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STEP AWAY FROM THE LIES
OF DIET CULTURE AND INTO
YOUR DIVINE DESIGN

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

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It's Normal to Hate Your Body

Take a few moments to think about the messages you heard about bodies growing up.

- Were they favorable toward all types of bodies?
 Did they shame those in larger bodies?
- Was weight loss or thinness praised? If so, how did this make you feel?
- Did you have a moment or turning point when your environment or our culture made you question whether your body was good?
- Do you remember comments about bodies in your home? Your school? Your church or from believers?
- As you reflect on Romans 12:2, what do you think of the ideas you've absorbed about bodies through the years?
- Are you willing to investigate how many of these beliefs could be lies? Let's begin to replace them with truth.

Diet Culture Isn't in the "Safe" Places

WHERE CAN WE FIND DIET CULTURE?

| Encouraging children and parents to "do something" about normal weight changes. Growth equates to weight gain. |
|--|
| Starting an office visit by stepping on the scale. Weight checks are, for the most part, unnecessary for adult medical visits. |
| Allowing only "healthy" snacks at Sunday school. There is no "one size fits all" definition of health or healthy food. |
| Hearing comments such as, "Oh, I shouldn't be eating this," or "Why do they always have so many sweets at fellowship events?" Worrying about food ingredients is far worse for us than eating a cupcake. |
| Assigning homework that asks children to categorize food into "good" or "bad." Dichotomizing food creates food and body distrust and often causes the child to feel like they're bad for wanting or eating those foods. |
| Making assignments such as calorie-counting records and discussing "healthy" weights. Focusing on numbers creates a deep disconnect within our bodies so that we don't understand our own hunger and fullness signals. This kind of focus also disconnects us from our food, which becomes nothing more than numbers, whether it's calories, macros, or sugar grams. |
| A Christian radio station talks about "clean" eating and how calories from Christmas cookies don't count Calorie counting and labeled ways of eating aren't necessary for divinely created bodies. |
| Prominent Christian influencers suggest sugar fasts or praying over "unhealthy" food choices. The fear of making "good" choices comes from diet culture, not from an all-powerful God. |
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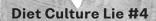
Think about how diet culture surrounds us and permeates almost every aspect of our lives.

- Do you have early memories of how diet culture showed up in your life? It may have been in lessons taught at school or comments from a trusted teacher or counselor.
- Did you witness diet culture in your church? Do you see it in your social circle or your church groups?
- Can you see how diet culture creates an earthly hierarchy of bodies (definitely not from God)?
 When we learn in this culture that some bodies are more valuable than others, how can we realize this message isn't from God?
- Review John 10:10. If you're like most people in this culture (including me), can you see how diet culture has stolen time and other things from your life? What has it stolen?
- Can you see how diet culture harms people who have bodies that don't align with the cultural value of thinness? How will you continue to detect diet culture?

It's Simple! Calories In, Calories Out

Calories are not heavenly currency. The Bible makes no mention of counting the food we consume. Diet culture is the reason we are so determined to count calories.

- Could calorie counting be distracting us from doing God's work?
- How does it make you feel to know the numbers can be wrong?
- If you're a calorie counter (and it makes sense that you might be) and you decide to let those numbers go, what could you do with the time and focus you got back?
- Can you think of calories, or the little units of energy they are, as life-giving gifts from an allpowerful God? Can you see them as a means to live out your purpose?
- Think about Luke 12:29. How can you begin to look at this verse with a fresh and fed vision?



Health Equals Diet and Exercise

I'm asking you to rethink your belief system around health, and I know how hard it is to do so. I've done it myself.

- Do you need to broaden your view of health? For yourself? For others?
- If you do expand your view, what areas of health will you now acknowledge that you hadn't realized before?
- Have you experienced ACEs or traumatic events as an adult? You are not alone.
- Did you realize that the social determinants of heath have such a significant influence on the foundation of health? Think about these factors as we continue on in the chapters ahead. There's so much more to come.
- Take a moment to reflect on Romans 8:38. Hear the truth expressed there: *nothing* can separate us from God's love—not even an earthly view or expectation of health.

