weight. In my case, the number itself was not the issue. The issue was how I felt mentally, spiritually, and physically. It was time to be honest with myself.

I think we all get to a place in our lives when we have to give a brutally honest answer to the question, "How am I doing?" It's not really a conversation we have with a

friend or family member. It's one of those middle-of-the-night contemplations when there's no glossing over the realities staring us in the face.

I knew certain things about myself needed to change, but it was easier to make excuses than it was to tackle them head-on. Rationalizations are so appealing. See if you relate to any of these:

*I'm good in every other area.*

*I make so many sacrifices already.*

*I need treats as a comfort in this season of life; I'll deal with my issues later.*

*The Bible doesn't specifically say this is wrong.*

*If I really wanted to make a change, I could; I just don't want to right now.*

*Oh, for heaven's sake, everyone has issues. So what if this is mine?*

But excuses got me nowhere fast, especially when it came to healthy eating.

A whole lifetime could be spent giving in to excuses, feeling guilty, resolving to do better, mentally beating myself up for not sticking to my resolve, and then resigning myself to the fact that things can't change.

And I don't want to spend a lifetime in this cycle.

I suspect you don't either.

The book you hold in your hands could be the missing companion you've needed with every healthy eating

plan you tried and cried over. I believe it will help you find your “want to.”

In addition to helping you find the desire to conquer your unhealthy eating habits, it also holds the key to something very significant for most of us women: spiritual malnutrition. We feel overweight physically but underweight spiritually. Tying these two things together is the first step on one of the most significant journeys you’ll ever take with God.

It reminds me of a journey described in Matthew 19. A rich young man comes to see Jesus and explains that he is following all the rules but still feels something missing from his pursuit of God. “All these [rules] I have kept,” he says. “What do I still lack?” (v. 20). Or, in other words, “I’m doing the basics of what’s required . . . so why do I still feel that I’m missing something?”

Such a vulnerable question. Such a relatable question.

Jesus responds, “If you want to be perfect [whole], go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (v. 21).

The rich young man then goes away sad because he won’t give up the one thing that consumes him. He is so full with his riches he can’t see how undernourished his soul is. He’s just like people today who refuse egg whites and fruit for breakfast so they can fill themselves up with candy-sprinkled, chocolate-frosted doughnuts. Even when their sugar high crashes and they complain

of splitting headaches, they steadfastly refuse to give up their doughnuts.

In my past sugar-filled life, I might have had some personal experience that led me to think of that frail little analogy.

Anyhow.

Jesus didn't mean this as a sweeping command for everyone who has a lot of money. He meant this for any of us who wallow in whatever abundance we have. I imagine Jesus looked straight into this young man's soul and said, "I want you to give up the one thing you crave more than me. Then come, follow me."

Piercing thought, isn't it?

Suddenly, Jesus isn't just staring at the rich young man; He's also staring at me—the inside me. The part I can't cover up with excuses and makeup.

When Jesus wants us to follow Him—really follow Him—it's serious business: "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me" (Mark 8:34 NASB).

With Jesus, if we want to gain, we must give up.

To be filled, we must deny ourselves.

To truly get close to God, we'll have to distance ourselves from other things.

To conquer our cravings, we'll have to redirect them to God.

God made us capable of craving so we'd have an unquenchable desire for more of Him, and Him alone.

Nothing changes until we make the choice to redirect our misguided cravings to the only One capable of satisfying them.

Getting healthy isn't just about losing weight. It's about recalibrating our souls so that we want to change—spiritually, physically, and mentally. And the battle really is in all three areas.

**Spiritually.** I had to ask God to give me the desire to be healthy. I knew a vanity-seeking “want to” would never last. Shallow desires produce only shallow efforts. I had to seek a spiritual “want to” empowered by God Himself.

So, I asked. I begged, actually. I cried out to God. And day by day, God gave me just enough “want to,” laced with His strength, to be satisfied by healthy choices.

God also settled in my heart that this is an issue of great spiritual importance. Think of Eve in the Bible's first recorded interaction between a woman and food. Obviously, the core of Eve's temptation was that she wanted to be like God, knowing good and evil. But we can't ignore the fact that *the serpent used food as a tool in the process*. If the very downfall of humanity was caused when Eve surrendered to a temptation to eat something she wasn't supposed to eat, I do think our struggles with food are important to God.

