

A Biblical Approach to
INTUITIVE EATING



Hannah C. Cai

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Kirstin and the invaluable feedback she provided in writing this. Thank you for the steadfastness you express through nature runs, class projects, snail mail, and countless prayers I don't even know about.

Hugs to Ben and Francesca for their unwavering support and encouragement to listen to my creativity and be led to my Creator, and to Ashley, for making Christianity so attractive.

Table of Contents

Introduction

1. Setting the Scene

*Justified and Redeemed by Grace, Not by Law
Old versus New
A Biblical Approach to Intuitive Eating*

2. A New Life

*A Fresh Start
Shame to Acceptance
Identity and Embodiment*

3. Honoring Ourselves and Our Needs

*Respect Your Body
Self-Care
Honoring Your Hunger*

4. Spirit--led Intuitive Eating in Action

*The Case for a Biblical Approach to Intuitive Eating
Framework for Fuel
Feel Your Fullness
Navigating the Nutrition Noise
Gentle Movement*

Closing Thoughts



Introduction

If there's ever a section of an article or book I get impatient reading, it's the introduction, so I'll try to keep this short. It's worth briefly explaining why a nutrition student wholeheartedly believes in eating dessert — butter, cane sugar, flour, and all.

Interestingly, God brought me to the field of nutrition through a back door while I was still hoping to become a veterinarian. I was sixteen and not the popular kid in school - nor was I the smartest. And to be honest, I didn't know who I was or who I wanted to be. I just knew I wasn't happy with my life and I wanted to feel good about myself.

So many things were spiraling out of control - family dynamics, relationships with people I thought were my friends, insatiable expectations to stand out for college applications. I wasn't confident in how I looked, but my appearance was something I could control through food and exercise.

Little by little, I turned to celebrity-authored books and personal websites to learn how others ate (or didn't) and exercised. As someone who is inclined to extreme self-restraint, I found myself enslaved to an obsession with perfection and purity. My day to day involved crippling mental cartwheels of planning out my eating, and that included exactly when, what, and how much I would eat. I eliminated many foods and invested more time breaking down relationships with people who cared a lot about me than cultivating them. Funny enough, food and exercise were supposed to be coping mechanisms for the stress I was facing, but they added tremendously to my stress in many ways. I was trying to feel whole, but I didn't know what hole I was trying to fill. But in that deep, dark, and lonely place I dug myself into, I finally had desperate ears to listen. Turns out, God had been knocking on my door, day after day, hearing my cries. He wanted to come alongside me and help me let go of the things that were giving me callouses. Slowly, I invited Him to breathe His life and wisdom into these areas.

Fast forward a few years. As I was rebuilding my relationship with Christ, I began to take real nutrition science classes that were not guided by anecdotal reports and commercially sponsored claims. And yes, I've certainly learned to appreciate how dynamic and resilient the human body is, but to be honest, even as a dietetic student, sometimes the evidence that's spouted all day long still doesn't resonate. There are cultural, economic, philosophical, and physiological lenses that complicate food choices, not to mention my volatile feelings about how I look. And so in this ocean of countless voices telling me how to live my life and how I should look, it's by God's grace that He's slowly helped me prioritize His unchanging, infallible Word as my compass.

Through this, I hope you'll be equipped with scriptural truths and practical strategies, but most importantly, I hope you'll consider inviting the Holy Spirit to lead you in this beautiful, honest journey to healing your relationship with body image, food, and exercise.

Father God,

Thank you for the victory that you have won for us, for freedom from worthless labels, for identifying us as your children. Father, you have saved us from the pain and darkness that comes with placing our identities in the world. You've broken the chains of death so that we may live in this world, free from hopelessness and fear. We strain our eyes to look ahead, awaiting eternity with You.

You have given us a Savior who knows, better than anyone, what loneliness feels like. Our perfect Savior knows what it's like to be an outcast, to not fit in, to have people judge you to your face and behind your back. You loved us so much that You sent Your Son to walk alongside us, to experience our pains. Jesus, You didn't need to suffer with us, let alone die for us, but You did it anyway.

Freely you gave because You loved us. You loved and continue to love us in our brokenness, and You welcome us to fall into Your arms just as we are... But it's so hard to reconcile the desire to earn Your love. We invent rules for ourselves. We try to win approval and admiration.

Give us strength to surrender our ideas of righteousness. We submit our pride to you, Father, because all we can take ownership of is our sin. We are not the disciplined, controlled, perfect images we chase after. It is so hard to reconcile the false exterior with the real brokenness, and we commit ourselves to the liberation You welcome us to.

Father, help us see ourselves and others as You see us. Help us give up the facades, pain, and hurt we inflict upon ourselves. We want to run into your gift of freedom and honor the bodies You've blessed us with.

We pray over all of our brothers and sisters who are healing from the deep wounds incurred from trying to find acceptance in this hostile world. Would you comfort them? May they discover their identities in You. We pray that they would come to know your peace and love, that through You, their feet would find stable ground in this ever-changing world.

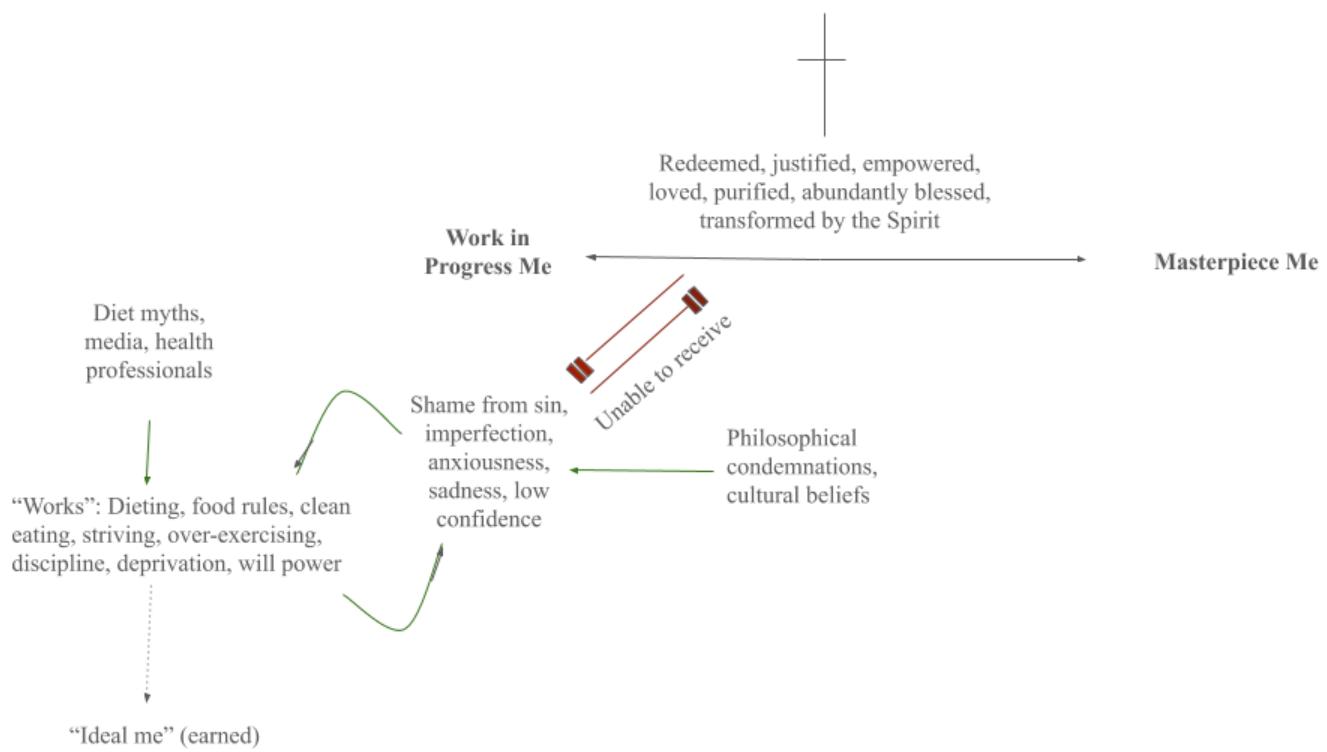
Holy God, I thank you for the opportunity to grow together and I ask for your help in communicating your messages the way you intend for others to hear it.

Questions to Consider

It's perfectly okay to answer yes to these questions. These are not meant to induce shame or defensiveness. Instead, use them as tools to check-in with yourself and identify where you're at right now. You may even consider returning to these questions every few months or every year; growing can be hard but looking back reminds us that the long way with Jesus is worthwhile.

Do you ever find yourself

- Avoiding certain foods because they are high in calories, carbohydrates, fat?
- Not eating, even when you're hungry?
- Thinking a lot about a certain food you don't let yourself eat?
- Feeling upset, guilty, frustrated, or mad after eating foods you consider "unhealthy"?
- Exercising more after eating a treat or large meal?
- Feeling irritable or guilty when you don't exercise to burn calories?
- Eating less to make up for eating a large meal?
- Eating less in preparation for a large meal?
- Giving permission to eat as much as you want on a designated "cheat day?"
- Following diet and/or exercise plans that specifically outline what, when, and how to eat?
- Participating in cleanses or detox regimens?
- Participate in weight loss or food-restriction challenges?
- Often explaining how you eat and why to others?
- Worrying about what others think about your eating habits?
- Avoiding food-related events with family, friends, and colleagues?
- Feeling stressed when you don't know what foods will be provided at an event?
- Carefully tracking or planning the types and amounts of food you eat?
- Eating when you're not physically hungry but bored, stressed, lonely, tired, sad, or anxious?
- Determining how much to eat based on portion sizes or counting methods?
- Untrusting of your body's hunger and fullness signals?
- Tired, low in energy, and hungry more than the average person?
- Thinking a lot about what you look like to others?
- Feeling unconfident in the clothes you wear?
- Avoiding certain clothes because your body does not fit certain criteria to wear them?
- Pinching, poking, or sucking in body parts you don't like?



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



1. SETTING THE SCENE

Justified and Redeemed by Grace, Not by Law

Let's rebuild the foundation of our relationship with God by rooting ourselves in the gospel. Because of Christ's faithfulness and grace, not our own works, we are invited to everlasting life.

"Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Romans 5: 18-21

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience - among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespass, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved - and raised us up with him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages, He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Ephesians 2: 1-7

"For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh - though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith - that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

Philippians 3:3-11

On Easter, Jesus cancelled our debt, guilt, shame, self-righteousness, and separation from God. We've gone from being slaves to beloved heirs. We were lost and now we're found. We were bound to eternal punishment and have been freed with a secured future. Even Paul, the author of these passages and whose former life was the epitome of social and religious status, could not earn his salvation.