It's Not a Diet— It's a Lifestyle

- Have you fallen victim to the "lifestyle" diet ruse?
 We all have. Don't forget that I used to sell it too.
 It's a tricky scam!
- Are you feeling stirred to move forward in a different way?
- Is the "lifestyle" diet scheme something you'd feel comfortable discussing in your circles? We don't have to overcome on our own.
- Who feels like a safe companion to talk over this issue with? If you're not ready or unsure about whom to confide in, that's okay. Let's continue moving.
- While you've been keeping your eyes open to diet culture, what are some of the sneakiest things you've seen lately?
- Is there a way to protect yourself and those you love from these messages?
- Did you know there is no lock on the cage?
- How can studying John 16:33 be helpful?

Your Weight Is the Most Important Indicator of Your Health

STEPPING AWAY FROM LIES

This may be the hardest reflection you'll be asked to undertake. It took me years to reckon with weight stigma and bias in my personal life and professional work.

- Have you judged yourself harshly in regard to your weight?
- Have you also judged others, either in your own thoughts or out loud? It's okay to admit it. We all have the seeds of weight stigma planted in our minds in this culture. The important question is, what do you want to do about it?
- You may live in a smaller body that doesn't get scrutinized in social or medical settings, and that is body privilege. We can all be harmed in this diet culture, but it's unlikely that those of us in smaller bodies have suffered like those in larger bodies have in our world. How does it feel to acknowledge this?
- If you are one of the countless victims of weight bias, does it help to know there's a name for what you've experienced? And that it's not your fault?
- Does it help to know that our culture and contemporary health policy are what have a problem, not your body?
- As you reflect on Ephesians 6:11–12, what parallels do you see between putting on the full armor of God and standing against the devil's schemes?
- How can reflecting on the teaching that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities" help you stand against the lies about weight?

Your BMI Is a Problem

Our world and human traditions can be incredibly challenging, especially if you feel like you don't fit in.

- How does it make you feel to know we're waging a war on divinely created bodies?
- Did learning about the history of the BMI's development help you see its futility and harm?
- It's possible you've experienced harm like both Teri and Eric did. If you feel safe to think back about this, can you claim that your body is not wrong?
 Can you attribute this experience to deceptive philosophy and harmful human traditions?
- If you've been like the doctor or the coach in these cases and caused harm because of what you learned in diet culture, can you allow yourself the grace to move forward with change?
 Remember, I've done this too.
- If you're a church leader or Bible study leader and you've used weight or BMI in your lessons to push change in your congregation or group members, can you see the secular influence and potential to cause harm?
- Be sure to offer yourself grace moving forward.
 If we are to receive this grace, we can no longer
 let these deceptive philosophies creep in. Spend
 some time thinking about Colossians 2:8.

Health Lessons Teach Health

UNTRUTH AND TRUTH CONVERSATIONS

Messages of Untruth Conversations around Truth "My teacher said I only "That is an untruth. Thank you for sharing need to eat fruit for a this with me. What do you think about that snack." statement? Does our family believe there is only one way to eat? Do you think all families can offer only fruit as a snack? Do you like other foods for snacks? The truth is that there is no rule about snacks." "We talked about "Thank you for sharing this with me. What the word *healthy* at you were told sounds untrue. Do you think Sunday school today. God is worried about the food on your plate Our teachers said that (besides that you're getting enough, of means not eating too course)? Do you think God made all bodiesmuch and keeping a big, small, and colorful—on purpose? Do you think God cares more about a number on a healthy weight." scale than about your heart? Your Sunday school teacher lives in diet culture too. I'm happy to chat with them about this if you'd like me to." "Our health teacher "Does that sound like truth to you? Do you said we need to write believe a great God would make our bodies down our food intake so hard to manage? I'm curious if you think and weigh ourselves to these ideas are actually healthy. Would you stay healthy." like to tell your teacher you're not going to participate, or would you like me to contact them? This untruth will harm you and your friends as well.

- Do you remember "health" lessons such as the ones described in this chapter?
- Do you hear about your kids' health teachings from them?
- You may have taught some of these lessons yourself. I'm curious how this chapter may have stirred you. Please know you're not alone in this. No one is out to shame you. Don't forget that my early professional experience included peddling and teaching diet culture.
- Knowing now that health isn't just a lesson in diet culture or something we can work really hard to achieve, what will you do with this information?
- As you reflect on Jeremiah 23:16, do you see parallels of false hopes and false prophets in our society today?

Your Weight Secures Your Righteousness

The sacred and the secular have become deeply intertwined. It's true, of course, that Christians cannot withdraw from the world; Jesus came to a broken world to save us from our sin. The sacred and the secular will invariably interact, which at times makes perfect sense—for example, when we love our neighbor, whether or not they are believers. Other times, we wrap up earthly beliefs and make them seem sacred—for example, when the spheres of medicine and ministry are coupled (dangerously so) in the arena of diet culture. What surprised you in this chapter?