**Physically.** The spiritual perspectives in this book may stir the soul, but the physical realities require turning those spiritual insights into practical choices.

When I began this journey, I finally had to admit

that what I eat matters. My weight is a direct reflection of my choices and the state of my health.

I started with a visit to my doctor, which I highly encourage you to do before starting your healthy eating plan. The doctor ran several tests. Except for some results that indicated I wasn't exercising regularly or making the healthiest food choices, the tests came back normal.

*Hmfff.* Why do doctors always say the same old thing about eating right and exercise?

Feeling sluggish? Eat better, move more. Feeling blue? Eat better, move more. I bet the next time I go in for a sore throat it will be the same thing. Eat better, move more. Have mercy. And we won't even go into the issues I have with the scale in my doctor's office. I am positive it weighs me heavy just to prove his point. *See? You need to eat better, move more.*

The doctor and the test results were right. My weight issues were directly linked to my food choices. Period. I had to admit it and do something about it.

**Mentally.** I had to decide I was tired of compromising. What happens when you delete "com" from the word *compromise*? You're left with a "promise." We were made for more than *compromise*. We were made for God's *promises* in every area of our lives.

Honestly, I am made for more than a vicious cycle of eating, gaining, stressing—eating, gaining, stressing . . . I am made to rise up, do battle with my issues, and, using the Lord's strength in me, defeat them to the glory of God.

I hope you'll stick around on this journey of discovering your "want to." I can't promise it will be easy. But I can promise it will be the most empowering thing you've ever done. Just today I put on some jeans I never thought I'd wear again. And while my flesh did the happy dance of success, my soul was far from thoughts of vanity.

My soul felt free. I was amazed that I ever desired to satisfy my taste buds over satisfying my desire to break free from all the guilt, all the destruction, all the defeat.

I still don't crave those blasted carrot sticks. But I found my "want to." I started eating better and moving more. I lost the weight. I feel great. And I have most certainly grown closer to God than ever before.

My truest cravings are satisfied—and yours can be too.

# what's really going on here?

---

**Several years ago, a weight-loss company came up** with a brilliant advertising campaign. Maybe you saw some of their ads. A little orange monster chases a woman around, tempting and taunting her with foods that obviously aren't a part of her healthy eating plan. The ads perfectly captured what it feels like to be harassed by cravings all day long.

While the orange monster is a great way to visualize cravings, the ads fall short in their promise to really help a woman. The weight-loss company's theory is to teach what foods are more filling and encourage consumption of those. But does that really help overcome cravings?

For me, it does not. Simply telling me to eat healthier foods that will help me feel full longer doesn't address the heart of the matter. I can feel full after a meal and still crave chocolate pie for dessert. Just feeling full isn't the answer to sticking with a healthy eating plan.

---



So, what's really going on here?

I believe God made us to crave. Now before you think this is some sort of cruel joke by God, let me assure you that the object of our craving was never supposed to be food or other things people find themselves consumed by, such as sex or money or chasing after significance.

Think about the definition of the word *craving*. Dictionary.com defines *craving* as “something you long for, want greatly, desire eagerly, and beg for.”<sup>1</sup> Now consider this expression of craving: “How lovely is your dwelling place, LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God” (Psalm 84:1–2).

Yes, we were made to crave—long for, want greatly, desire eagerly, and beg for—God. Only God. But Satan wants to replace our craving for God with something else. Here's what the Bible says about this: “Do not love the world or anything in the world. . . . For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world” (1 John 2:15–16).

The passage details three ways Satan tries to lure us away from loving God:

- The cravings of the sinful man
- The lust of his eyes
- The boasting of what he has or does

what's really going on here?

Let's define these things.

According to the commentary in my *Life Application Study Bible* (NIV):

**Cravings** = trying to get our physical desires met  
*outside the will of God*

**Lust of eyes** = trying to get our material desires met  
*outside the will of God*

**Boasting** = trying to get our need for significance  
met *outside the will of God*

Remember Eve? Studying her story, I realized how intentionally Satan chooses his tactics. He knows where we are weak. He desires to lure us away from God. And he knows what works . . . “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food [cravings of the sinful man] and pleasing to the eye [lust of the eyes], and also desirable for gaining wisdom [boasting of what she has or does], she took some and ate it” (Genesis 3:6). Eve was tempted in precisely the same three ways the 1 John passage warns us about.

