

surrendering hunger

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365 DEVOTIONS FOR WHOLENESS
REVISED, 15TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

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Surrendering Hunger: 365 Devotions for Wholeness

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Introduction

Those of us struggling with food issues, compulsive eating, or compulsive dieting, know that working through these things is not a quick process. It doesn't happen in a week or a month or even a year. It doesn't happen after a visit to a dietician or going to weekly support group meetings. We work on these issues every day, several times a day. We are on a journey.

The meditations in this book are designed to add strength and hope to the daily journey. I have based them on verses found throughout the Bible because my own walk has awakened me spiritually to God as the loving parent presented there.

If you're a little fuzzy on the spiritual-growth terms used, the glossary defines some of those, too. If perhaps you once had faith in God but now you're not sure, this book allows you to take a second look at faith and the nature of God's character.

I have used the masculine pronouns *he*, *him*, and *his* throughout this book to refer to God because adequate pronouns do not exist. The Bible says that God's image is both male and female (Genesis 1:27), so I believe that God's personhood is also both male and female. I regret limiting God by using only masculine pronouns, but I trust that "he" understands and I hope you do, too.

Day 1 Do I Trust God?

READ | Genesis 2:16–17

And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”

From the beginning, eating has been a problem for humans. But in the garden and even now the problem is much deeper. I’m not sure whom I trust and don’t trust. My impression of God is so distorted that I don’t trust God easily. Can I trust God to love me as I am, to value me in spite of my failures?

I have allowed other powers in this world to tell me what God is like. Teachers and friends valued outward actions instead of inward motivations; parents, being only human, did not portray the unconditional love of God. I need to know God better and find out what he’s really like. As I do this, I can put my trust in God who, most of all, deserves my trust.

Thank you, God, for helping me to put my trust in you and brush away all those other images of you.

REFLECT | *The core issue in my life is not my eating problem but my lack of trust in God.*

Day 2 I Didn’t Do It!

READ | Genesis 3:12–13

The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” . . . The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

I have been like the man in this passage—putting the blame on someone else. I can take responsibility for my compulsive overeating, my short temper, and my laziness.

I see the destructive results of blaming others:

- blaming others distracts me from examining my own defects of character;
- blaming the same people over and over makes me dislike them more;
- blaming others keeps my life in an uproar; it robs me of any serenity I have.

For my own good, I stop blaming and start admitting when I'm wrong.

God, help me recognize when I blame others,
and help me admit my own fault in the matter.

REFLECT | *Time spent blaming is time wasted.*

Day 3 Releasing the Anger

READ | Genesis 4:6–7

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? . . . [sin] desires to have you, but you must master it."

I'm like Cain when I'm angry. I try to bury my anger and put on a happy face. But like Cain's, my face is downcast, and I can't seem to shake my anger unless I work through it. But that is too difficult, so I secretly numb my anger by overeating or starving. Then I can put the happy face back on for a while, although I never know when my anger will leak.

God intervened to help Cain deal with his anger. I often feel the same nudge from God myself. I'm learning that when

this happens I can work through my anger in ways that don't hurt anyone else. I talk it out with a friend or at a support group, I journal about it, or I take one of my rather loud prayer walks. Then I've released it, and I'm free of my anger and my need to overeat or deny myself excessively.

Thank you for prompting me
to surrender my anger to you.

REFLECT | *To admit and then let go of anger is to find life, one day at a time.*

Day 4 How Much Is Enough?

READ | Psalm 104:27–28

*These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time. . . .
When you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things.*

As I start my day, I ask God to show me how much food is enough to sustain me properly. When I sit down at the table, that amount may seem like too little or too much, but I can trust that God is opening his hand to me. I trust that this amount will satisfy me physically even if it doesn't satisfy my emotional needs. I will now have other ways to satisfy my emotional needs: relationships, journaling, and prayer.

I, who have not trusted others well, am taking a big step by committing my food to God. This toughens and strengthens my relationship with him as I ask, "Are you sure about this, God?" Then I walk in that trust.

My daily food is a sacred gift from you,
and I value your judgments.

REFLECT | *I can trust God, the blesser himself, to distribute his blessings well.*

Day 5 Getting Beyond Myself

READ | Genesis 12:3

. . . and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

Am I working on this area of my life just so I can look good and impress others? Is my goal to have a nice life and not be a pain in the neck to anyone? Do I exist only to look within myself all day?

