



Eating Disorders

EATING DISORDERS: ANOREXIA AND BULIMIA NERVOSA

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(Judges 3:17)

In today's society, one can't be too beautiful or too thin. The message of the prime importance of external beauty is warped and dangerous! The pressures to look or be a certain way provide big business, though not without great cost to the consumer. The message of perfection as being thinner and better often results in women and men using harmful means to reach that perceived level of perfection.

The eating disorders called anorexia and bulimia nervosa are two life struggles that have recently emerged within our culture and have caused much suffering.

BRIEF EXPLANATIONS

Bulimia Nervosa

People who have bulimia consume large amounts of food in a short period of time (bingeing), then feel out of control and unable to stop eating. Bingeing is often followed by various methods to expel the food from the body—vomiting, diuretics, laxatives, or excessive exercise. While their bodies are usually normal in size, people with bulimia often base their self-worth on their weight and shape, feeling that they must be thinner.

The exact cause of bulimia is unknown. Culture and glamorized norms certainly contribute. Bulimia can be impacted by stress or be a response to trauma. In most cases, bulimia begins during high school or college.

Some common warning signs include: secretive behavior coupled with trips to the bathroom after eating, laxative or diuretic abuse, heart palpitations, depression, social withdrawal, restrictive dieting, frequent and obvious weight fluctuations, and a preoccupation with body weight and appearance.

There are many reasons why bulimia

is serious, including the possibility of esophageal tears, gastric ruptures, and dehydration. In addition, psychological, social, and emotional damage are often experienced by those struggling with bulimia.

Anorexia

Where bulimia is a battle with excessive eating, anorexia involves a pattern of not eating enough. Those affected by it are in a battle for control. If they cannot control other parts of their lives, they will control their food intake. People with anorexia refuse to keep their body weight at a normal level because they are unable to accurately view the shape and size of their own bodies. They may be very thin, but still think they are fat. They try to continue to lose weight through a much lower level of food intake, often coupled with extreme amounts of exercise. Similar to bulimia, their body weight affects their self-esteem.

The daily grind of those who experience anorexia is exhausting. Food is meticulously prepared and calories counted. Much time is spent on the scale and in front of the mirror. On top of that, hours can be spent exercising. Essentially, people who suffer with this disease are starving themselves to death. The underlying futile attempt at perfection lurks continuously. This attempt at perfection is fueled by several fears: fear of fat, fear of failure, fear of

being less than
fear of losing

TREATMENT

How to Be Healed
It is vital to understand the symptoms of the disorder to help the person suffering from the disorder. The problem and get threatening.

Helping someone with these disorders is a challenge. It is essential to understand the patterns of the disorder. Does our love remind us of "fear"—even in healing relationships?

God is essential. We must be willing to face the deception of the world.

These disorders are a result of the promises of the world. Though it is not their own, it is not bulimia and to avoid getting into a vicious cycle, persistence is vital to offering help to people in need.

Spiritual Encouragement

Since these are psychological disorders, they can be treated with therapy. However, these disorders are difficult to deal with. They deal with the underlying issues, but will not be "band-aids."

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TREATMENT CONCERNS

How to Be Helpful

It is vital to understand the presence of the symptoms of bulimia and anorexia in order to help those who suffer. Seldom will the person suffering initiate the process of healing, which often begins with hospitalization. The prospects of facing the problem and getting help are extremely threatening.

Helping someone who suffers with either of these life struggles requires large amounts of love and patience. Just as these patterns are intense and severe, so also does our love need to be. First John 4:18 reminds us that "perfect love casts out fear"—even the fears described above. Healing relationships with people and with God is essential. People who desire to help must be willing to speak the truth. Self-deception often drives those with one of these disorders to downplay the seriousness of the problem and even to make promises to stop their destructive behavior. Though it may be tempting to give them some slack and time to change on their own, it is not advisable. Just as lies fuel bulimia and anorexia, lies will be used to avoid getting the proper help. Love, patience, persistence, and discernment are vital to offering help and encouragement to people in these situations.

Spiritual Encouragement

Since these struggles are both spiritual and psychological, they must be dealt with in like fashion. The behaviors that comprise these difficulties are illegitimate attempts to deal with anxiety and stress. Failing to deal with the underlying factors that are driving the discomfort will not lead to healing, but will provide only surface-level "band-aids" that will eventually fail.

People dealing with these struggles can benefit from prayer and Scripture reading to help them alter the way that they see themselves. God is powerful enough to break through their defenses and chains of bondage. From Christ, believers gain their righteousness, their perfection, before God. Perfection is found only in Christ and is a work of the Spirit, not accomplished through their own efforts. God's grace is sufficient to cover imperfection. People facing these difficulties need to see perfection not in the mirror or on the scale, but in the blood of Christ shed for them.