But it doesn't stop there. Look at how Jesus was tempted:

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The

tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

"He will command his angels  
concerning you,  
and they will lift you up in their hands,  
so that you will not strike your  
foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. (Matthew 4:1-11)

what's really going on here?

Again, the pattern of temptation is the same:

**Cravings:** Satan appealed to Jesus' physical cravings for food.

**Lust of the eyes:** The devil promised Jesus entire kingdoms if He would bow down to the god of materialism.

**Boasting:** The enemy enticed Jesus to prove His significance by forcing God to command angels to save Him.

But here's the significant difference between Eve and Jesus. Eve was saturated with the object of her desire. Jesus was saturated with God's truth.

I obviously wasn't in the garden with Eve, but based on three phrases from Genesis 3:6, I can only infer that she never took her eyes off the fruit as she *saw that the food was good, pleasing to the eye, and desirable*. She didn't walk away and give herself time to consider her choice. She didn't consult Adam. She didn't consider the truth of what God had clearly instructed or talk to Him. She focused only on the object of her obsession.

Eve craved what she focused on. We consume what we think about. And what we think about can consume us if we're not careful.

We crave what we eat. If I make healthy choices over a period of time, it seems to reprogram my taste buds. The more veggies and fruit I eat, the more veggies and

fruit I crave. However, if I eat brownies and chips, I crave brownies and chips in the worst kind of way.

Jesus set a beautiful example of breaking this vicious cycle of being consumed by cravings. It's even more powerful when we understand that Jesus was in a completely deprived state.

Eve was in a paradise garden with her every need provided for. Jesus had been in a wilderness, fasting for forty days. And yet He held strong. He quoted God's Word. And so can we. When we feel deprived and frustrated and consumed with wanting unhealthy choices, we, too, can rely on God's Word to help us.

With each temptation, Jesus quoted Scripture that refuted Satan's temptation. Truth is powerful. The more saturated we are with truth, the more powerful we'll be in resisting our temptations. And the more we'll naturally direct our cravings where they should be directed—to the Author of all truth.

Cravings. Are they a curse or a blessing? The answer to that depends on what we're craving. And what we're craving will always depend on whatever we're consuming . . . the object of our desire or God and His truth.

Consider what it means to the success of your journey to quote Scripture in the midst of a craving attack. One of the most meaningful scriptures I used in this process is "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is beneficial" (1 Corinthians 10:23). I quoted this scripture over and over to remind myself that I could have that brownie

what's really going on here?

or those chips, but they wouldn't benefit me in any way. That thought empowered me to make a beneficial choice rather than wallowing in being deprived of an unhealthy choice. As you read this book, make a point to write out meaningful verses and quote them aloud each time the orange monster tries to talk you into tarrying with him awhile.

I know it's a battle, sister. But we aren't rendered powerless. The more saturated we are with God's truth, the more powerfully resistant we become. Stick with me here—this isn't a plastic Christian answer. It's one that will change our lives if we let it.

## replacing my cravings

---

**I roll over and look at the clock. Another day. Beyond** all reason and rationality, I slide out of bed and strip off everything that might weigh even the slightest ounce as I head to the scale. Maybe today will be the day the scale will be my friend and not reveal my secrets. Maybe somehow overnight the molecular structure of my body shifted and today I will magically weigh less.

But no. I yank out my ponytail holder—hey, it's gotta weigh something—and decide to try again. But the scale doesn't change its mind the second time. It is not my friend this day.

Vowing to do better, eat healthier, and make good choices, I head to the kitchen only to have my resolve melt like the icing on the cinnamon rolls my daughter just pulled from the oven. Yum. Oh, who cares what the scale says when this roll speaks such love and deliciousness.

Two and a half cinnamon rolls later, I decide tomorrow will be a much better day to keep my promises to eat healthier. And since this is my last day to eat what I want, I better live it up. Another cinnamon roll, please.

---

The next morning I turn over and look at the clock. Another day. Beyond all reason and rationality, I slide out of bed and strip off everything that might weigh even the slightest ounce as I head to the scale. Maybe today will be the day. But once again it isn't. I yank out my ponytail holder and try again. But no.

Vowing to do better, eat healthier, and make good choices, I head into my day, only to find myself making more excuses, rationalizations, and promises for later.