We live with some tension because the bodies we currently inhabit are lowly and weak, but we've been promised they will be raised in power to be like Christ's glorious body (1 Corinthians 15:43, Philippians 3:21).

Now something Jesus followers remind themselves of all the time is they're "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). How do we reconcile our divinity with our brokenness?

When I first read this line in isolation, I made it all about me. I assumed that "wonderful" means I am amazing and perfect, but after a closer look, "fearfully and wonderfully" doesn't describe the "I." It describes "made," the verb, or God's process.

I then read through the entire Psalm and realized that an overarching emotion that David expresses is awe. He was in awe of God's craftsmanship, omniscience, and purpose. The whole Psalm is bookmarked by a praise for how God has searched and known every bit of him in verse 1, and a petition for God to continue searching his heart and mind in the last verse.

Verses 4-6 read, *"Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it."*

We see the word "wonderful" again, and here, it's clear how David uses it to describe how miraculous and incomprehensible God's all-knowing power is.

David continues in verses 15-16, *"My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them."*

David refers back to the creation of Adam in Genesis 2:7, when God "formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature." How is it that God can create the intricate, complex human body (which science today still does not fully understand) out of the earth? How is it that He already reserved plans for each one of my days before I was even alive to write things down into my agenda?

Now, with all these pieces laid out in front of me, I feel the reverence-inspired “fear” that David described. I, Hannah, was made out of nothing. So my existence here today, with microscopic branches in my lungs to breathe and muscle fibers contracting in my legs to run, is a display of God’s power. My whole being, including my physical body, exists to point back to its Creator, not to appeal to mankind’s approval or satisfy society’s insatiable appetite.

Returning to David’s praise and petition, “*Search me, O God, and know my heart,*” we’re reminded that the one awesome God who crafted our incredible bodies knows our gaps and is faithful in leading us to the everlasting way. It’s by God’s love and power that we were made, we were saved, and we are being sanctified right now.

If we refer to the Conceptual Framework (Page 10), grace is the logical link between the Work-in-Progress Me and Masterpiece Me. As John Newton wrote, “*I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world; but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am.*”

These reminders that we are saved and sanctified by grace are crucial to informing our attitudes as we rebuild our relationship with food.

1. Our purpose in life is not to appeal to cultural standards.
2. We cannot achieve anything, especially not salvation, by our own efforts.
3. Our good God, the Creator of our bodies and Perfecter of our faith, will help us live a lifestyle that honors Him.

The Old Versus the New

God laid out instructions in the Old Testament (Leviticus 11) for what could be eaten and what could not. The Jewish *kashrut* (kosher laws) detail the specifications of their dietary standards.

For some time, I thought these food rules were boundaries that God provided out of protection for food safety concerns. Yet Leviticus 11 differentiates clean and unclean animals by anatomy, not by their living environment or nutritional value. On a similar note, wine could not be consumed if it was produced by non-Jews, but permissible when bottled according to Jewish laws. So why did God require His people to eat differently?

Peter Leithart¹ explains, *“Israel is called to be a separate people. They exist to serve the Gentiles, to bring Yahweh’s blessing to the world, and to light the nations. But to be light, they need to avoid communion with darkness. They keep the food laws to maintain the God-given wall between Jews and Gentiles. Israel is prohibited from eating animals with serpentine features to train them to avoid communion at the table of demons. They aren’t to incorporate unclean meat, so they’ll learn to avoid unclean people.”*

¹ Leithart, Peter. “You Are What (Animal) You Eat: Making Sense of the Bible’s Dietary Laws.” The Gospel Coalition, 8 Apr. 2020, www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/you-are-animal-eat-bible-dietary-laws/.

Following the *kashrut* was a discipline of holiness and statement of identity. But, as Dr. Leithart continues, *“Jesus died to break the dividing wall. The human race is no longer divided between Jew and Gentile, but now between the Seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. The food restrictions that kept Israel separated from Gentiles are canceled. That’s the message to Peter in Acts 10–11: a sheet full of animals is lowered from heaven and Peter is invited to eat. He objects that he’s never eaten unclean meat, but is told to do so. The whole context, though, has to do with Peter’s reception of Cornelius. He can eat unclean food; he can commune as an equal with the Gentile Cornelius. These are two implications of the gospel. For us, nothing is to be rejected, if it’s received with gratitude (1 Tim. 4:4).”*

Everyone today is welcomed to Jesus’ table, therefore, we are no longer obligated to follow dietary restrictions to be united with God. There is no need to be afraid of food or certain types of foods because we are liberated by God’s love.

“And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.” (1 John 4:16-18)

Fear is the enemy’s currency, or as Pastor Louie Giglio once said, "Fear is faith in the enemy." Bullying and fear-mongering for health's sake has no place in the Christian life. Jesus invites us to live abundantly (John 10:10), but a diet mentality leaves us far from that.

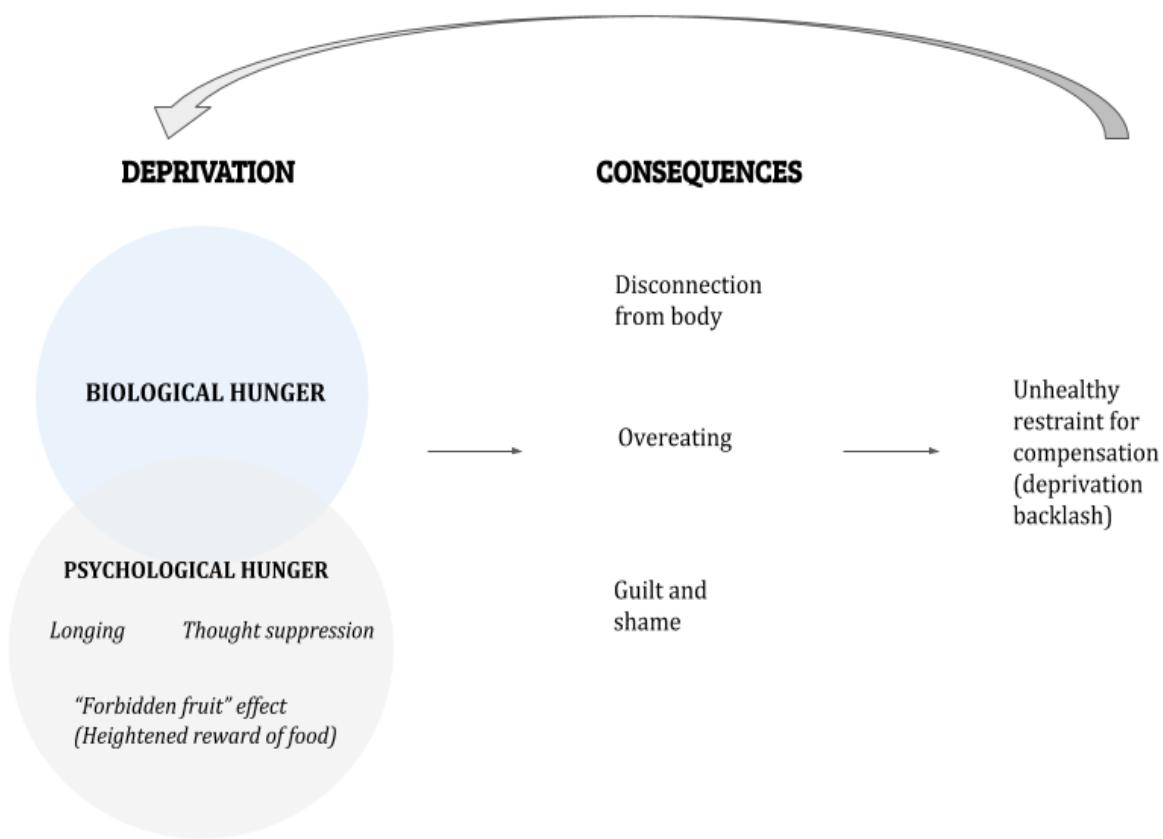
A few of the far-reaching consequences of a diet mentality include:

Physically	Socially	Psychologically	Behaviorally	Spiritually
Weight gain	Canceling/ avoiding social events	Constant worrying & tracking	Compensatory mechanisms for breaking rules	Canceling/ avoiding church events
Decreased metabolism	Judging others and fearing others' judgment	Strict rules	Compulsive exercise	Idolizing athletic performance, food, diet, exercise, health, nutrition
Increased cravings for carbohydrates	Interference with relationships	Guilt	Talking a lot about dieting, food, weight	Interference with Christian community life
Hair loss		Shame	Constant weighing	
Lower blood sugar		Mood swings		
Loss of menses		Fear of fullness		
Weight cycling		Depression		
Low energy		Anxiety		
Becoming cold easily				

There is a lot of noise competing with God's voice. Some of us may have grown up with strict food rules implemented in the name of health. "Don't eat fat. Sugar is bad. Carbohydrates are the enemy."

Today, we don't need to look very far to be told that ingredient *x* is harmful while *y* and *z* have "super" detoxification powers. Our culture has developed an implicit morality based on diet and body image. If our bodies look one way, we're assumed to be lazy. If we eat another way, we're "clean." What happens if we fail to live up to our self-assigned dietary identities? How do we feel when we can't eat "forbidden food"? How do we feel when we do? Can we tolerate being uncomfortably full without compensating by exercising more or skipping a meal?

The rebound cycle distances us from Christ.



Whatever the enemy can't destroy, he distracts, and food restrictions can prevent us from giving our hearts fully to God. Placing our hope in a diet instead of Jesus Christ means that we doubt His ability to guide us towards abundant life. Believing that our dignity is compromised by the "wrong" food choice means that we don't believe we are co-heirs with Christ. What or who are we more willing to devote our bodies, hearts, and minds to? Time obsessing over calories displaces time with God.