- Did any of the descriptions of diet programs, "lifestyle" plans, detoxes, and the like stand out to you?
- Have you participated in any of these programs, or do you know of others who have? What kind of feelings do you have about that?
- What challenges might you face if you chose to evict the number on the scale from your view of righteousness or worthiness?
- Read Leviticus 19:4. Would you consider the scale an idol in your life?
- If you knew that a number on a scale really doesn't have anything to do with being a good steward of your body, would that change your mind about your approach to health?
- Would you be willing to get rid of the scales in your home? Journal a bit deeper on that answer.

We're All Just Gluttons in the Temple

You made it! In part 1, we exposed the insidious nature of diet culture and the way it sneaks into our sacred and safe places. This unlearning and relearning can be difficult. The lies of this culture can be hard to uproot, especially if they've been planted in the soil of "safe" places.

- Think back to your first memories of the word gluttony. Was the term attributed to specific foods or bodies? What do you think about gluttony now?
- When you consider the full context of "your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit," does it change how this verse lands on your heart?
- How can you move forward knowing that diet culture can be evicted from our reading of Scripture?
- Can you see how our current culture may interfere with ancient fasting practices?
- Review Ephesians 2:8–9. We are saved by God, not by our works. This gracious love is a gift we do not have to earn. As you recall the teachings of the chapters of part 1—exposing the lies of diet culture and how they keep us stuck—are you ready to move to truths? Let's go!



STEPPING INTO TRUTH

Our world can make us question the most basic form of self-care—feeding ourselves.

It doesn't have to be that way.

- Consider the seeds about feeding yourself that were planted in your mind from an early age. Did those seeds grow into body confidence or body doubt? Were they tied to the way your body looked?
- How can you start to pull the weeds and disconnect the act of feeding your body from the worth or appearance of your body?
- What small steps can you take to propel yourself toward adequate and consistent nourishment?
- Would it be helpful to ask for support or talk to a friend about this journey? It is a journey, for sure, and it's also a revolution. Feeding yourself fully and pleasurably is an act of defiance against the enemy.
- Take a moment to reflect on 1 Kings 19:7. You may remember the story of Elijah fleeing from Queen Jezebel and hiding in the wilderness. When Elijah was sleeping, the angel of the Lord woke him up to give him something to eat in preparation for the journey and mission ahead of him. And so Elijah ate and was later empowered to feed others. What would it look like for you to get up and eat so you can be strengthened for the journey?

Truth #2

You Can Value Your Physical Health without Dieting

STEPPING INTO TRUTH

It can be hard to abandon diet culture's definition of health, but it's not impossible. You may recognize that sleep is a health factor you can focus on, or you may find ways to move more joyfully or purposely apart from the corruption of diet culture. You can value your health without engaging in diet culture! I'm so glad we have the option and blessing of unlearning.

- How have you begun to disengage from our culture's view of health? Did you know there are so many other factors to focus on if you want to pursue health behaviors?
- Do you pencil in time for self-care in your schedule (for example, getting groceries, meeting up with a friend, going for a walk, or getting your meals and snacks in)?
- Is there a behavior you'd like to change that may improve your health?
- If you knew that your "right now" body wouldn't change and believed that it is a good body (and it is), what activities or health behaviors would you be willing to try? By trying new things, we may be better equipped to disconnect from the pursuit of weight loss and shift our focus away from the pursuit of diet culture goals.
- Think about 2 Corinthians 5:1. We may have a tent on this earth—our earthly body—but we belong to an eternal kingdom that this world's view of health can't touch. We can pursue health as our earthly abilities allow, but it is not a prerequisite for kingdom love. Reflect on this truth.

Truth #3

Pursuing Health Will Not Guarantee Health

STEPPING INTO TRUTH

Thinking about our health can be daunting at times. I'm curious—have you been trying to measure up to a worldly policy view of health? It's okay. I have as well. And at times I fall back into the blaming and shaming we've learned from diet culture.

- Are you ready to let go of some of those earthly diet culture-related health goals? How would you now define health?
- Have you thought about how your health behaviors may align or not align with your values?
- What might your health behaviors look like knowing what you know now?
- Have you considered variables like time, wealth, information, and an able body as health benefits before? Do you have some of those benefits?
 Are there benefits you don't have?
- Armed with this information, can you more easily have compassion for a neighbor worried about their health and refrain from making assumptions about their situation?
- How might you begin to loosen your grip on the worldly view of health?