Always later.

And the cycle I've come to hate and feel powerless to stop continues.

Who could I talk to about this? If I admit my struggle to my friends, they might try to hold me accountable the next time we go out. And what if I'm not in the mood to be questioned about my nachos con queso with extra sour cream? I'll just tell them I'll be starting on Monday, and they'll be fine with it. They don't think I need to make changes.

But I did need to make changes. I knew it. Because this wasn't really about the scale; it was about this battle that raged in my heart. I thought about, craved, and arranged my life too much around food. So much so, I knew it was something God was challenging me to surrender to His control. Really surrender. To the point where I'd make radical changes for the sake of my spiritual health perhaps even more than my physical health.

Part of my surrender was asking myself a really raw question.



May I ask you this same raw question?

*Is it possible we love and rely on food more than we love and rely on God?*

Now, before you throw this book across the room, hear me out. This question is crucial. I had to see the purpose of my struggle as something more than wearing smaller sizes and getting compliments from others.

I had to be about something more than just me.

I had to get honest enough to admit I relied on food more than I relied on God. Food was my comfort. My reward. My joy. Food was what I turned to in times of stress, sadness, and even in times of happiness.

I felt stupid admitting that. I felt like such a spiritual failure.

I told a few people about it and most seemed supportive. But one well-meaning woman quipped what others would echo in the months that followed: "You're making this diet thing a spiritual journey? Does God really care about our food?"

Yes, I think He does.

God never intended for us to want anything more than we want Him. Just the slightest glimpse into His Word proves that. Look at what the Bible says when God's chosen people, the Israelites, wanted food more than they wanted God: "They willfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved" (Psalm 78:18). Yikes.

And what became of them? They never reached the promised land. These people wandered in the desert for

forty years, and no one but Joshua and Caleb (the next-generation leaders) was allowed to enter the land flowing with milk and honey.

I don't know about you, but I don't want to wander about in a "desert," unable to enter into the abundant life God has for me because I willfully put Him to the test over food!

When I started, I knew this battle would be hard. But through it all I determined to make God my focus. Each time I craved something I knew wasn't part of my plan, I used that craving as a prompt to pray. I craved a lot. So, I found myself praying a lot.

Don't rush past that last paragraph. I used my cravings for food as a prompting to pray. It was my way of tearing down the tower of impossibility before me and building something new. My tower of impossibility was food. Brick by brick, I imagined myself dismantling the food tower and using those same bricks to build a walkway of prayer, paving the way to victory.

Did this simple visualization make it easier? Sometimes it did. Other times my cravings for unhealthy food made me cry. Seriously, cry. Sometimes I wound up on the floor in my closet, praying with tears running down my face. And I gave myself permission to cry, just like the psalmist:

Listen to my words, LORD,  
consider my lament.  
Hear my cry for help,

i'll start again monday

my King and my God,  
for to you I pray.

In the morning, LORD, you hear my  
voice;  
in the morning I lay my requests  
before you  
and wait expectantly.

(Psalm 5:1-3)

That is exactly what I did.

“God, I want a biscuit this morning. Instead, I’m eating poached eggs. I’m thankful for these eggs, but I’ll be honest in saying my cravings for other things are hard to resist. But, instead of wallowing in what I *can’t* have, I’m making the choice to celebrate what I *can* have.”

“God, it’s 10:00 a.m. and I’m craving again. I want those snack crackers that are screaming my name. But instead of reaching for them, I’m praying. I’ll be honest, I don’t want to pray. I want those crackers. But I’ll have a handful of almonds and brick by brick . . . prayer by prayer . . . lay a path for victory.”

“God, it’s lunchtime and all my friends are heading out for Mexican. I love Mexican! I could seriously justify a big bowl of chips and guacamole right now. But once again I’m choosing to pray instead of getting stuck in my craving. Help me, God, to feel satisfied with healthier choices.”

And that’s how my prayers continued throughout

the day. Laying my requests before God and waiting in expectation.

Then one morning, it finally happened. I got up, and for the first time in a long while, I felt incredibly empowered. I still did the same crazy routine with the scale—no clothes, no ponytail holder—but I only stepped on it once. The numbers hadn't changed yet, but my heart had. One day of victory tasted better than any of that food I'd given up ever could. I had waited in expectation using prayer as my guide, and I did it.