Yes, I need to look within myself, but also beyond myself. I see that God put me on earth to benefit other people. I tried to help others in the past, but my obsession with food handi-caps me. I thought more about satisfying my neediness than about how I could serve others. My prayers were filled with pleas to relieve my own problems rather than inquiries about how I could follow God's will in every aspect of my life.

As I surrender to God, I rediscover God's purposes for my life because he teaches me how to get my needs met in healthy ways. I'm free to truly care about other people.

God, help me see that I am distracted by
my weight problems instead of being challenged
to serve you with my whole life.

REFLECT | *Self-improvement is never a big enough reason to change; fulfilling God's purposes is.*

Day 6 Shortcuts Can Get Me Lost

READ | Genesis 21:10

Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.

I want to feel better and look better, but I don't want to give up my own desires regarding food. Isn't there a shortcut?, I wonder.

Abraham tried to take a shortcut to God's will by having a son, Ishmael, with a slave woman. When Ishmael made life miserable for Abraham's later son, Isaac (the son God intended Abraham to have), Ishmael had to leave.

My eating problem is my Ishmael. It is my scheme to manage pain, feel better, and perform well in the chaos of me. But it is an unhealthy way to live, and I have to get rid of it.

Even though I may take the long way around to maintain a proper weight, I benefit so much from finding healthy ways to relate to God, others, and myself. I find my Isaac, God's true path for me.

Once again, I give my compulsions to you and ask for healthier ways to deal with life.

REFLECT | *I surrender my destructive shortcuts to God.*

Day 7 I surrender my destructive shortcuts to God

READ | Genesis 21:17, 19

Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. . . . Then God opened [Hagar's] eyes and she saw a well of water.

Will God help me get out of this mess I've made? No, I don't deserve it.

But God helps those who mess up, too. Hagar was grieving and dying of thirst in the desert because she had made the worst of a bad situation. But God provided a well for her and

her son. Even though she was more than partly at fault, he put the well there for her.

I am like Hagar. I am more than partly at fault for my being overweight (or underweight). I have isolated myself; I have tried to work it out on my own; I have misled others about my problem. Even though I am guilty of these things, God is still there for me. I don't have to be one hundred percent innocent for God to rescue me.

God, I am grateful that you take care of me
and meet my needs even when I mess up.

REFLECT | *God loves because he's faithful, not because I'm innocent.*

Day 8 A Promise in Stone

READ | Genesis 31:52

This heap [of stones] is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not go past this heap to your side to harm you. . . .

Are promises made to be broken? I have broken so many promises to myself to diet or to eat properly or to exercise more. I know the pain of broken promises.

One recovering manipulator, Jacob, and his enemy, Laban, set up a pile of stones to cement their promise not to harm each other. My friends who are struggling with food issues (some of whom may be in my support group) become witnesses of what I commit myself to do and not do. I promise them that I will make an effort to eat sensibly and make healthy choices. I promise to pray for everyone in the group every day. I promise to start exercising. Their

simple presence in my life, like the pile of stones, reminds me of my promise in a concrete way. If I fail, I have these human witnesses to forgive me and help me start over.

Please give me the strength to use
the powerful tool of accountability.

REFLECT | *Accountability is teamwork, and it puts more strength on my side.*

Day 9 Regret Reduction

READ | Genesis 32:24–25, 31

So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched. . . . [Jacob] was limping because of his hip.

Like others who have trafficked in eating issues, I have done a miserable disservice to my body. Like Jacob, I am limping. My metabolism is slowed so that weight doesn't come off or stay off easily. My junk-food eating has sped along my hypoglycemia. These *limps* aren't endearing to me, but I don't regret them, either. They are memorials to the great battle I am fighting. They hint at how much more damaged I could be if I don't continue to surrender food to God.

My battle wounds are signs that I am a seasoned person who has acquired wisdom the hard way. I have struggled with God, with others, with food, and with a culture that worships food and thinness. I have overcome because I have surrendered to God my valiant attempts to win the wrestling match with food.

God, help me see my wounds as reminders
of how far I've come.

REFLECT | *I can live with the negative physical effects
of my past eating habits and not resent them or beat myself up over
them. Tomorrow is a new day.*

Day 10 Becoming Willing to Forgive

READ | Genesis 50:20

*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish
what is now being done. . . .*

Surrender involves forgiving those who have intentionally harmed me. At first I may forgive because it's the smart thing to do. I know that if I hold grudges, I will overeat or starve to relieve the bad feelings my grudges produce.