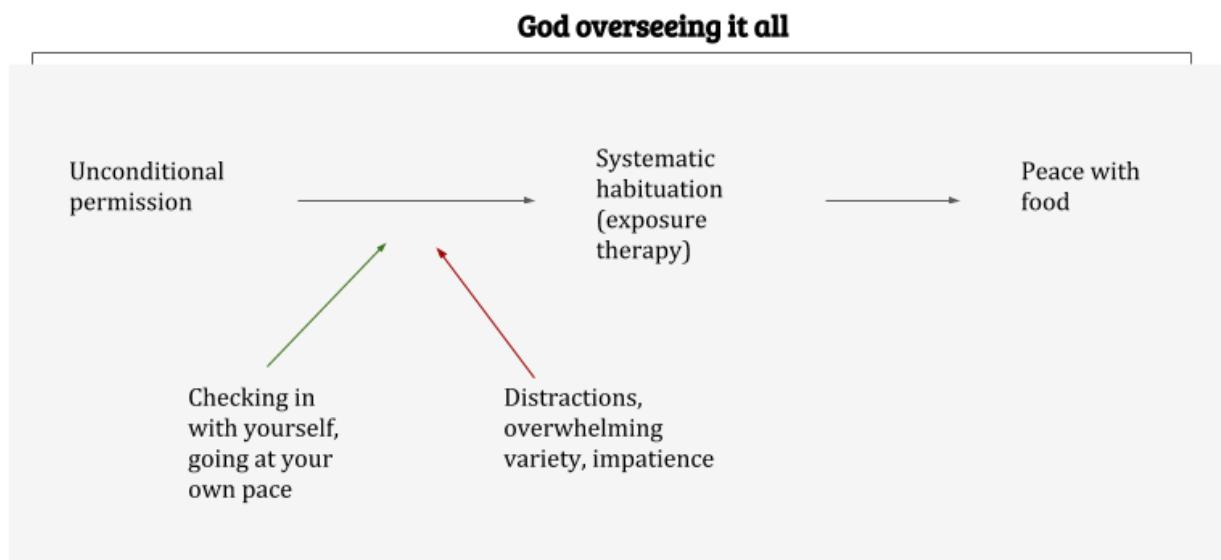
Rebuilding our relationship with food will certainly take time and energy, but when we put God at the center, we prioritize our relationship with Him first and foremost. When He's at the center, everything surrounds Him.

A Biblical Approach to Intuitive Eating

If you've picked this up, you're probably interested in learning about intuitive eating principles. Intuitive eating is a framework developed by two dietitians (Tribole and Resch²) that seeks to help people cultivate attunement to their biological and psychological needs and eliminate barriers to attunement, such as beliefs and rules. Tribole and Resch explain that *"Trust takes time to cultivate... Your body has survived nutritional trauma, and your cells need to know that they will be fed and taken care of, which will take repetition and consistency."*

As with Pavlov's dogs, we need to condition ourselves to relearn our body's sensations and unlearn the lies we've been told.

I propose a slightly modified version of Tribole and Resch's path to peace:



Not only do we need to rebuild our trust with food, we need to rely constantly on the Holy Spirit to lead us in this journey. We can trust that our Shepherd, the One who leaves the ninety nine for the one lost sheep, is good and wants the best for us. Food alone cannot sustain us, because Jesus is the Bread of life. At the same time, food is not inherently bad. In fact, it's an experiential gift! Culture, art, science, innovation, and the environment are all connected to food. As a church community, we often find ourselves gathering over a meal. Sitting together is a symbolic representation of Christ beckoning us all to His table. He could have nourished us with nutritionally complete pills, but instead, God's given us the pleasure to connect with others through food. What a gift, huh?

² Resch, Elyse; Tribole, Evelyn. "Intuitive Eating: A Revolutionary Program That Works, Third Edition: Paperback." St. Martin's Publishing Group, 7 Aug. 2012.

Questions to consider:

1. *Where have I been trying to earn approval by God or others?*
2. *What body, exercise, or food-related thought has been at the forefront of my mind? Is it rooted in condemnation, fear, or shame? Who told me that?*
3. *What is one step I can take to invite the Holy Spirit to disciple me as I seek to make peace with food?*



2. A NEW LIFE

Starting Fresh

"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."

Galatians 5:1

A yoke is a wooden beam placed over the necks of a pair of oxen. It keeps them together so they can walk in step with one another as they do farm work.

Everyone is yoked to something or someone. Think about it. We can devote everything to our work, to counting every last calorie, to avoiding a long list of foods at all cost. To be yoked is to be under the control of whatever or whomever we are yoked to.

When God created the world, He created trees that were "*pleasing to the eye and good for food*" (*Genesis 2:9*). Before asking Adam to rule over all living creatures, God invited Adam to enjoy the fruit from any tree, including the tree of life, with the exception of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This tree represents a choice: the choice to enjoy the abundance God gives or to take matters into our own hands. Every good thing in our lives is matched with an equal opportunity to lose it all, and we are surrounded by a lot of low-hanging fruit tempting us to settle for less than the abundant life God desires for us.

However, upon accepting Christ as our Savior, the oppressive chains of sin are broken. We are no longer yoked to death. We are free to accept Christ's invitation to His yoke, which is light (*Matthew 11:29-30*). As tempting as it may seem to "do our own thing," we know that there is no other way to everlasting life. If we are to choose life, we must choose to be yoked to Jesus. Though we are free to do anything, we don't have to be a slave to everything. There is power in knowing you can, but you don't need to.

Ecclesiastes 2:11 reminds us that it is fruitless to view anything short-lived as "the ultimate." "*Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.*"

The good news is that we labor alongside a seasoned ox who is gentle in teaching us how to live an abundant life. He walks in step with us, training us to do meaningful work for the kingdom's purpose. Being under Christ's influence introduces a radical form of servitude. We are discipled by a kind Shepherd who has our best interests in mind.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many of us were confined to smaller spaces. It was hard being trapped inside, and the moment lock-down protocols were lifted, many people flocked to public spaces. Would we want to return to a shelter-in-place lifestyle? I don't think so. Similarly, it doesn't make sense to return to a life full of old habits that makes us feel afraid, ashamed, or guilty.

By calling us to "stand firm," Paul recognizes that His "easy" yoke does not guarantee an easy, relaxed lifestyle. The world will certainly offer temptations, but when we walk with the Spirit, He will give us His desires and remove ones He does not desire for us (*Galatians 5:16*). Your power isn't in you being beautiful, but in the Holy Spirit dwelling within you. The more you press into God, the more your rhythm will align with Jesus's. Over time, what was normal will become awkward and foreign. Your mind is being renewed; you are being transformed. As you dance more and more with Jesus to His tune, you will be able to reject that former cadence, even when it comes back up.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Hebrews 12:1-3

Let us hold fast to our hope with confident assurance that we have been washed clean by Christ's blood and have no reason to seek purity or righteousness through our own works. Humans are broken, but God's in the business of binding up wounds.

God has promised to empower us (1 Corinthians 15:10), give us healthy desires and right instincts (Galatians 5:16), help us practice patience for the desires He has promised (Isaiah 40:31), not condemn us (Romans 8:1), teach us the truth in love (James 1:5, 2 John 1:3-4), lead us individually (1 Corinthians 7:17), and satisfy our souls with living water (John 4:14). By the transformative powers of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, we are shaped into the masterpieces God sees us as (Ephesians 2:10). We cannot develop the fruit of self-control nor can we steward our bodies alone, but when we give our hearts to God, the Spirit will help us change our habits.

“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”

Galatians 5:18, 22-26

Shame to Acceptance

Growing up, I didn't pay much attention to clothing brands. I wore the colorful shirts my mom bought me, the dresses my twin cousins handed down (both dresses, even though they were identical), and the VBS t-shirts I accrued every summer. Some days, I'd wear a baggy souvenir t-shirt over a skort, not realizing that was "unfashionable."

It wasn't until middle school, when everyone cared to wear shirts with the brand sewn in big, bold letters across the chest, that I became preoccupied with how I presented myself. Kids didn't just care about what they were wearing; others' fashion senses became a personal concern. I learned that wearing the graphic shirt I so loved, the one with the long-sleeves sewn to the short-sleeved tee with a cartoon puppy, was a major faux pas, the kind of currency that would keep me on an island far away from the cool girls at school.

Years later, still fixated on my lack of social status, I heard, "Who told you that?" I sat for a moment and whispered the question to myself, over and over. *Who told you that? Who told you that?* God asked Adam and Eve this when they hid themselves because of their nakedness (Genesis 3:11).

You see, we've learned to navigate our complex world by developing heuristics, shorthand rules that are internalized and become second nature to help us make decisions efficiently. These rules may have been developed by personal experience, or they may have been instructed by family members, friends, the media, or even health professionals, subtly or via megaphone. The food rules, nutrition information, body image standards, and fitness goals are hard to avoid. Much like a small-minded teenager entrenched in her middle school world, we, too, are bombarded by messages about what we should eat, what we should look like, and how we should exercise.

Fashion is fickle, and it seems like nutrition science is the same way. Caffeine is good, caffeine is bad. Don't eat fat. Scratch that, don't eat carbs. It's impossible to please anyone when standards are both ever-evolving and set to be attained only by someone who lives and breathes to achieve them. We learn the helplessness we feel. No wonder we become dissatisfied with our bodies.

Can I let you in on a secret?

The foundational principles of good nutrition don't evolve that quickly! The media tends to blow research findings out of proportion, reporting to us that a "possible association" is a sure and sound causal relationship. Most importantly, nutrition is personal. It would be unwise to recommend "carb cycling" to someone with diabetes, and it would not be advisable to suggest a "raw diet" to an immunocompromised patient. Health and personal taste are not the only factors that influence the foods we choose to eat. There are many - our wealth, the availability of ingredients around us, our cultural heritage, our upbringing, and our busy schedules, just to name a few.

But too often, we submit our eyes and ears to diet culture. Viewing food in moralistic terms – "clean, good, pure" versus "bad, cheat, decadent, sinful, tempting" – can become an all-consuming false religion if we allow ourselves to get swept away (Conceptual Framework, Page 10). Mark 7:14-23 instructs us that what defiles a person comes from the heart. The meditations of our hearts are manifested in our actions and words. What are we meditating on? What thoughts remain at the forefront of our minds?

"You shouldn't eat that." "You're a stick." "You'd look nicer if you lost a few pounds."

Let's continually ask ourselves, who told you that?

Take some time to take inventory of the messages you consume.

...

So... who told you that? It can't be our Heavenly Father, because the truth is, He does not utter these ugly words of condemnation. Thanks to Jesus, He calls us beloved (Romans 9:25), children of Light (Ephesians 5:8), children of promise (Galatians 4:28), chosen (Revelation 17:14), citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20), disciples (John 13:35), friends (John 15:15), heirs (Galatians 4:7), members of His body (Ephesians 5:30), sheep (John 21:15), a royal priesthood and His special possession (1 Peter 2:9), sought out and a city not forsaken (Isaiah 62:12).

Society may never be satisfied with who we are, but God, even when we were dead in our transgressions (Ephesians 2:5), chose to show us the immeasurable riches of His love, a love that surpasses our wildest imaginations. As members of His family, as Jesus' brothers and sisters, we've already been accepted as first-class citizens of God's kingdom. There is no need to impress man. There is no reason to appeal to man's appetite.