I did it that day and the next. Then the next. Why not shoot for four victorious days in a row? And then maybe one more.

I can't promise you there won't be any more tears. And I can't promise the scale will magically drop as quickly as you wish it would. But it will be a start. A really good start.

## getting a plan

---

**Last spring I took a shortcut through a neighborhood** and caught a glimpse of a man planting a flower garden. That quick glance was long enough to produce a lingering thought: *I wish I had a pretty garden.*

For years I've looked at other people's flowers and secretly wished for my own lush display. However, the glimpse of this man with his hands digging deep into the earth brought a new revelation. *He has a garden because he invests time and energy to make it.* He didn't wish it into being. He didn't just wake up one day and find that a garden of glorious blooms had miraculously popped up from the dirt.

No.

He worked at it. He sacrificed for it. Day after day. Row by row. Seed by seed. Plant by plant.

It took time and commitment before he ever saw any fruit from his labor. But eventually there was a bloom . . . and then another . . . and then another.

I saw this man's flowers and wished for my own—without a clue about all the work that had gone into producing them. I want the flowers but not the work.

Isn't that the way it is with many things in life—we want the results but have no desire to put in the work?

Besides a garden, I also wished for a thinner body for years but was lax about actually changing what I ate. I excused away the necessary discipline, citing my age and metabolism, lamenting the unfairness of my genetic disposition and blah, blah, blah.

The reality is, I can't eat like an athletic teenager and then complain about my extra layers of fluff.

Or my pants size.

Or my arms that are starting to wave back at me when I raise them.

I can't wish blooms into place any more than I can wish fat away. I knew I needed a plan. Something more than "I'll start again Monday."

I had a friend who'd found a nutritionist she really liked. She got her issues under control, lost weight, kept it off, and experienced the empowering feeling of success.

The day of my first appointment with this same nutritionist, I sat in my car and chuckled at my choice for a *last meal*—the meal before I'd have to make changes.

I stared down at the paper plate. Minutes before, it had been piled high with slices of Chef Boyardee pizza. Cheap, boxed pizza had been the delight of my childhood taste buds. Who am I kidding? It was the delight of my adulthood as well. And if my food choice alone didn't seal the deal that changes needed to be made, my next move certainly did.

I licked the plate.

Yes, I did. If this would be the last time I'd enjoy this delicacy, I was for sure not leaving a drop of sauce on the plate. Not a drop.

Inside the nutritionist's office, I was told I was overweight. This was not news to me. I had gone up two pants sizes during the past year and now even my big pants were protesting.

Something had to give.

Someone had to learn the discipline of giving up some things. And those "things" were poor food choices that were sabotaging my body, my mental energy, and my spirit.

Food had become like a drug. And honestly, it's a good drug choice for a Christian woman. Every church event I attended readily provided my drug out in the open with no hesitation or judgment.

I was eating too much of the wrong kinds of foods and felt trapped in a cycle of hunger. I felt hungry all the time. I was too dependent on food for comfort. I wanted to eat what I wanted, when I wanted, in the quantities I wanted. So, despite exercising, my food choices caught up with me, and my changing body revealed all my secrets.

That's both the blessing and the curse of issues with food. My poor choices will rat me out every time—if not in my waistline, then in my energy level and my overall well-being.

I left the nutritionist's office that day with a plan. Under her supervision and with a weekly weigh-in to hold me accountable, I felt empowered for the first time in a long while.

The plan I chose was strict and restrictive. I knew in my heart it had to be. I had to break the addictive cycles my taste buds had grown to crave. I needed to train my body not to be hungry all the time. I had to keep my blood sugar in check.

The healthy eating plan I adopted then and maintain now is a balanced protein-carbohydrate plan. I learned correct portion sizes, food combining, when to eat, and what to eat. I still eat carbohydrates, but I'm limited in how much and what kind. I don't eat most breads, potatoes, rice, corn, pasta, or other starchy things. Mainly, I eat low-fat meats, veggies, and fruits.

I have a funny truth to share about the healthy eating plan I chose. Basically, I eat what a wild animal eats—meat and things that grow naturally from the earth. Only I cook my food and use manners. I was immediately encouraged by the possibilities of this plan because I have yet to see an overweight animal in the wild lamenting over excess cellulite.

Think about it.