• Think about Jeremiah 29:11. God knows everything about our lives—the health concerns, the waiting-for-the-test fears, the possible diagnosis, and the treatment options. Yet God's plans are to prosper us and not to harm us. There is hope and a future; not one piece of it is tied to this world's view of health.

Truth #4

Mental Health Is Vital to Overall Health and Well-Being

STEPPING INTO TRUTH

I don't know what it was like growing up in your home, but in my home we didn't talk about stress, anxiety, depression, or mental illness.

- Was your experience similar to or different from mine? In what ways?
- Have you ever experienced the symptoms described in this chapter? You know I have, and I'm so glad we're talking about mental health. It's an essential factor in our overall health.
- Are you open to seeking help if you need it?
 You don't have to be in crisis to talk to a helping professional. In fact, given the challenges regarding access to care and possible delays in obtaining appointments, it's better not to wait.
- Can you see how connecting with others is imperative to your health and well-being? Is this something you'd like to work on? If so, how can you plan to pursue more connection with others?
- Take a moment to reflect on Psalm 94:19. Notice
 the verse reads when anxiety is great within us,
 not if anxiety is great within us. The stressors
 of this world will affect us, but God will give us
 consolation and joy. Let's not forget that God
 often does this through relationships and the
 guidance of helpers.

Truth #5

You Owe No One a Number on a Scale

STEPPING INTO TRUTH

I pray you feel a weight lifted. We owe no one a certain number on the scale, even when this world tries so hard to tell us otherwise. Spend a moment to check in with yourself.

- Where have you felt expectations around weight? What kind of impact does knowing these expectations don't come from our gracious God have on you?
- Sometimes we feel tremendous grief in regard to our past experiences around dieting and weight. Take some time to jot down some thoughts about giving up the notion that you owe someone a number on a scale. How might it help you? How might it help others? Is it possible you can help others see this truth?
- In Job 6:2, Job pleads to have his misery weighed on a scale. I think of the story of Job and the immense pain and loss he endured. I can't help but see this connection in current times. How has our culture's obsession with weight brought pain to you or someone you know?
- Isn't it amazing to know we don't owe a weight to anyone? To me, it's even more amazing to know that God never asks us to chase a number on a scale.

Truth #6

Seeing Diet Culture Builds Resilience

The ability to see diet culture for what it is leads to freedom, yet it's a freedom that comes with many new choices.

- In what ways are you seeing the impact of diet culture?
- Have you seen it at the grocery checkout?
 On television? At church? On social media? In your home? At the doctor's office? It's in all the places, even when the people in these places mean well.
- Have you experienced this transition yourself—moving from diet culture to an awareness that you are, and always have been, just the way God wants you to be? That's true even as our bodies change throughout life.
- How will you continue to see the truth about diet culture? Will you bring others into your community—into your safe circles?
- Take a moment to read Psalm 9:10. In what ways can you trust God to help you reject a culture that forsakes our souls? The more we seek the Lord, the more resilient we can become in seeing cultural lies.

You Will Not Look like the Influencer, Even If They Say So

We've been under a spell in our culture—a spell that creates the illusion that a specific look equates to health and expertise. But it just doesn't add up.

- Has an influencer taken advantage of you? I think
 at some point this has happened to all of us.
 Whether it's the supplement-pushing buddy in
 your Bible study group, a neighbor pressuring you
 to join WW or Noom, or the verse-spouting, dietselling supermom on social media, the pressure is
 on to join a community that has learned to use the
 language of belonging. You don't belong there. You
 belong to the kingdom of God.
- In what ways have you seen the influence of the influencer show up in your life? Was it on social media? Did it come from someone close to you? Was it a health professional or ministry leader?
- Knowing what you know now, how can you protect yourself from false promises and prophets?
- Have you ever been an influencer? What would you do in the same way or differently now?
- Take a moment to read and think about
 1 Corinthians 8:3. We're often searching for
 belonging in this world. But we are already known
 and loved. We don't have to influence or be
 influenced to receive it.

You Can Detox from Social Media and Trackers

We live in a very interesting time. Social media instantly alerts us to disasters while our watches beep at us to get up and move. Sometimes it feels great to be in the know, and sometimes our beeping wrists can start a shame spiral. In this sneaky culture, we can forget that we control what we let in and allow to influence us. A perfect God gave you what you need—your unique design and the ability to listen to your own body. And our great God *knows* you.