As I progress in surrendering my life to God, I see why I'm so unwilling to forgive others: I don't trust God to keep me from further harm. In today's verse, Joseph trusted God and forgave his brothers because he could see how God's plan had worked to benefit everyone. Even if I can't see a master plan, I can trust the Master to reroute someone else's devious plan to my advantage. I surrender my bitterness, not because I trust the person I forgive, but because I trust God.

Help me face my grudges and bitterness and
turn them over to you, God.

REFLECT | *Today I trust God with my bitterness.*

Day 11 Fullness Issues

READ | Joel 2:26

You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed.

Can I trust God to make my stomach feel good again—to give me a sense of fullness or to relieve it? If I order a salad for lunch, will I survive? If I scoop a proper amount of food onto my plate, will it satisfy me? Will it be too little or too much?

Eating sensibly means following a reasonable eating plan and surrendering these emotional eating issues to God. I must trust him to help me eat an appropriate amount and feel good about it. I must not panic and grab more or put some back.

If I try to eat normally, God will provide exactly what I need emotionally.

Help me feel full but not stuffed
with the right amounts of food.

REFLECT | *A sensible eating plan provides enough.*

Day 12 When Their Faults Are My Faults

READ | Exodus 2:12–13

[Moses] killed the Egyptian and hid him. . . . The next day he . . . asked the one in the wrong, “Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?”

When I get upset with people, I’m often guilty of the same things they do. I don’t like judgmental people, but I judge quickly. I don’t like grumpy people, but I can be grumpy. When I haven’t worked out a problem in my own life, I spot

it easily in others' lives—much like Moses who tried to break up a fight the day after he had murdered someone!

To truly surrender my whole life I have to quit taking inventories of other people's faults. I take responsibility for my own faults instead. I ask God to show me what I need to do to grow spiritually.

The only person I should try to change is myself, so I can get on with life and let God take care of others.

God, show me my character defects and
help me release them to you.

REFLECT | *I will be able to help others more when I have faced my own faults.*

Day 13 Scared to Step Out

READ | Exodus 4:13

But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it!"

It's scary to pay attention to the promptings of God, and it's scary to ignore them. My love for my eating behaviors tells me to ignore God's promptings because they get in the way of my getting what I feel I need most—food.

As God's peace quiets the thunder of my compulsion, God's promptings seem louder. Sometimes I feel as if I'm standing in front of a burning bush, saying, "God, please ask someone else to start a support group . . . or to volunteer at the street mission."

As I face my fear and wait and pray, God plants a desire within me that is stronger than the fear. So I take the plunge. When I follow God's prompting (not my own

grandiose desire for applause), it's more rewarding than I could have imagined.

God, help me listen to your promptings and follow them.

REFLECT | *To follow God's promptings is to enjoy the little excitements of life.*

Day 14 Look, I Don't Understand

READ | Exodus 12:22

Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the door frame.

If I had been an Israelite hearing the instructions in today's verse, I would have said, "Forget it. That's a disgusting idea." Of course, I've thought that attending support groups and calling others for help was ridiculous, too. When I'm eating too much, few helpful ideas make sense to me.

Yet I see what the Israelites could not see—that the blood above and to the sides of the door frame form the three upper points of the cross of Christ. In a sense, the Israelites were calling on the power of Christ by putting blood on their door frames. And as I practice eating better, and I attend my support group, and I make telephone calls, I'm turning over my hunger and my need to control to Christ. I need his power to help me.

Help me to use the proven tools of
support groups, telephone calls, and prayer to
surrender to you even though their
importance eludes me.

REFLECT | *To do is to understand.*

Day 15 Choosing for Myself

READ | Daniel 1:8

But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine. . . .

Daniel, a spiritual person (he was later arrested for praying three times a day), determined that his eating pattern would include vegetables and water. Even though this was inconvenient, he found a way to follow it.

Choosing my own healthy eating plan is full of possibilities for rationalizations, but it is still my choice. With God's help, I can choose wise habits that temper my drivenness. In time, he leads me to refine and change my eating patterns as I need to. I trust him to show me what to do and to help me see when I'm kidding myself.

God, you know my eating behaviors better than anyone else. Please show me the best eating plan.

REFLECT | *Choosing my own eating plan is a risky but wise step in my growth.*

Day 16 Choosing Foods Wisely

READ | Daniel 1:15–16

At the end of ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

As I practice eating sensibly, mealtime is no longer the highlight of my day. I don't need my favorite foods to satisfy me,

because food is no longer a reward. I want to eat nutritious food for lunch so I can be more alert afterward.

It is a miracle that alertness is becoming more important than my appetite! I remember days when nothing was more important than appetite. There is hope for me yet!

Thank you, God, for the gift of food, and help me use it to help my body function well.