I'm not saying this has to be your plan. (You need to do your research, consult your doctor, and create a healthy and realistic plan for *your* everyday life.) I'm saying this is *my* plan and, believe it or not, I've grown to love it. Notice



I said “*grown* to love it.” I won’t deny there have been some really hard days.

My plan is realistic for me because the foods I eat are things I can buy at my local grocery store and because my family can eat what I eat for the most part. However, they usually have starches that I skip.

This journey will require you to make some tough sacrifices, but I’ve come to look at this process as embracing healthy choices rather than denying myself. There are lessons to be learned and perspectives to be gained in the season of embracing healthy choices. These will not just be physical lessons. The mental and spiritual lessons gained in this time will be the very thing to equip you for the long haul. And keep you healthy and blossoming, just like that man’s garden.

Speaking of gardens, don’t be expecting any fresh-cut flowers from my garden. That is still but a wish.

A girl can’t do it all, you know.

# friends don't let friends eat before thinking

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***Stop, in the name of love, before you break my heart.***

*Think it over.*

Who would have ever thought this classic tune by the Supremes could apply to so much more than a girlfriend warning her wayward beau? Contained within the melody is a very powerful statement: “Think it over.”

I wonder how many bad choices and severe consequences could have been averted if that three-word statement had been applied.

Sometimes we can muster up the gumption to *think it over* on our own and redirect our steps away from the slippery slope of compromise. But, more times than not, we need measures of accountability.

For me, one of the most effective accountability measures has been mutually tracking progress with friends. I have one friend who started ahead of me and who has been an invaluable source of encouragement and perspective. She's the one I mentioned earlier, with the nutritionist.

She leaned across the table one day and said, “Lysa, if you do this healthy eating plan, it will work.” I clung to that statement when I had a little breakdown.

The first three weeks of my new eating plan, things went well. I only struggled with being hungry the first ten days. At the start of week four, I think my body went through sugar withdrawals. I’m not kidding.

All my systems were out of whack. I felt like I had the flu one day, severe allergies the next, and then stomach issues for a week after that. It was definitely my angry little self, demanding I give my body some SUGAR NOW!

I felt awful. I could hardly exercise. I had to nap—and if you know me in real life, you know what a shocker that is! Part of me was ready to throw in the towel, head to the boxed-brownie aisle at the store, and ask if anyone knew how to hook up an IV line between me and Betty Crocker.

We must be aware that desperation breeds degradation. In other words, when what is lacking in life goes from annoyance to anxiety, we run the risk of compromising in ways we never thought we would.

I find it interesting that a verse many of us know and quote—how the devil prowls about like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour—is tucked right at the end of a passage that says, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert” (1 Peter 5:7–8).

You see, when we determine to get healthy, we will

have to give up certain things and change our habits. Doing this can make us feel anxious. That's why we must have friends to help us remember that what we're giving up in the short term will help us get what we really want in the long term. If we forget to be self-controlled and alert, we are prime targets for Satan to usher us right away from the new standards we've set in our life. That's degradation.

Yes, desperation breeds degradation.

A person who thinks she would never steal gets into a financial bind and suddenly finds herself skimming money from the register at work.

A person who thinks she'd never have sex before marriage feels physically pressured by someone she desperately wants love from and suddenly finds herself in bed with him.

A person committed to getting healthy forgets to pack her healthy snacks and suddenly feels it's urgent to zip by the vending machine and grab a candy bar just this one time.

Be aware and be on guard, sweet sister. Know that these are schemes the devil has devised to lure you away from your commitments. Find a friend who can speak rationality into your irrational impulses. A friend who will hold you accountable, speak the truth in love, and pray for you.

Look at the great example of how desperation breeds degradation in the Old Testament story of Esau. Esau, the

older of two twins, was a skillful hunter, while the younger twin, Jacob, was more of a homebody. The Scriptures say:

Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, “Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I’m famished!” (That is why he was also called Edom.)

Jacob replied, “First sell me your birthright.”

“Look, I am about to die,” Esau said. “What good is the birthright to me?”

But Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.

Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left.

So Esau despised his birthright. (Genesis 25:29–34)

The thing that strikes me about this story is how much Esau gave up for just a few moments of physical satisfaction. He sacrificed what was good in the long term for what felt good in the short term. He gave up who he was in a moment of desperation.