"But the Lord said to Samuel. "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

1 Samuel 16:7

We feel ashamed when we fail to live up to a standard, but Jesus brought an end to the old way of life. In this new life we've inherited, He instructs us to 1) love God, 2) love ourselves, and 3) love others (Mark 12:30-31). There is no place for shame and darkness in the face of divine love and light, and His face is shining upon us. Let's trade in our sorrows and lay down our shame for the joy of the Lord.

Identity and Embodiment

“But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?” How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.

Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”

1 Corinthians 15:35-50

What stands out to you in this passage?

For me, “splendor” caught my attention. Not only is splendor a part of our future, heavenly bodies, there’s a different kind of splendor found in the weak, earthly bodies we currently inhabit. Some aspects of our bodies can be altered, perhaps even through nutrition and exercise, but some are fixed - the color of our skin, our height, a genetic mutation that causes us to be born differently. We continually age, and with each year in adulthood, our bodies grow weaker. We may be dissatisfied with an unchangeable physical aspect, but our lowly bodies will be raised in glory and power. That is not to say our current bodies are worthless. We are both dust and divine, created out of earth and born to life by God’s breath, sustained by the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. The seeds God planted are appropriate for the current earthly environment, and the bodies He’ll sow will one day be appropriate for the heavenly environment.

When we can anticipate God’s promises, we hold a vision that gives the present a purpose (Proverbs 29:18). There will be days when we feel stuck, but we’ve been given something stronger and bigger to tolerate pain. Don’t just learn God’s promises; lean on them.

We can make peace with our bodies, knowing that they are temporary but still valuable, a component of who we are, but not a determinant of our identity.

God clearly cares about bodies. He sent Jesus to experience life in the flesh, to live embodied, just as we are. He touched us. He experienced death on a cross in an earthly body. He was reincarnated - with scars. After His resurrection, on the road to Emmaus, Jesus revealed Himself to two men while breaking bread (Luke 24:28-34). When the disciples were marveling over Jesus’ body, He asked if they had anything to eat (Luke 24:41-43). Then again, during his third appearance, he invited Peter to “Come and have breakfast” in the early morning (John 21:12-13). As He revealed Himself, He made it clear that he cared to nourish human bodies.



3. HONORING OURSELVES AND OUR NEEDS

Respect Your Body

"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple."

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

As God's creation and a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit, our bodies are sacred and ought to be treated well. This means acceptance and stewardship go hand in hand. But before we take action to nourish our bodies, we need to respect our bodies.

Tribole and Resch³ point out, “Our culture accepts foot size and doesn’t try to alter it. The same should apply to our bodies... Love [your body] by taking good care of it - it has done so much for you.”

If we take a look at the Conceptual Framework (Page 10), we see that there’s a lot of body-shaming noise that can drown out God’s whispers of encouragement. Respect is synonymous with courtesy, dignity, esteem, honor, and regard. These words describe the attitude we ought to have towards our bodies. Respecting our bodies simply means we acknowledge that our bodies, God’s handiwork, deserve to be nurtured and nourished regardless of shape or size.

³ Resch, Elyse; Tribole, Evelyn. “Intuitive Eating: A Revolutionary Program That Works, Third Edition: Paperback.” St. Martin’s Publishing Group, 7 Aug. 2012.

Some strategies to cultivate respect for your body:

1. Practice gratitude: What can your body do? What's your favorite physical attribute? What's your least favorite? We like to avoid our insecurities, but maybe you inherited your crooked nose from your grandmother, and you loved your grandmother. She was a strong woman and absolutely hilarious. Perhaps by learning to view our insecurities differently, we can appreciate them better. Whatever body part you feel proud or un-proud of, the entirety is a gift from God.

I am grateful for _____ because God _____

I love my _____ because _____

God made my _____ to _____

2. Get rid of the scale or request to not have the number shown at the doctor's office.

3. Wear clothes that fit comfortably and donate ones that make you feel poorly. One of my favorite actresses, Sophia Bush, suggests that we all ought to show ourselves more grace. "Buy your favorite pair of jeans in two sizes."

4. A lot of time can be spent bashing ourselves in front of the mirror. It might be time to take down your most-used body-check mirror or cover it with a towel - better yet, stick a piece of scripture on it reminding you of who you are in God's eyes.

5. Recognize tough days and remember there's always a fresh start tomorrow. But today, you can take time to appreciate your kingdom virtues and compliment others for theirs. *Who can you call or text to check-in with to keep you accountable?*

6. Refrain from engaging in body-bashing, gossip, slander. Take the lead and shift the conversation to something else. *What's pure, just, true, honorable, lovely, commendable, excellent, praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8)?*

7. Be on guard, because envy can emerge. *Jot down a 1-2 sentence prayer to lift up every time a critical thought arises. On a hard day, you may find yourself whispering it every minute. God is eager to listen.*

8. Recite the truth to yourself when critical thoughts arise. God's word is your weapon. Scripture does not condemn; it encourages (1 Corinthians 15:4-5). *Jot down a verse to inscribe onto your heart.*

9. It's time to let go of the "fantasy" body. *Where did these beliefs come from? How have they affected you?*

10. Practice self-care.

Self-Care

The term “self-care” can raise images of a tranquil spa day or a retreat to the woods. Though both are nice, self-care can and ought to happen in smaller ways every day. It’s not enough to run to the beach once a year and fill up on rest then, expecting that our souls will be sustained for the next 364 days.

Pastor Tyson⁴ describes “work-life balance” as a “*cultural construct put into our lives to cope with the abuse we invite into our lives.*” Our drive and ambition can do violence to our bodies, so living in kingdom rhythm and walking at Jesus’ pace requires more than a bandage-approach. Instead of a one day, intensive retreat, why not create and preserve enough margin to be strengthened regularly?

Self-care is “*the daily process of attending to your basic, physical and emotional needs, which includes the shaping of your daily routine, relationships, and environment, as needed*”⁵. It’s so important that it’s considered an ethical imperative for psychologists in order to be emotionally and mentally stable for their patients⁶.

What are some of your needs?

⁴ Tyson, Jon. “A Missional Life: Living at a Sacred Pace.” Church of the City New York, 17 Nov 2019.

⁵ Resch, Elyse; Tribole, Evelyn. “Intuitive Eating: A Revolutionary Program That Works, Third Edition: Paperback.” St. Martin’s Publishing Group, 7 Aug. 2012.

⁶ Barnett, JE; Baker, EK; Elman, NS; Schoener, GR. “In pursuit of wellness: The self-care imperative.” *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 38(6), 603–612. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.38.6.603>

Our pace of life is so fast that it's become instinctive to address without assessing the situation. Take a moment to complete this Self-Care Assessment.

Physical	Emotional and Psychological	Relational
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I get 7-8 hours of sleep regularly and feel rested when I wake up. <input type="checkbox"/> I wear clothes I like and feel comfortable in. <input type="checkbox"/> I eat when I feel hungry. <input type="checkbox"/> I take time to enjoy and savor at least one meal a day without multitasking. <input type="checkbox"/> I try not to go more than 5-6 hours without eating. <input type="checkbox"/> I'm physically active at least five times each week. <input type="checkbox"/> I take rest days when my body needs it or I'm sick. <input type="checkbox"/> I get regular medical and dental checkups. <input type="checkbox"/> I designate some time every week to not do work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I spend time reflecting and processing feelings. <input type="checkbox"/> I acknowledge my thoughts and feelings without judgment. <input type="checkbox"/> I reserve time to play. <input type="checkbox"/> I catch myself when I engage in critical self-talk. <input type="checkbox"/> I laugh regularly. <input type="checkbox"/> I enjoy hobbies outside of school or work. <input type="checkbox"/> I seek support when needed. <input type="checkbox"/> I practice healthy coping strategies when I'm stressed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I regularly spend life-giving time with friends and family. <input type="checkbox"/> I maintain contact with important friends and family. <input type="checkbox"/> There is someone I can reach out to listen if I needed to talk.

Spiritual	Boundaries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I regularly talk to God. <input type="checkbox"/> I make time to regularly ground myself in the Word. <input type="checkbox"/> I regularly seek or participate in a Christ-centered community. <input type="checkbox"/> I make time to do things that draw me closer to God. <input type="checkbox"/> I feel grateful and satisfied for the material and non-material things I have in my life. <input type="checkbox"/> I have a sense of purpose. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I designate time to step away from screens. <input type="checkbox"/> I allow myself to say no to extra work when I have too much on my plate. <input type="checkbox"/> I set limits with my friends and family. <input type="checkbox"/> I take small breaks throughout the day. <input type="checkbox"/> I seek a balance between being filled by God and working with God.

1. What are some strengths in your self-care practices?

2. Are there any areas of self-care that need more attention?

Coping with emotions without food:

Eating can *absolutely* be part of an emotional experience (or an experience itself)! Positive emotions linked to food experiences include babies being nourished with milk and celebrations. Between friends and family, cooking, serving, and sharing, food can be a love language. As a church, we fellowship during bagel and coffee hour, have a Bible study over dinner, and extend our concern through meal deliveries.

Unfortunately, it's easy to turn to food as a source of positive emotions when we need to calm anxiety, anger, boredom, emptiness, and stress, or when we want to procrastinate. We may equate some foods with comfort and safety, but food doesn't fix feelings. It can only provide short-term comfort, distraction, or numbing. When the satisfaction wanes, what happens? More food? More shame and guilt? We're better off addressing our emotions and evaluating our needs from the start. create space and time to unpack them later.

Emotions can be messy and in our world of go-go-go, we push them away because there's not enough time or energy to deal with them in the moment. Yet suppression is the opposite of letting go and letting God take over; suppression only buries our issues deeper into our fists. Situations that require immediate response may warrant setting our feelings aside for a moment, but remember to create space and time to unpack them later.

Here are some strategies that may help in developing healthy responses to overwhelming feelings, whenever they come up:

1. Equip yourself with the capacity to respond to emotions with a level head. *Use your imagination: Can you channel healthful, peaceful thoughts?* Oftentimes, it's all in your head.
2. Practice self-care: Respond to your needs - you need to sleep, to be regularly nourished, to be heard, stimulated intellectually and creatively, to be comforted, to feel warm. *Ask yourself if you're living in step with God's plans for you.* He doesn't give you more than you can handle with His help. *What else have you taken on?*
3. Learn to sit with your feelings.
 - Take a time-out to check-in on yourself and pray. Consider spending no more than 60 minutes without talking to God.
 - What do you need at the moment? *Try to identify the core need (connection, nurturing, entertainment, time alone). How can you fulfill the need without food? How has or how can God fulfill the need?*
 - Emotional muscles need to be exercised and they take time to grow. Visualize how you'd feel and look when responding constructively to emotions.
 - Find a professional who can support you.
4. Cope with stressful things, one at a time.
5. Find positive distractions. Take a walk, spend time with a pet, or close the computer and come back to your project later.
6. Prevent emotionally stressful situations by preparing. Notify someone that you might need to phone a friend during an emergency, pack a snack, or plan and practice an exit strategy.