Psychological Treatment

The seriousness of bulimia and anorexia must not be taken lightly. Of course, God is all-powerful, but people who suffer from these diseases need to also seek professional help. Psychologists and psychiatrists who are believers and have been trained in this area know the best methods for treatment. This process can be long, but with a focus on God, the support of others, and the endurance and determination to fight, healing is attainable. Recognizing the symptoms and instilling hope are the beginning steps toward wholeness.

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of eating disorders include:

- Proverbs 23:21
- Romans 14:14-23
- 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20
- Colossians 3:17

To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on eating disorders at Proverbs 23:2 on page 832. See also the personality profile of Eli on page 350.

24 Make no friendship with an angry man,
And with a furious man do not go,
25 Lest you learn his ways
And set a snare for your soul.

26 Do not be one of those who shakes
hands in a pledge,
One of those who is surety for debts;
27 If you have nothing *with which* to pay,
Why should he take away your bed from
under you?

28 Do not remove the ancient landmark
Which your fathers have set.

29 Do you see a man *who* excels in his
work?
He will stand before kings;
He will not stand before unknown
men.

23 When you sit down to eat with a
ruler,
Consider carefully what *is* before you;
And put a knife to your throat
If you *are* a man given to appetite.
3 Do not desire his delicacies,
For they *are* deceptive food.

Do not overwork to be rich;
Because of your own understanding,
cease!

5 Will you set your eyes on that which is
not?

For *riches* certainly make themselves
wings;
They fly away like an eagle *toward*
heaven.

Do not eat the bread of a miser,^a
Nor desire his delicacies;
For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.
“Eat and drink!” he says to you,
But his heart is not with you.

8 The morsel you have eaten, you will
vomit up,
And waste your pleasant words.

Do not speak in the hearing of a fool,
For he will despise the wisdom of your
words.

10 Do not remove the ancient landmark,
Nor enter the fields of the fatherless;
11 For their Redeemer *is* mighty;
He will plead their cause against you.

12 Apply your heart to instruction,
And your ears to words of knowledge.

13 Do not withhold correction from a child;
For if you beat him with a rod, he will
not die.
You shall beat him with a rod,
And deliver his soul from hell.^a

23:6 ^aLiterally *one who has an evil eye*
23:14 ^aOr *Sheol*

KEY PASSAGE



Eating Disorders

EATING TOO MUCH

(23:2)

Some people attempt to fill the emptiness in their lives with drugs, alcohol, sex, money, or even hard work. Others use food, and such people find themselves trapped in emotional eating—leading to such problems as obesity and bulimia. The Bible says, “Put a knife to your throat if you are a man given to appetite.” The instruction graphically pictures cutting out anything that might lead to addictions in order to feed an appetite of some kind. There is nothing wrong with food. There must be a balance, however, between enjoying what God has provided, and using food to meet emotional needs and thus allowing it to control one’s life. The fruit of the Spirit called self-control applies to many areas of life, including eating. God desires to fill any emptiness, helping us to lead balanced, healthy lives.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about eating disorders on pages 302, 303. See also the personality profile of Eli on page 350.

she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and gave birth, for her labor pains came upon her.²⁰ And about the time of her death the women who stood by her said to her, "Do not fear, for you have borne a son." But she did not answer, nor did she regard it.²¹ Then she named the child Ichabod,^a saying, "The glory has departed from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband.²² And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

they brought it into the house of Dagon^a and set it by Dagon.³ And when the people of Ashdod arose early in the morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and set it in its place again.⁴ And when they arose early the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. The head of Dagon and both the palms of its hands *were* broken off on the threshold; only Dagon's torso^a was left of it.⁵ Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor any who come into Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

⁶But the hand of the LORD was heavy on the

THE PHILISTINES AND THE ARK

5 Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.² When the Philistines took the ark of God,

4:21 ^aLiterally *Inglorious* 5:2 ^aA Philistine idol 5:4 ^aFollowing Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text reads *Dagon*.



Eating Disorders

PERSONALITY PROFILE

ELI: UNBRIDLED APPETITES

(1 SAMUEL 4:18)

Eli died as a pathetic father, overwhelmed by the consequences of his own failures. His two sons had just died violently. The beloved ark of the covenant had fallen into enemy hands. He had been warned, but the shock of his worst fears suddenly coming true led to his death. The biblical autopsy reveals the cause of death: a broken neck resulting from a fall against a gate, compounded by the victim's age (98) and his weight.

Eli may have been a glutton; we don't know. Words spoken years before his death, when God sent a prophet to warn Eli, indicate a possible problem: "Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering . . . to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?" (1 Sam. 2:29). At best, Eli's story describes a father and sons who lived undisciplined lives. They ate too much and exercised too little.

We now know that some kinds of obesity have a strong genetic influence. In Eli's life, however, weight appears as part of a pattern. Lack of self-control—even a lust for various pleasures—reveals a disturbing family dynamic in Eli's line. We see in his sons unbridled appetites for mischief and illicit sex that were never curbed. These behaviors were at least enabled, if not modeled, by the father. God's eventual judgment affected individual family members as well as Eli's entire family structure.