Had a true friend of Esau’s heard this interaction with Jacob, surely he would have spoken some rationality into Esau’s irrational impulses.

That’s what my friend was for me—a voice of reason,

stability, and rationality. While she held fast with her assurances, I cried. Cried *tears*, y'all—big tears over the lack of sugar and salty treats and the temporary highs they always gave me. After calling her, I'd lie down on my bathroom floor and beg God for His help. To say I was miserable was an understatement. But if she could press through her withdrawal days, so could I.

Then the day after my worst day, all my symptoms vanished. Suddenly I felt great. My body was strong, my emotions were in check, my energy level was sky high. Just like my friend said would happen.

Amazing.

Persevering through my breakdown ushered me into a sweet place of breakthrough, and suddenly I started seeing tangible results. It felt so good not to dread getting dressed in the morning. It was a major perk to wear clothes that actually fit. Granted, they were still my “big clothes,” but being able to put them on with comfort and ease was a great step in the right direction.

It also was crucial to have the accountability of another friend, Holly, who started this healthy eating plan at the same time I did. We both knew it would be hard, so we committed to praying for each other as well as holding each other accountable. Every day we talked about what we'd be eating. Then weekly we reported our weights to each other. We talked through each struggle, each temptation that seemed so consuming, each step both good and bad.

Knowing I couldn't hide little cheats here and there

from Holly kept me from slipping. I couldn't stand the thought of having to tell her I'd messed up—so I didn't. Our motto became, "If it's not part of our plan, we don't put it in our mouths."

If you don't have a friend who is willing to take this journey with you by changing her eating habits, don't be discouraged. Find a friend who is willing to take the journey with you in prayer. Be honest with her about your struggles and ask her to commit to praying fervently for you and with you.

Honestly, I *never, ever* thought I could really give up eating bread, pasta, rice, potatoes, and sugar. But seeing the success of friends ahead of me and knowing I had someone who was willing to sacrifice with me gave my brain permission to stop—in the name of love—and think it over.

While you'll have to find a friend to either do a healthy eating plan with you or one who will pray you through it, let me be that voice that reaches across your doubts to say, "If you follow the healthy eating plan you've chosen, it will work and it most certainly will be worth it." And when you get into possible trouble with temptation, remember to "stop in the name of love." Let your love for your friends who are standing with you and your love for the Lord, who wants you to honor Him in the way you treat your body, make you think it over.

So, are you ready? Take time to prayerfully consider the right healthy eating plan for you. Talk to your friends to see who might be willing to join you. And then start walking toward the healthy life that's possible for you.

## made for more

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**When I was a senior in high school, I was invited to a sorority party by a friend who'd graduated the year before me.**

*Cool* doesn't even begin to describe what I felt as my pink jelly shoes and I made our way into that party. By the end of the night, my friend and I were giggling over the attention given to us by two good-looking college boys. As the party died down, they invited us over to their place.

Part of me was so flattered, I wanted to go. A much bigger part of me didn't. But plans got made, and before I knew it we were getting into their car and driving away.

I was not a Christian at this point in my life. Not even close. And I certainly can't say I'd ever heard God speak to me, but in the midst of this situation, I did.

*This isn't you, Lysa. You were made for more than this.*

Truth. A gift of truth. Planted deep within me when God personally knit me together. Untied and presented at just the right time.

I wound up making an excuse for a quick exit and walked back to my car alone that night. I mentally beat



myself up for acting like an immature high schooler who couldn't handle being a college party girl. But looking back, I want to stand up on a chair and clap, clap, clap for my high school self!

There were other seasons of my growing-up years when I heard this truth loud and clear within the confines of my soul and, sadly, I refused to listen. These were the darkest years of my life. I wasn't made to live a life that dishonors the Lord.

None of us are.

*You were made for more, Lysa. You were made for more.* I remembered it especially in those early weeks of my new healthy eating adventure when I was tempted by one million assaults on my sugar-deprived taste buds. I just kept mentally repeating . . . *made for more . . . made for more.*

What a great truth for us all. What a great truth to use while rewriting the “go-to” scripts that play in our heads every time we're tempted. Rewriting the go-to scripts is one of the most crucial steps toward permanent progress.

We have to rewrite the excuses, the rationalizations, the “I'll do better tomorrow” escape clauses by getting into the habit of saying other things. And the first of these is, “I was made for more.” Wrapped in this truth is a wisdom and revelation that unlocks great power available to all Christians.