REFLECT | *I eat simply to nourish my body—imagine that!*

Day 17 Serenity in Stillness

READ | Exodus 14:14

The LORD will fight for you; you need only be still.

If I am going to stop overeating or undereating, I have to stop panicking, too. As a compulsive controller, I move into the panic mode when a crisis strikes.

No more. Now I take care of what is within my control, knowing that most things in life are not within my control. Often I'm trapped like the Israelites were between a powerful Egyptian army and the Red Sea. I am learning to trust that God is going to part that Red Sea—without my interference.

When I am confident that God will intervene, I have serenity. Others may urge me to panic, to plot, and to coerce, but I “need only be still.” Finally, I am learning to watch and wait for God to part the Red Seas in my life.

Thank you, God, that you invade impossible situations and give me the serenity I need.

REFLECT | *To wait and be still is an unexplainable serenity.*

Day 18 God's Learning Curve

READ | Exodus 15:2

The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.

I thought I knew God. Yet as I work on food issues in my life I find my need to lean on God as never before. He becomes my strength.

I also thank God for my progress, even though it is slow. I celebrate with him in prayer and in the way I report to my struggling friends. He becomes my song.

As I examine my character defects and allow God to permeate every area of my life, no matter how disgusting, I become identified with him and begin to have a sense of oneness with him. He's becoming my daily salvation in everything I do.

God, please come into my life in a greater way.

REFLECT | *Leaning on God is how it begins; oneness with him is how it continues.*

Day 19 Becoming Whole

READ | Exodus 16:14–15

Thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?"

I look at the food on my plate as if it were manna and say, "What is it?" The sight of five ounces of broccoli is a strange sight. Have I traded in chocolate binges for this? It isn't much of a prize.

This is reality. I have turned my back on the power of food. It can no longer be a soothing friend or a weapon for control. It is only a nourishing substance.

If I were on a diet, this healthy food might make me grouchy, but true healing from food obsession is different. I fill my life with prayer, meditation, reading, and serving others. I am finally involved in worthwhile activities that do not involve overconsuming or underconsuming food!

God, help me shift my focus from food to life.

REFLECT | *I used to live to eat; now I eat to live.*

Day 20 Meeting with God

READ | Exodus 19:17

Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

At regular intervals, I meet with God. Yes, it's difficult to go "out of the camp" of my daily life for a few minutes or hours, but it's so rewarding when I do.

I don't expect fireworks or great revelations from my time with God. I expect only to meet God in some way, and because he's such a varied being, I meet him in various ways. I hear him talk through the Scripture, through my meditation on it, through my own journaling and prayers, and through the stillness of being with him.

I come away knowing that I am loved by God, knowing that I am no longer useless because he has great designs for me.

Thank you for meeting with me, God,
and letting me know that I am loved.

REFLECT | *Meeting with God becomes something I look forward to.*

Day 21 Can Good Come Out of Anger?

READ | Exodus 32:19

When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces. . . .

Anger is like fire. It can be used for good purposes when it motivates us to right wrongs. But too often I express my righteous anger in unhealthy ways. Like Moses, I may have good reasons to be angry, but I hurt the people I love the most.

If I'm to surrender these behaviors, I have to look at my anger and make choices about it. When people and situations frustrate me, I can allow the passion stirred within me to motivate me to do something constructive instead of destructive. I can calm myself and say or do something helpful. My anger can do some good, as fire warms a cold world.

Take my anger, Lord, and use it in a positive way.

REFLECT | *When I give my anger to God, great things happen.*

Day 22 Being Versus Doing

READ | Exodus 33:14

The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

In the past, I thought God wanted me to be up and doing every minute. I frantically tried to figure out how to please him, and I did and did and did.

I've come to see that God loves me and sees me as something more than a machine. Not only does he encourage

me to rest, but also he gives me rest. As I acknowledge his continuous presence in my life, I can abide in his rest and taste some of that serenity I've been chasing. I refuel so that in the fray of battle, I am more reassured and less panicked.

Thank you, God, for helping me learn to rest
in your presence.

REFLECT | *God wants me to “be” with him; he will lead me to the proper amount of doing.*

Day 23 Moving Beyond Failures

READ | Exodus 34:1

The LORD said to Moses, “Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke.”

When I make mistakes, no one judges me more harshly than I judge myself. To me, mistakes aren't something I can correct, but catastrophes I must regret for the rest of my life. That's one reason I feel such a need to overeat and to control my overeating.