Overeating, lax parenting, and whatever else Eli may have struggled with are all clues to a deeper problem—a disordered character. The specifics are not as important as the traits they reveal. What traits in your life have not been surrendered to God's control? Excusing or denying the clues doesn't get rid of them. At the center lies the decision to be a person whose life belongs to ourselves or to God. If we belong to God, doesn't it make sense to let Him deal with the sins for which Jesus Christ gave His life? Only the Creator knows how to bring order to our character.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about eating disorders on pages 302, 303. See also the key passage note at Proverbs 23:2 on page 832.

dren of Israel, according to their armies, when they began their journey.

²⁹Now Moses said to Hobab the son of Reuel^a the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place of which the LORD said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us, and we will treat you well; for the LORD has promised good things to Israel."

³⁰And he said to him, "I will not go, but I will depart to my *own* land and to my relatives."

³¹So Moses said, "Please do not leave, inasmuch as you know how we are to camp in the wilderness, and you can be our eyes. ³²And it shall be, if you go with us—indeed it shall be—that whatever good the LORD will do to us, the same we will do to you."

³³So they departed from the mountain of the LORD on a journey of three days; and the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them for the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them. ³⁴And the cloud of the LORD was above them by day when they went out from the camp.

³⁵So it was, whenever the ark set out, that Moses said:

"Rise up, O LORD!
Let Your enemies be scattered,
And let those who hate You flee before
You."

³⁶And when it rested, he said:

"Return, O LORD,
To the many thousands of Israel."

THE PEOPLE COMPLAIN

11 Now *when* the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD

heard *it*, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the LORD burned among them, and consumed *some* in the outskirts of the camp.

²Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the LORD, the fire was quenched. ³So he called the name of the place Taberah,⁴ because the fire of the LORD had burned among them.

⁴Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: "Who will give us meat to eat? ⁵We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; ⁶but now our whole being is dried up; *there is nothing* at all except this manna *before* our eyes!"

⁷Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its color like the color of bdellium. ⁸The people went about and gathered *it*, ground *it* on millstones or beat *it* in the mortar, cooked *it* in pans, and made cakes of it; and its taste was like the taste of pastry prepared with oil. ⁹And when the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna fell on it.

¹⁰Then Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent; and the anger of the LORD was greatly aroused; Moses also was displeased. ¹¹So Moses said to the LORD, "Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me? ¹²Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child,'

10:29 ^aSeptuagint reads *Raguel* (compare Exodus 2:18). 11:3 ^aLiterally *Burning*

SOUL NOTE



Food Fixations (11:4-9) Preoccupation with food can indicate an eating disorder. When people become *over* focused on food, their dependence on God suffers. The Israelites, while not having an eating disorder, did experience a "perspective disorder" because of their focus on food. Their preoccupation with foods they did not have caused them to lose sight of God's miraculous and loving provision of manna. So today, when people become preoccupied with anything other than God, they can lose their perspective of God's care for them. People with eating disorders need to refocus on their worth in God's eyes and be thankful for God's provision.

Topic: Eating Disorders

⁷Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather *let yourselves* be cheated? ⁸No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and *you do these things to your brethren!* ⁹Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals,^a nor sodomites, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

GLORIFY GOD IN BODY AND SPIRIT

¹²All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me,

but I will not be brought under the power of any. ¹³Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body *is* not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.

¹⁵Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make *them* members of a harlot? Certainly not! ¹⁶Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body *with her*? For "*the two*," He says, "*shall become one flesh.*"^a ¹⁷But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*.

¹⁸Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his

6:9 ^aThat is, catamites 6:16 ^aGenesis 2:24

KEY PASSAGE



Addictions

THE FORCE

(6:9-12)

God gave people "richly all things to enjoy," but Satan works tirelessly to take God's blessings and twist them into evil. The beauty of sex in marriage is corrupted by the sin of sex in other relationships. The enjoyment of a wide variety of delicious foods is corrupted by gluttony, the addiction of eating too much—not to mention other eating disorders. The provision of material blessing is corrupted by greed and love of wealth.

Paul explained that "all things are lawful," meaning that believers are allowed to enjoy many things as long as they are not forbidden by Scripture. But they must never allow themselves to be controlled or "brought under the power of any." An addiction is powerful. If a believer is moving toward an addiction in some area of life, the Holy Spirit will make them aware of it. We must seek God's guidance to maintain balance.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about addictions on pages 1186, 1187. See also the personality profile of Gomer on page 1130.

SOUL NOTE



Balanced Meals (6:12, 13) Some who face a difficult eating disorder—whether it be an addiction to food, or an addiction to going without food—understand the power of that addiction. God provided food for the animals and people He created in order to sustain them. Food is meant for sustenance—"foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods." A food addiction takes the focus off God and puts it on one's food or stomach—both of which will eventually no longer be needed. People who struggle with eating disorders should seek Christian professional guidance to gain a proper perspective and pattern for eating. **Topic: Eating Disorders**