And isn't power what girls in pursuit of making healthy life changes really need? We need a power beyond our frail attempts and fragile resolve. A power greater than

our taste buds, hormones, temptations, and our inborn female demand for chocolate.

Read what the apostle Paul wrote about this amazing power available to us, and note the emphasized phrases, which we'll take a closer look at in a moment:

*I keep asking* that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the *glorious Father*, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, *so that you may know him better*. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and *his incomparably great power for us* who believe. (Ephesians 1:17–19, emphasis added)

Now I realize it is hard to take a passage like this, hold it up to a decadent piece of chocolate cake, and instantly feel the power to walk away. But if we unpack this passage and then practice its truth, it's amazing how empowered we'll be. So, let's take a closer look at some key words and phrases.

### Be Persistent: "I Keep Asking"

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We must ask God to join us in this journey. And this won't be a one-time exercise. Paul asked over and over and

over again for wisdom. So should we. We need to ask for God's wisdom, revelation, and intervening power to be an integral part of our food choices from now on.

Why not make this a daily prayer—first thing in the morning—before we've eaten a thing: "God, I recognize I am made for more than the vicious cycle of being ruled by food. I need to eat to live, not live to eat. So, I keep asking for Your wisdom to know what to eat and Your indwelling power to walk away from things that aren't beneficial for me."

### Embrace a True Identity: "Glorious Father"

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The phrase "glorious Father" indicates our relationship to God and answers the question, "Why are we made for more?" We are made for more because we are children of God. For years I identified myself not by my relationship with God but by my circumstances. I was . . .

Lysa, the *broken* girl from a broken home.

Lysa, the girl *rejected* by her father.

Lysa, the girl *sexually abused* by a grandfather figure.

Lysa, the girl who *walked away from God* after the death of her sister.

Lysa, the girl who *had an abortion* after a string of bad relationships.

Then one day I read a list of who God says I am. What a stark contrast to the way I saw myself! I finally realized I didn't have to be defined by my circumstances. Instead, I could live in the reality of who my glorious heavenly Father says I am:

Lysa, the *forgiven* child of God. (Romans 3:24)

Lysa, the *set-free* child of God. (Romans 8:1–2)

Lysa, the *accepted* child of God. (John 1:12)

Lysa, the *holy child* of God. (1 Corinthians 1:30)

Lysa, the *made-new* child of God. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Lysa, the *loved* child of God. (Ephesians 1:4)

Lysa, the *confident* child of God. (Ephesians 3:12)

Lysa, the *victorious* child of God. (Romans 8:37)

I was made to be set free—holy, new, loved, and confident. Because of this, I can't allow myself to partake in anything that negates my true identity. Be it a relationship in which someone makes me feel less than my true identity or a vicious food cycle that leaves me defeated and imprisoned, I must remember I was made for more.

## Find the Deeper Reason: “So That You May Know Him Better”

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Did you catch the real reason for embracing our true identity? It's not just so we can feel better about ourselves or to help us make healthier choices. It's not even to help us operate as victorious children of God. And it's certainly not so we can slip into smaller jeans and lose the muffin tops, although these are all wonderful benefits.

The real reason is “so that you may know Him better.”

There is a deeper purpose behind our disciplined commitment. Making this connection—between being made for more and getting to know God better—helps this whole adventure be less about food and lifestyle choices and more about embracing a chance for deep, wonderful connections with God.

## Discover a Hope and Power Like No Other: “That the Eyes of Your Heart May Be Enlightened”

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*Enlighten* literally means “to shed light upon.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, the apostle Paul asked that light be shed upon our hearts so we can more clearly recognize the hope and power available to us.

We are made for the same hope and power that raised Christ from the dead. We've covered Ephesians 1:17–19, but we must look at what follows: “That power is the same

as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms” (vv. 19–20). This is the power available to us! The same power that raised Jesus from the dead! It may not feel like we have this power, but we do—*you* do. And I pray that each time you proclaim, “I am made for more,” all the power-packed truths within that statement rush into your heart.

We were made for more than excuses and vicious cycles. We can taste success. Experience truth. Choose to stay on the path of perseverance. Build one success on top of another. And our eating habits can be totally transformed as we operate in the hope and power that’s like no other.