Keep in mind that there may be some factors that persist after you commit to making peace with food. For example, it takes time to unlearn long standing perceptions that certain foods can only be consumed under specific conditions. It's by God's grace that we can break through these chains, and maybe the process of embracing our freedom takes time. Continue to rely on the weapons that He's equipped us with - your past experiences, worship, the Word, community. Don't just learn His promises; lean on them when you feel like you're faltering.

Other factors may be external. Food insecurity certainly discourages the path to peace with food. When situations that lie outside of your control, seek support from your church community, local community, and professionals. Food insecurity is no fault of your own. It is a structural inequality and you are honoring your needs and right to food by equipping yourself with the tools to succeed in your path towards peace.

Some of the self-care practices I've committed to incorporating into my own life include:

Physical	Emotional/	Relationships/	Spiritual	Boundaries
Lights out, phone down by 11 pm.	Your own projects can wait.	Work can always wait. Be available for family on weekends. Don't give them the leftover bits of yourself.	Spend time with God before bed. Enjoy time <i>in</i> nature, not just running through it.	Set limits with friends, family, volunteer projects. You are not being selfish by saying "no."
Remember to eat more starchy carbohydrates at meals.	Do not judge yourself for practicing sleep hygiene.	Set plans for activities with family and friends.	Seek experiences of awe.	Take a tech-free break each week.
Avoid multi-tasking when eating at least one meal a day.	Do not judge nor praise yourself based on your weekend productivity.		Count your blessings. You have more than enough.	Limit divisive conversation topics at dinner/ family gatherings
Find healthier stress-coping mechanisms: go for a walk, pray, breathe, call a friend.			Ask yourself, <i>What does God say? Did He tell you that?</i>	

Questions to consider:

1. *When your soul is parched, what do you turn to?*

2. *What are some feelings or situations that drive you towards exercising and food?*

3. How do you feel afterwards?

4. Did it meet your needs?

5. What's a self-care strategy you can implement next time instead of turning to food or exercise?

6. How can you invite Jesus to minister to you when you feel guilty or ashamed of your body, food choices, or exercise habits?

Honoring Your Hunger

Nourishment is also a form of self-care. How wonderful is that? There are opportunities to practice self-care at every meal. Food-related self-care may look like:

1. Ensuring that the foods you eat are adequate in energy to sustain your body
2. Planning to cook according to anticipated energy levels (e.g. How tired do you feel most days after school or work?)
3. Honoring your hunger

Tribole and Resch⁷ explain that there are two forms of hunger.

1. Biological hunger is the “body’s cues for a need of nourishment.” It’s not the desire to eat but the need to eat when the fuel tank is near empty.
2. Primal hunger is an “urgent, intense desire to eat when your biological hunger has gone unanswered for too long.” It is akin to a profound, gasping inhalation as opposed to a polite breath. I think of it as my readiness to eat by the time I’m “hangry.”

⁷ Resch, Elyse; Tribole, Evelyn. “Intuitive Eating: A Revolutionary Program That Works, Third Edition: Paperback.” St. Martin’s Publishing Group, 7 Aug. 2012.

Many factors can disrupt our ability to respond to our biological hunger. They include silencing our hunger by ignoring it, only drinking water, or eating “air foods” to render our bodies insensitive to our hunger cues. We can lose “attunement” to our hunger through actions that are informed by “attunement disruptors,” such as beliefs, distractions, a lack of self-care, and rules. For example, a seemingly harmless but influential thought we can all experience is, “I can’t be hungry, I just ate!” Well, our bodies are not robots. They are dynamic! Maybe we’re exercising more. Maybe we ate a small meal. Maybe we’re menstruating. Maybe it’s cold out. Maybe we’re just hungry, and that’s reason enough to eat!

Questions to consider:

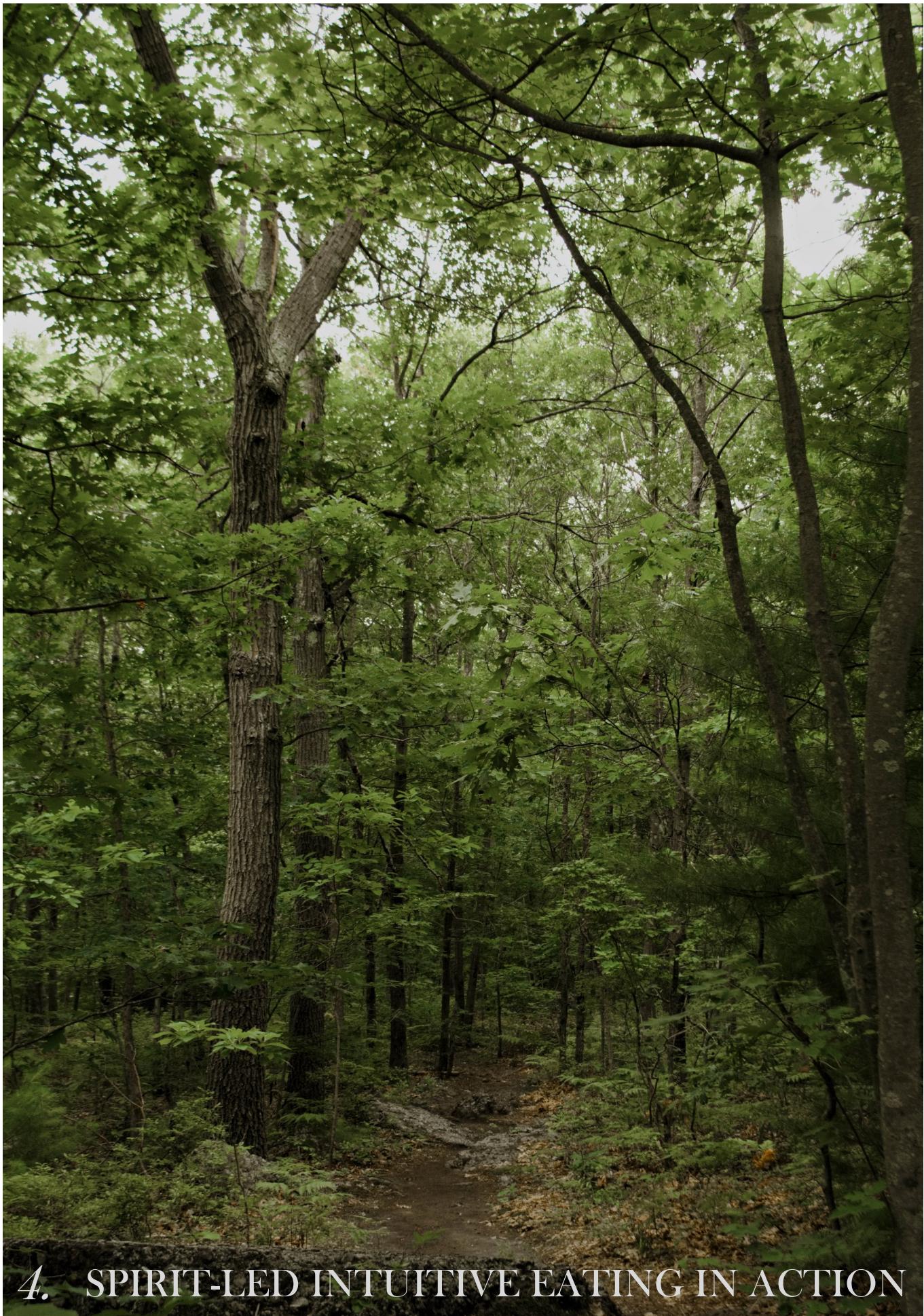
1. *What are the restrictions that limit you from eating during certain times or situations? What are the rules that govern what you can and cannot eat?*

2. *Now that you’ve written these down, consider where they came from. Was there a reason you adopted these restrictions and rules?*

3. *Over time and with small steps, you can challenge these heuristics. Identify one food rule to tackle over a one month period, and set yourself up for success by aiming for reasonable goals. What’s a small change you feel confident about making tomorrow?*

Self-care is an action that tends to our bodily needs and involves our minds.

When our body experiences a sensation, such as hunger, our minds form judgments, opinions, and thoughts that govern our response. As we develop respect for our bodies, we are empowered to take the appropriate actions to care for them.



4. SPIRIT-LED INTUITIVE EATING IN ACTION

The Case for a Biblical Approach to Intuitive Eating

“Our bodies will not last forever, but He’s promised us to give us new ones. But that doesn’t mean we can just neglect the ones we have. It doesn’t mean we should live as despairing people, but it also means we shouldn’t put all our hope in our bodies. So the question still comes to, how can I steward my body to the best of my ability given my specific details in life, and, how can I accept what God in His goodness has given me, believing that He will not withhold anything from me because He is a loving Father?”

*Love Thy Neighborhood*⁸

Tribole and Resch’s intuitive eating involves three main steps:

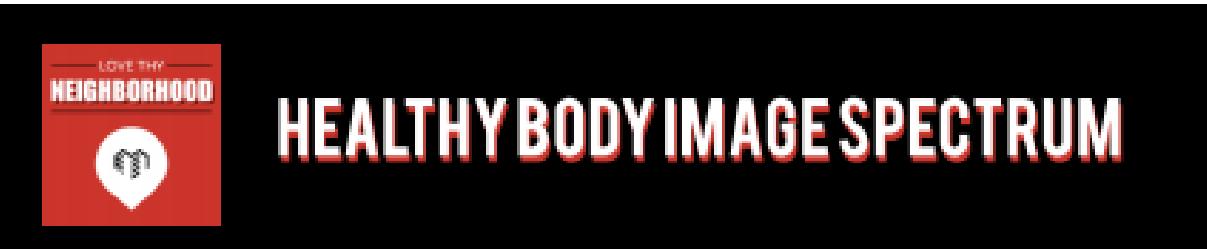
1. Cultivating attunement to our basic, physical, and emotional needs, including hunger (*Section 3, Self-Care and Honor Your Hunger*)
2. Removing obstacles to attunement (*Section 2, A New Life* and *Section 3, Respect Your Body*)
3. Encouraging self-care, the daily actions taken to address our needs (*Section 3, Self-Care*)

These steps help us approach harmony between our instincts, emotions, and rational thoughts. The goal is not to reach a state of “authentic health,” because being balanced means being perfect, which none of us are! In other words, the intention is to integrate our inner worlds, a mind-body dynamic, with medical needs, external health recommendations, and philosophical beliefs.