I marvel at how God forgave Moses for breaking the stones on which the Ten Commandments were written and simply told him to write them again. I want to be that kind of parent to myself and to my children. When I fall flat on my face, I want to get up, brush myself off, and say, “Let's try again.”

Even if I fail today, especially in the food area, I want to forgive myself and say, “God is helping me begin again.”

Thank you, God, for picking up the pieces of myself
and letting me start over.

REFLECT | *Failure doesn't have to defeat me unless I beat myself up over it.*

Day 24 Others May, I Choose Not To

READ | Leviticus 18:3

You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices.

It feels as if everyone around me is stuffing themselves on sugary foods or talking about losing weight and skipping meals. They don't seem to have any problems. Couldn't I just this once do the same thing?

I know what I need to do: adopt a sane, healthy eating plan in my life and to grow in the light God has given me. It doesn't matter if my culture is food-oriented or my friends overeat or diet incessantly. I now know I am important to God and to others in my support group. I will not overeat, under-eat, or overspend, even though my culture says this extreme behavior is normal.

Help me, God, to know and love you so well that your voice blocks out the voices of excess in my culture.

REFLECT | *Others may follow my culture, but I choose not to do so.*

Day 25 Progress I Don't Understand

READ | Leviticus 26:8

Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you.

As difficult as dealing with an eating problem can be, there are small improvements that I can't explain.

I struggle so long with chocolate and turn down one candy bar and suddenly all kinds of food have less appeal for me. I focus on quieting my voice with my children and it seems hopeless, but then I find I'm less frustrated with my co-workers. I progress when I'm not looking, and I can't explain why.

That's the beauty of it. With God, five soldiers can defeat one hundred soldiers. If I could explain it, I would claim I won in my strength and feel proud, then I would fall. This way, I can only report my progress to my friends and celebrate with them. These small moments of grace become inside jokes with God.

Work in me, using your mysterious paths, God,
and I promise to cooperate.

REFLECT | *God's ways are mysterious, and that's OK.*

Day 26 My Conscience, My Friend

READ | Numbers 5:6–7

When a man or woman wrongs another . . . that person is guilty and must confess the sin he has committed. He must make full restitution for his wrong. . . .

When I have a guilty conscience, I try to ignore it but I still feel needy inside. Neediness stirs up my drivenness, and I want to overeat or punish myself by undereating.

If I'm to abstain from these behaviors, I have to confess my faults, ask forgiveness, and make amends. It isn't pleasant to face people and situations I would rather forget, but it cleanses me. I'm able to live with myself without the numbing effect of food.

Asking forgiveness and making amends sets a pattern of taking responsibility for my hurtful actions. The next time I think about doing something hurtful, my conscience awakens and pleads with me, “Please don’t make me confess and make restitution again! Anything but that!” So I change my path and do what seems to be the kindest, most helpful thing.

God, please give me the courage to confess my mistakes
and make amends.

REFLECT | *A clean conscience decreases my need for food.*

Day 27 When Griping Grips Me

READ | Numbers 11:1

Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the LORD, and when he heard them his anger was aroused.

Gripping is often a well-developed hobby for those of us who are excessive. Take me anywhere and I can come up with five things that are wrong with any person, place, or thing. The more I gripe, the more I feel the need to manage and control.

So griping becomes one more thing I confess to my support group. I can try a simple accountability such as not complaining for twenty-four hours. The next night and next day I catch myself with my mouth open, ready to spew forth cranky complaints, but nothing comes out. When people say, “What were you going to say?” I can smile.

Changing my behavior this way is difficult but wonderful. Life is so much better. I do this as often as I need to until I find that I feel more grateful all the time.

Thank you, Lord, that while you help me
process my thoughts and feelings you also
help me break destructive habits.

REFLECT | *My hopelessness fades as my complaining fades.*

Day 28 Better Off Where?

READ | Numbers 11:18

The LORD heard you when you wailed, "If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!"

When I long to return to satisfying myself with food, I don't know what I'm asking for. I resemble the Israelites who became tired of eating manna every day. Their appetites were so distorted that they said they were better off in Egypt as slaves making bricks, because sometimes they got meat to eat.

I have the same choice. I can choose slavery or freedom. On the days when eating drives me, much of my life is clouded by my appetite. I choose social activities based on whether or not food is served; I choose friends who also overeat or undereat; I make the rounds of convenience stores for junk food. Now I'm free to choose jobs, friendships, and social activities with no thought of how close they take me to an ice cream parlor.

God, show me just how much my eating enslaves me.

REFLECT | *I'm better off without the enslavement of unhealthy eating.*