- Let's start with social media. Do you follow certain accounts that make you question the way you eat, move, dress, or care for yourself? If so, make a quick list of them.
- Do these accounts trigger a desire to engage in diet culture? If so, are you willing to delete or unfollow these accounts? If yes, great. Take that, diet culture! If not, spend a few moments reflecting on what is standing in the way and causing your hesitation.
- Now let's talk about wearables and smartwatches. Do you have these items? What is the true intention? Do you want to begin to create boundaries with regard to your use of these tools?
- Read Psalm 139:1–3. We may use apps and gadgets in our lives, but do they truly know us? Think about how much our great God knows us and how, if we reconnect with ourselves, we can know and trust our bodies without external controls.

- that, diet culture! If not, spend a few moments reflecting on what is standing in the way and causing your hesitation.
- Now let's talk about wearables and smartwatches. Do you have these items? What is the true intention? Do you want to begin to create boundaries with regard to your use of these tools?
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You Are You on Purpose

FAMILIAL SEEDS OF DOUBT

| Seeds of Doubt | Plant False Belief |
|---|---|
| Did you notice that Aunt Linda has gained weight? | Body change is something to be feared. Weight changes are always bad. |
| Dad, do you really need a second helping? | Bodies cannot be trusted. Food cannot be trusted. |
| Mom, you have diabetes. Are you supposed to be eating that muffin? | It's okay to micromanage or judge others' bodies or decisions. People with diabetes can't eat muffins and similar kinds of foods |
| Heart disease runs in our family, Jack. We need to be very careful about what we eat. | Strictly controlling food selections will keep you free from disease (and living in fear). |
| Why did you eat so much of that, Sarah? It's so bad for you. | Something must be wrong with me for liking certain foods. I am a bad kid. I can't trust myself. |
| I can't believe I ate so much yesterday. I'd better eat less and work out extra hard today. | Food must be earned. Eating more than I usually do requires restriction or compensation. |

As I've gotten older, I've become much better at feeling at home with myself. It hasn't always been easy. You may have experienced things as you grew up that made you question your authentic self. It's not the fault of our families. Diet culture is the tool of the enemy. Seeds of doubt can be planted early in our lives, which can lead to hiding, pretending, conforming, and even harmful behaviors. You're not alone.

- Is your story like mine—a story in which seeds of doubt about your body were planted early in your life?
- Do you have a story that impacted the way you show up in the world—as the real you or the conforming you? I pray you feel safe to love, care for, and express the real you.
- Have you planted seeds of doubt in the hearts
 of others you know and influence? I think we all
 have, and it's never too late to be honest about a
 change of heart. Grace will get us through.
- Read Psalm 139:14. Write down the words of this
 verse and weave your name into it. Read it aloud.
 Read it again. You are you on purpose—so that you
 will know you are fearfully and wonderfully made.

You Can Choose Your Legacy

Here we are at the end. We are moving along in the journey of rejecting a pervasive cultural force so we can feed ourselves and step into our divine design together.

What an incredible and challenging journey this unlearning and relearning can be!

- Weeds we thought were fully eradicated still sprout up from time to time. What weeds have you had to pull up over and over?
- Could these weeds be tied to an inheritance and legacy you're now ready to reject?
- What steps can you take to keep the weeds from reemerging?
- How can you help pull the weeds of doubt now that you know you don't have to conform to diet culture? The unlearning and relearning don't end.
 We can let go of our need to always get it right.
- What else will you let go of? Will you challenge others to let go with you?
- Are there boundaries you can set to protect yourself and those in your circle of influence?

Take a moment to read Ephesians 6:14–16.
 Beloved, the flaming arrows may not come to an end in our lifetimes, but we have a good God who gave us good and diverse bodies. Pick up your shield of faith and step into a fed and free life.

I pray you'll pick up this book whenever you need encouragement. I pray you will have a community of people who will band together to expose the lies and live the truth. Those of us who go against the grain need to deliberately plant the seeds that can bring others to the truth of our divine design. I pray that the tide will turn one day and that diet culture will become the exception, not the rule. And when it does, we will be there to welcome our fellow image bearers to the shore. And I pray that you will never forget to feed yourself.

Recommended Reading

The following list of books about diet culture, the church, trauma, and more is not exhaustive. The fruit of twenty years of unlearning and relearning would result in a very long list! This is simply a small sampling of books I've found helpful.

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