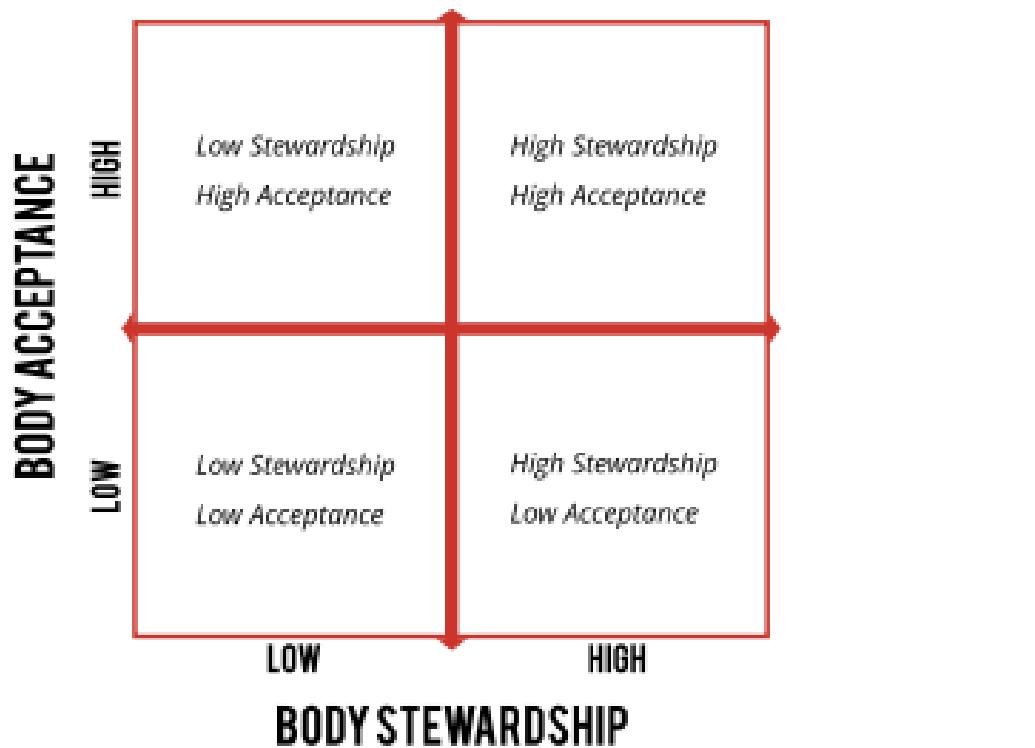
⁸ Eubanks, Jesse; Szabo, Rachel. “Where the Gospel Meets Body Image.” *Love Thy Neighborhood*. 29 Oct 2019. <https://lovethyneighborhood.org/episode24-body-image/>

I'd like to introduce two fundamental components for the "not yet but already" children of God: God's instruction (Section 1, The Old versus the New) and the Spirit's leading (Section 2, A New Life). We've discussed these components in previous sections, but I find it personally helpful to return to them continuously when (not if!) I feel discouraged, distracted, or doubtful.

Remember, when God is in the middle, everything surrounds him. We don't have to struggle so much to maintain our health, nutrition, and exercise on top of work, school, and personal life if we look to the One unifying it all. It's not up to us to develop our path to perfection. God's already laid out a plan to perfect each one of us! Somewhere between acceptance and stewardship is a happy middle ground that God will always be coaxing us towards.



"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." - 1 Corinthians 6:19-20



STEWARDSHIP IS... our actions, things we do (or don't do) as a means to take care of and be responsible for our bodies.

What can I do today to steward the body entrusted to me?

ACCEPTANCE IS... being at peace in the bodies God has given us now, regardless of appearance, ability, limitations or differences.

What's one thing I can thank God for about my body today?

Reprinted, by permission, from Love Thy Neighborhood.

"Body Image Grid Visual." Love Thy Neighborhood. 29 Oct 2019. <https://lovethyneighborhood.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Body-Image-Grid-Visual.pdf>.



When I was in high school, I volunteered at a stable to accrue some experience working with animals. There, I learned many reasons why a horse needs a jockey during a race. The most important reason is that horses have blind spots. Their eyes are positioned laterally, so when they're running towards a fence or an obstacle, the object disappears from their vision momentarily. This is useful for avoiding predators, but poor depth perception is not helpful for a race. Of course there are stories about the rare horse that jumps independently, but most require training. In the same way, not all of us are born to be LeBron, and even he had to dedicate a lifetime of training to get to where he is today. Without training and someone to coach the horse to jump at the right time, the jump will not be successful. Of greater concern, improper technique leading up to a jump can result in injury.

Jockeys are also important for helping the horse perform their best. A horse needs to transition from its canter to its jump and back to a canter smoothly, without sacrificing speed. Horses also need a rider to train their eyes to the specific lighting of a venue for optimal performance. Without a rider, the horse won't get access to practice alone. Jockeys partner with horses to help them do their best.

Much like horses, we cannot run our race independently (Hebrews 12:1-2). Health is not about will-power. It's not just mind over matter. This is faith over unbelief, because Spirit-led holiness is not a work of our flesh but a transformation into His blameless image by grace.

The imagery of a rebellious horse being controlled by its rider is described in 2 Kings 19:28. As humans, or figurative "horses," we won't fully understand in the moment why God implements boundaries, but we must remember that they serve to keep us in line with His plans, for there are hurdles we can't leap over ourselves.

Hunger is real... The question is, where do we go to fill up? Our feet tend to follow wherever our eyes wander to; we know where to go based on what we give our attention to. The distractions are everywhere, so some seasons, we may find that we can only look as far as the first step our divine coach places right in front of us.

Many different nutrition philosophies exist. One camp staunchly believes in intermittent fasting while another makes the ethical case for veganism. They can all be rather convincing, and the world has a tough time respecting that we are all called to different paths.

The 3 P's of intuitive eating (paying attention, patience, and practice) are even more powerful when we view this process through a biblical lens. Not everyone will understand the plans God has reserved for you. Some people will be looking at your story in the middle of the chapter, asking, "Why don't you eat this way or exercise that way?" But remember, God's been telling your story since your beginning, so hold fast to the "not yet but already" process you're on (1 Corinthians 13:9-12). Likewise, it's important to respect another's path and not impose our own convictions onto them (Romans 14:1-23, 1 Corinthians 8). We're all quick to respond to bodily illnesses, and we should, but our spiritual health, our personal relationship with God and our fellowship with others, transcend the physical in importance.

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit... Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God.”

Romans 14:17, 20-22

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The employment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition.”

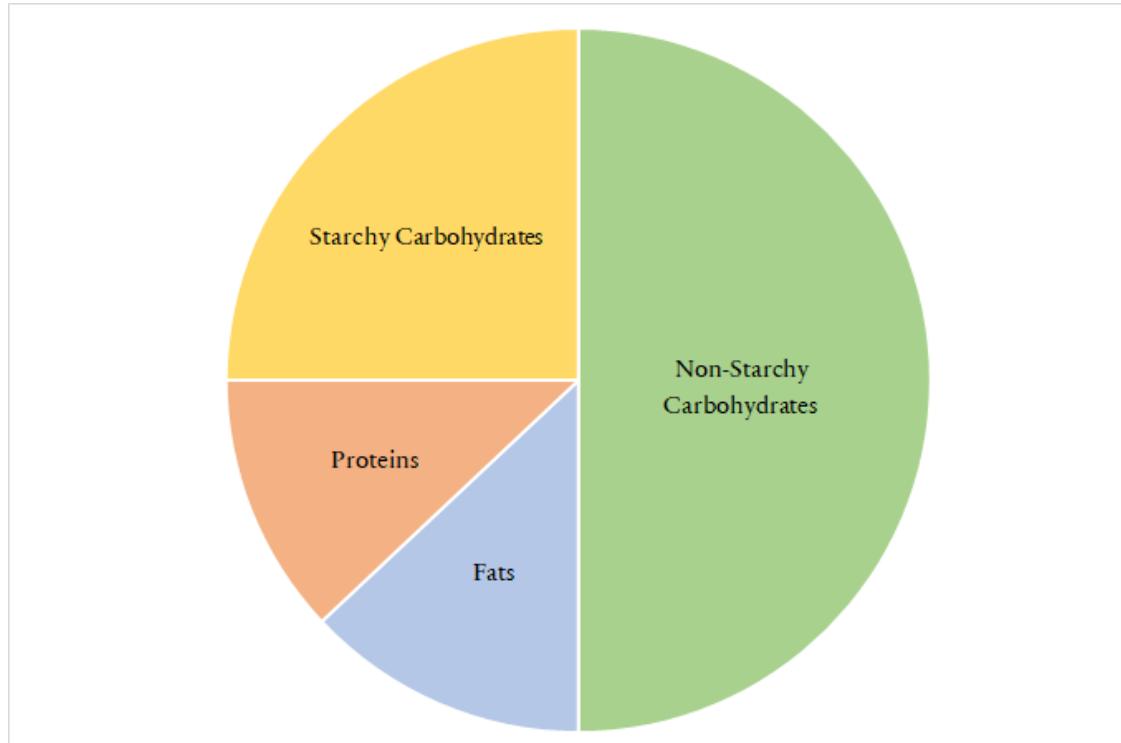
World Health Organization, 2006

In discussing intuitive eating, I'd like to consider the Health At Every Size (HAES) movement as a lens that shifts the focus of health from weight management alone to sustainable, healthy behaviors. Someone's weight may increase or decrease as they practice intuitive eating skills, and that's perfectly normal. Weight can be used as one of many indicators of disease and health risk, but it is in no way a determinant! Above all, it provides no justifiable reason for disrespect, exclusivity, or feelings of failure. Health, as we've learned, includes many more components in addition to diet and exercise.

God's kingdom is made up of millions of broken pieces of glass, each a different shape, size, and color, that, when pieced together, form a beautiful mosaic. There's a seat for all of us at Jesus' table, and the hope of this final section is to provide some gentle strategies for ways to invite the Spirit to lead us towards a healthier relationship with food, exercise, and one another, and ultimately, a more intimate relationship with God.

Framework for Fuel

After cycles of restriction and binging, it can be hard to recognize internal hunger and satiety cues. As we begin to unlearn unhealthy heuristics, we need to intentionally sustain our bodies with energy, ideally at least every 4-5 hours. Regardless of dietary preferences, there are four elements of a nutritionally complete meal that keep us full and nourished: fat, protein, a starchy carbohydrate, and a non-starchy carbohydrate.



1. Fat, mostly from unsaturated sources like oils, avocados, nuts, seeds, and fish, helps us maintain healthy skin and nails, cushions our organs, keeps us full, and optimizes absorption of some vitamins (A, D, E, and K).
2. Protein is our body's building block. It's a component of every cell, helps to transport nutrients throughout our bodies, and catalyzes critical reactions for regular functions, including digestion.
3. Starchy carbohydrates are commonly avoided because they're easy to overeat, but they are our body's primary and preferred source of energy. We can't cut them out completely! The carbohydrates that will digest more slowly have fiber, which also regulates our blood sugar levels, keeps us full, lowers cholesterol, maintains a healthy digestive tract, and feeds the health-promoting bacteria in our guts. Fiber-rich starches include whole wheat, oats, brown rice, potatoes and fruits with their skins on, and legumes.
4. Non-starchy carbohydrates are also critical because they are rich in fiber, vitamins, and minerals. They aren't calorie dense, so we can't rely on vegetables to supply our day's worth of energy, but they are certainly nutrient dense.

Different foods will impact us all differently, so it may take time to figure out what works best for you individually. But regardless of allergies, intolerances, dietary preferences, and cultural influences, we all need these four elements to stay fueled, and best of all, there's flexibility in adapting this framework to our own tastes.

Try building your meals using this simple, four-pronged framework. First, crowd out 50% of your plate with non-starchy carbohydrates. Then, have fun mixing and matching your favorite unsaturated fats, proteins, and carbohydrates to create different flavor profiles that are appetizing to you.

Being mindful of the foods we eat is like being mindful of how we meet our emotional, mental, and spiritual needs (Section 3, Self-Care). If empty coping mechanisms can't fill our spirits, how can empty calories fuel our bodies? As your body learns to trust that it will be nourished, you will be sensitized to its messages, trusting them and responding appropriately when you're hungry and when you're satisfied.

Our plates certainly won't look the same day to day, and it's not reasonable to expect that every plate will check off on all four elements. There are mornings when we scramble to get out the door, just as there are special occasions, like catered lunch meetings, birthday parties, and family celebrations. Food choices based on nutritional value alone neglects the importance of pleasure. "Healthy-ish" recipes are fun to experiment with, but they don't really satisfy my cravings for a chocolate chip cookie, browned butter and all.

"The reality is that a lack of appealing food choices creates a sense of deprivation and promotes a creative food-foraging experience that never seems to produce a satisfying result."

Resch and Tribole⁹

Consider sticking to the "for the most part" mentality, where there's room for everything in moderation, no food fears allowed. Give full permission to enjoy foods that were once "forbidden." As you habituate yourself to this new freedom, you may find that your cravings are no longer as intense. Foods will no longer wield the same power they did when they were restricted. Plus, food tastes far better when it's not served with a side of guilt.

⁹ Resch, Elyse; Tribole, Evelyn. "Intuitive Eating: A Revolutionary Program That Works, Third Edition: Paperback." St. Martin's Publishing Group, 7 Aug. 2012.

Activity: Intentional Ten

When you crave a treat, which in my case is always a homemade chocolate chip cookie, challenge yourself to maximize your satisfaction on a scale of one to ten. Deliberately plan an experience that scores ten. Be mentally present so you can savor every bite, with or without a social component.

Treat:

Where:

When:

What can I add to make my experience more enjoyable?

What distractions could minimize my enjoyment?

Feel Your Fullness

There are a number of factors that influence our sense of fullness:

- Our initial level of hunger
- The amount of food we eat
- The composition of our meal
- Our activity level
- Social influence: who we're eating with, how much they're eating, and conversations
- Distractions: phone, tv, computer, homework, books. When our senses are disengaged, we're less attuned to our fullness and pleasure. It's easy to overeat, which is physically and mentally uncomfortable. It's harder to be satisfied, which may lead us to desire more beyond our point of satiety
- Food rules: how much we ought to be eating based on outside information, past experiences, or others' input

“With so many variables that exert influence on your eating, it should be no surprise, then, that the amount of food you desire to eat can and will fluctuate. A big key is to stay tuned in and to eat consciously.”

Resch and Tribole¹⁰

We might have a general sense of portion sizes that will typically satisfy our hunger, but recognize that some days, a typical portion may not be enough, and other days, it might be too much. We are not robots that require a set amount of fuel to fill their tanks! As you can see, there are myriad factors that impact our fullness. That's why focusing on our eating experience helps us re-familiarize with our body's hunger and satiety.

There are some strategies that may help:

- Set boundaries: turn electronics off, limit stressful conversation topics
- Check in with yourself before, during, and after a meal to evaluate how you feel
- Eat more slowly: try eating with your non-dominant hand, or even chopsticks if they help!
- Chew carefully
- Don't force yourself to clean the plate
- Give yourself unconditional permission to eat more later if you're still hungry

Being hyper-aware of our eating experience can be laborious, but like any other skill, it simply takes some time and effort. As you acclimate to your internal signals, you'll find that feeling your fullness comes more naturally.

¹⁰ Resch, Elyse; Tribole, Evelyn. “Intuitive Eating: A Revolutionary Program That Works, Third Edition: Paperback.” St. Martin's Publishing Group, 7 Aug. 2012.

Activity: Savoring a Meal

We all lead busy lives, and it would be hypocritical of me to suggest that you focus solely on every meal you eat for the rest of your life. But a feasible challenge, for both you and me, is to try to be present for at least one meal or snack each day. Think of your schedule. What are the barriers to savoring your food? If you always have lunch meetings, don't choose lunch time to do this. Set yourself up for success. During which meal are you least distracted? Commit and give this activity a go.

Use this hunger scale and the following questions to help you check-in with yourself:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Starving. Feeling dizzy and weak.	Very hungry. Feeling irritable, low in energy.	"I could eat." Feeling pretty hungry.	Beginning to feel hungry.	Satisfied, neither hungry nor full.	"Not one bite more." Pleasantly full.	Slightly uncomfortable.	Stuffed	"That was too much." Feeling very uncomfortable.	Too full. You feel sick.

1. *How hungry were you when you sat down to eat?*

2. *What did you eat?*

3. *How did you feel as you ate?*

4. *How did you feel after you ate?*

5. *How much of your plate did you eat?*



Navigating the Nutrition Noise

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek His will in all you do, and He will direct your paths."

Proverbs 3:5-6

Information is everywhere, and that's not necessarily a bad thing. As a nutrition student, I seek out authoritative scientific studies that help me make sense of what happens and why. I integrate education when counseling patients about ways to improve their dietary patterns and I need to stay updated on the most recent information to ensure my recommendations are relevant. In my own life, I often ponder ethical questions, particularly related to environmental sustainability and human rights, as I plan my weekly grocery list. The food system is complex and eating is certainly more than a physical act; as we've discussed, it's agricultural, cultural, ethical, and political. There are financial aspects with privilege mixed in. Simply put, nutrition is personal. We each come bearing unique philosophies and goals, with exposure to different voices informing them all.

However, the uncurated mass of information available can be overwhelming and deceiving. It's awfully tempting to be counseled by culture, but it makes far more sense to get instructions from the Maker of food, bodies, and Creation. The Manufacturer reveals the intentions, which illuminate the purpose and aim of our food choices. What would it look like if God's instructions were the foundations of our nutrition philosophies? If we're made in His image, can God see Himself in us, our thoughts, our actions?

In high school, I felt rather enlightened by a certain group of animal activists and decided to remove all animal products from my diet. Failing to think critically when making this decision resulted in poor nutrition, a terribly self-righteous ego, and relational strains with family members for quite some time.

Looking back now, I ask myself, does God condemn us, or does He compel us in love?

With the great privileges of cultivating the earth for our own sustenance and dominating other living creatures come great responsibilities to steward our resources and ensure a fair playing field for everyone involved in the food chain. We are certainly influential players that shape the economic and political forces that impact the wellbeing of the environment, farmworkers, meat plant workers, servers, and eaters all over the world. What's troubling is that arguments about ethical issues are wrought with pathos. This is not necessarily right or wrong, but feelings, just like media and popular messages, are fickle.

“And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”

Ephesians 4:11-14

If the heart of our existence is to maximize our joy and satisfaction, which, for the Christian, is achieved by magnifying God (Christian Hedonism ¹¹), then knowing how to act by establishing personal values based on God's values frees us from culture's chaotic whims. Going to Scripture to understand what our values are provides clarity and direction; having firmly established values leads us to true freedom and peace from being swayed back and forth by the popular current.

Instead of living as “wherever the wind takes me” or “go with the flow” people, we can stand firm, confident in the lifestyle God has called us to. How we live now can't perfectly match the aim God has revealed to us individually, but the compass has been calibrated and we walk a path filled with immense grace and power. It is absolutely possible to steward our resources - our own bodies and the rest of Creation - at the same time.

Truly sustainable practices of producing, eating, and decomposing must be attainable and feasible - economically, environmentally, financially, nutritionally, and socially. There is no single dietary pattern for the environmentally conscious! For society to approach sustainability goals, a variety of strategies that accommodate different stakeholders' values are required. Think of the small-scale farmers, large-scale farmers, conservationists, barbecue enthusiasts, vegans, farmworkers, anti-hunger activists, nutritionists, food justice advocates, budding food entrepreneurs, corporation CEOs, politicians, biofuel scientists, culinarians - the list goes on!

No prescription can fit all. Many multisector, multifactorial, realistic solutions are needed. Diets, labels, and food movements themselves are not perfect. Rather than defining our lifestyles by a specific term, we can choose what is reasonable from the diverse buffet of strategies available and pursue the edifying experience of fulfilling our commitments. And the good news is that the individual actions *do* contribute to the collective impact. While we should seek to continually challenge and inform ourselves with new expert information, the fundamental values our actions are based on should ultimately be between us and God.

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

Ephesians 4:15-16

¹¹ Piper, John. “Christian Hedonism.” Desiring God. <https://www.desiringgod.org/topics/christian-hedonism>

In John 10:1-18, Jesus describes Himself as the Good Shepherd who leads His sheep to abundant life. He calls each one by name and guides them using His voice. The sheep follow Him because they know His voice and trust He will lead them to pastures.

I don't know about you, but I spend far more time listening to other voices, so it's hard to discern God's, whether He's whispering to me through the still, soft wind or roaring like a lion. In his message, "Learn How to Recognize God's Voice" ¹⁰, Pastor Rick Warren lays out guiding questions to help us evaluate the messages we hear and decide whether they're congruent with God's desires:

1. How does this (message/thought/action) line up with what God has already said (in the Bible)?
2. Does this make me more Christ-like? Is it self-serving? Is it merciful and gracious?
3. What does my church family think of this?
4. Is this consistent with who God has made me to be?
5. Does it concern my responsibilities?
6. Is this convicting (specific, clear, goes away when you respond) or condemning?
7. Do I sense God's peace about it?

It's okay to let go of some messages if they don't line up with God's coaching (Colossians 2:16-23). There are companies that claim to promote health but also seek to make bodies smaller. Society may try to sell us detoxification products, but our bodies are not dirty. There are clever marketers who try to convince us that we need to buy superfoods, but let it be known - superfoods don't have super powers! And as important as it is for us to make thoughtful decisions that reflect the divine responsibilities entrusted to us, we, ourselves, are not gods holding the world in its place, saving it from utter destruction.

We are called to hold ourselves accountable to our commitments and Scripture-based values through our actions, but shame is someone else's currency, not God's. If the messages you hear are condemning, take a step back to reflect; they will interfere with your ability to receive the grace that links the Masterpiece you with Work-in-Progress you (Conceptual Framework, Page 10).

¹⁰ Warren, Rick. "Learn How to Recognize God's Voice with Rick Warren." Saddleback Church. 7 Oct 2014.

Activity: Taking Inventory of Messages

This exercise is based on Pastor Rick's guiding questions. When you come across a piece of nutrition or diet advice, go through these questions and consider whether or not it's coming from God.

1. *Where did you hear it? (In your office? From a website?)*

2. *Who propagated it?*

3. *What does it promise?*

4. *What are the pros? What are the cons?*

5. *How does it make you feel about yourself?*

6. *How could it affect your health, social life, or general lifestyle?*

7. *How could it affect your relationships with food, your body, others, and God?*

8. *How long do you think you can follow this advice? What barriers to success do you foresee?*

9. *What do your trusted friends and family members think about it?*

10. *How does it line up with Scripture?*

11. *If this message doesn't seem to be God breathed, what can you do to tune out the noise?*

Gentle Movement

“Physical activity is defined as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure.”

World Health Organization, 2010

Make Movement Fun

Growing up, my parents arranged for my brother and I to be involved in sports. As kids who adored the outdoors, we ran around outside for hours. It wasn't until high school, when I was no longer participating in organized sports, that I had to figure out how to incorporate regular exercise into my day. Many of the exercise videos I considered had titles that instilled some harmful ideas about movement, like “Cardio to Burn 600 Calories” or “Get Abs in One Week.” Limiting the benefits of exercise to calorie reduction and body sculpting heightened my concern over maintaining my weight and my commitment to a strict regimen. When negatively viewed as a condition for good health and good looks, exercise became a laborious numbers game. No wonder gym memberships are stereotypically short-lived. But it doesn't have to be that way!

In addition to strengthening your bones and muscles, lowering your blood pressure, improving your blood sugar control, and increasing your metabolism, exercise offers stress relief, a boost of endorphins, a sense of accomplishment, social connection, and a source of renewed energy.

Gym culture propagates a one-dimensional concept of exercise, but movement is not all-or-nothing. In fact, it's even possible to exercise enough to meet physical activity guidelines but maintain a sedentary lifestyle. Brainstorm some ways to be active, not just to strengthen your muscles, but to reap some of the emotional and mental benefits of regular movement.

Here are some ways to be more active:

- Schedule periodic breaks. Set timers on your phones or make notes in your agenda.
- Drink from a smaller water bottle so you get up to refill it often.
- Take stand-up breaks.
- Take walks when speaking on the phone.
- Plan walking meetings.
- Get off a few train stops before yours and walk to your destination.
- Park the car further back in the parking lot.

Over the recent years, I've learned to view my runs not as chores to check off my training schedule, but opportunities to escape from my desk. During these sacred moments, I get to listen to encouraging podcasts, wander around the woods, and take my mind off work. “Me time” to play is now high on my priorities because it makes me feel good and helps me sleep better.

Balancing Movement and Rest

On the other hand of the spectrum lies overexercising, which is also harmful.

Signs may include:

- Guilt if one day is skipped
- Working out when sick or ignoring signs of injury
- Increasing activity according to foods eaten or planned to be eaten
- Strong withdrawal symptoms (anxiousness, irritability, moodiness) when exercise is skipped
- Frequently declining activities with friends to make time for a workout that's long enough

There are a lot of strict diet and exercise plans that suggest little to no days for rest. Overstraining your body can certainly risk injuries, and over-disciplining yourself when your body is asking for a break can suck out some joy and motivation to exercise. Even recently, I was training for a race, an area on my ankle began to feel sore. I ignored it and pushed on, relishing the “high” each run ended with. The length of my runs increased everyday, and eventually, my ankle gave out. I could barely run down my block without limping.

What is your body telling you? Do you feel the Spirit’s peace with what you’re inclined to do? Sometimes, self-care means taking a day off! And remember, resting doesn’t mean you can’t move at all. Instead of a 5 mile run, maybe you invite a friend to catch up over a leisurely walk.

It’s easy to train our physical bodies to be in better shape than our spirit (1 Timothy 4:8) because the physical results are visible, but our bodies were not made to serve our eyes. They are not destinations. Our arms were made to give and receive hugs; our feet were designed to run and bring the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15). They are not our life’s work. They are beautiful right now, just as they are. Allowing our bodies to heal appropriately can help us look forward to our next workout. Step back, reflect, plan a fun workout for later, and jump back in the next day to perform with renewed strength. Rest is also a good reminder to engage in everything with moderation.

Proper Fuel

As exercise and nutrition go hand in hand, both recovery and active days call for proper fuel. Have you ever felt frustrated with your body because exercise felt particularly challenging? Exercise may not be enjoyable if our bodies lack energy! The primary fuel for our brains, hearts, and muscles is carbohydrates, and if we're not eating enough, our bodies begin to convert our muscle into energy to meet our body's demands. Instead of building stronger muscles, we could be breaking them down. On the other hand, exercise is not a condition for eating! Carbohydrates, alongside the other components in the Framework for Fuel, are vital for sustaining our busy lives.

Eating for exercise varies for different sports, intensity levels, and seasons of training. For most active people, however, general pre- and post-workout nutrition recommendations are reasonable. Try these suggestions and tweak them as you see fit.

Pre-Workout	Post-Workout
<p>A small snack at least 30-45 minutes before your exercise can help fuel your muscles for the work they're about to do.</p> <p>Ideally, something that digests quickly, like carbohydrates, will avoid the indigestion that proteins or fats, foods that take longer to digest, may cause. As mentioned, carbohydrates are also your muscle's preferred source of energy!</p> <p>If you plan to exercise within a few hours of a meal and don't feel too hungry, you don't have to eat a pre-workout snack. Pay attention to how your body performs and see if having some fuel beforehand would be helpful in the future. A small snack is recommended if it's been over 4 hours since your last bite.</p> <p><i>Examples: a medium-sized apple, a banana, a slice of toast, a few crackers</i></p>	<p>Now that you've finished your exercise, it's time to fuel and rehydrate your tired muscles. Having a small serving of a carbohydrate and protein within 30 minutes of ending your workout is ideal for building stronger muscles. Carbohydrates replenish your muscle's energy stores while protein provides construction material to rebuild the muscles you broke down through exercise.</p> <p>If you plan on having a meal within that time period, however, there's no need to add an extra post-workout snack.</p> <p><i>Examples: an energy bar with 10-15 grams of protein, a slice of toast with peanut butter, turkey slices and crackers, a banana and a handful of nuts</i></p>

Exercise and, more broadly, intuitive eating habits, can be challenging. Some days are harder than others, but those who progress most are the ones who get back up after slipping. Everyday is a new day, another opportunity to start fresh and discover ways to move that are enjoyable. Perhaps as you're moving, you can consider one of these verses to spur you on:

“...but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

Isaiah 40:31

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Hebrews 12:1-2

“Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:13-14

Closing Thoughts

“Balance” is a funny word I hear all the time. Regardless of whether it’s used in a conversation about work or the food groups on a plate, it rubs me the wrong way because it’s often used as an adjective to describe something that is or isn’t. Maybe this is just me, but I see it as a destination we’re progressing towards.

If you’ve read this far, you are well aware that I am nowhere near the perfect state of harmony that “balance” suggests, but as rough as the waves can get, Jesus keeps this ship floating towards who He wants me to be. Fortunately, it’s not up to you or me to determine what or how we should all eat! All we’re responsible for is listening to the tune offered to us individually and stepping into that dance. Your 6-step waltz may look and feel very different from another’s 8-count jazz, and it’s pretty cool the same God created both and is dancing with all of us at once. Though we may step on His feet or forget the next move, the music goes on. He’s taking the lead when we rest, recalibrate, and jump back in. I hope we can keep this freedom-filled, love-rich dance at the forefront of our minds as we work out what it means to accept and steward our bodies. There’s a seat prepared for you at the table and you’re welcomed to join anytime - no need to bring anything, just your fearfully and wonderfully made self.

Resources

Mentioned:

Eubanks, Jesse; Szabo, Rachel. "Where the Gospel Meets Body Image." Love Thy Neighborhood. 29 Oct 2019. <https://lovethyneighborhood.org/episode24-body-image/>

Leithart, Peter. "You Are What (Animal) You Eat: Making Sense of the Bible's Dietary Laws." The Gospel Coalition, 8 Apr. 2020, www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/you-are-animal-eat-bible-dietary-laws/.

Piper, John. "Christian Hedonism." Desiring God. <https://www.desiringgod.org/topics/christian-hedonism>

Resch, Elyse; Tribole, Evelyn. "Intuitive Eating: A Revolutionary Program That Works, Third Edition: Paperback." St. Martin's Publishing Group, 7 Aug. 2012.

Tyson, Jon. "A Missional Life: Living at a Sacred Pace." Church of the City New York, 17 Nov 2019.

Warren, Rick. "Learn How to Recognize God's Voice with Rick Warren." Saddleback Church. 7 Oct 2014.

Additional resources:

Finding Balance
<https://www.findingbalance.com/>

Health at Every Size (HAES) Movement
<https://haescommunity.com/>

The Bible Project: Grace
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABPVVw_aw44

About the Author

Hannah is a graduate student and dietetic intern based in Boston. She's learning to embrace the long route with Jesus and is discovering hidden beauties along the way. Turns out, there's a lot of treasures and stories to document. You'll find some of her photos throughout this guide and more at hannahcai.wordpress.com.