



100 Renewing Exercises to Help You
Break Free from the Control of Food

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part one

Foundations



“I Need Ice Cream”

I close my eyes and let out a sigh. *This ice cream is so good*, I think. Spoonful by spoonful, I revel in the joy of it as I devour the whole carton. Then I get up from my perch on the cold concrete at the local grade school and set off for the one-mile walk back to campus.

This was a regular occurrence for me back in my college days in Missoula, Montana. I didn't have a car at the time, so I was forced to walk to my little pig-out sessions. It was inconvenient but necessary. You see, I craved that ice cream. Nothing could stop me from getting it, not even the lack of a car or a cushy place to eat it. I was desperate, and desperate people do whatever they need to do to get their fix.

This type of behavior continued for another 20 years after college. You could tell how my life was going by looking at my body. In the good years I was skinny. In the bad years I wasn't. I was an emotional eater—and emotional eaters gain weight when life is hard.

Most of my pounds were added during the traumas of my life, but a good share of them were added during the celebrations: holidays, vacations, social gatherings—even weekends and evenings were a time for celebration. And what kind of celebration doesn't include food?

My guess is that if we were to sit down for a cup of coffee and a donut, you could tell me a similar story. We both have memories of far too many eating sessions—enough that we've lost hope more than once. For me, eating was that one thing in life that controlled me—the thing I thought I'd never get over. Thankfully, I was wrong.

More than two decades ago, God gave me a discipline that changed my life. First, He used it on my marriage; then He began to use it on my eating habits. That discipline is the renewing of the mind, and it's so effective I've gone 15 years without gaining my weight back.

God can do the same for you. In this book you'll find 100 renewing-of-the-mind exercises designed specifically to help you say goodbye to emotional eating. We'll talk more about how to use those exercises later, but first let's take a look at emotional eating.

Emotional Eating

Emotional eating is letting your *emotions* determine when and what you eat, not your will. So instead of just eating when we're hungry or at mealtimes, we'll eat when we're emotional. When we're happy. When we're sad. When we're annoyed. When we're overwhelmed. You name the emotion—we're ready to eat for it.

Yesterday was a good example. It was 3:00 in the afternoon and I still had a long to-do list that was making me feel discouraged and overwhelmed. I was just thinking how terrible those jobs on the list were, when suddenly I had a brilliant idea. *I'll go to the Dairy Queen for a little blizzard!* I grabbed my car keys and headed for the door, but then I stopped. *No, Barb*, I told myself. *Get up to your office and finish your work.* And surprisingly, I did.

If I had followed through with my little plan, I would have let my emotions—not my will—determine what and when I ate. I call this living by desire, not design. Instead of planning the life I want and following through with it, I'm allowing my emotions and desires to dictate the life I live.

Our culture is all about letting emotions and desires rule, but God isn't. First Corinthians 6:12 tells us, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything." When I engage in emotional eating, I'm letting my emotions and desires master me. They're telling me *what* to eat and *when* to eat, and I'm sitting back and letting them do that.

But here's the thing: in the old days, I didn't feel like I had any other choice. I would hear Christians—people who never struggled with food a day in their life—tell me, "You have a choice. You can choose to say no to the second bowl of ice cream and the third handful of chips."

But I knew otherwise. That food controlled me hook, line, and sinker, and I was powerless to say no. This made me feel defeated and hopeless. Where was the power of God in my life?

Well, the power of God was in the truth. I'd heard “the truth will make you free” (John 8:32), but I didn't know what that meant at the time. Instead, I just felt like I was doomed to a life of being overweight and waking up each morning with dread, thinking back to everything I'd eaten the night before.

The Truth Will Set You Free

But remember those people who told me I had a choice? They were right. Only the choice was different from what I had originally thought. It wasn't the choice of whether to eat the third cupcake. It was the choice of whether I'd go to the *truth* to be set free from the *desire* to eat the third cupcake.

The truth will make us free—but we usually don't apply that verse to such mundane things as not bingeing on cupcakes when we're feeling emotional. While it's true that the truth sets us free from death to eternal life with God, it's also true that the truth sets us free from the desires that control us.

The more God replaced lies with truth when I went to Him for help with emotional eating, the more I was able to see the beauty of eating with control. Truth changed my desires and allowed me to say goodbye to emotional eating. And when that happened, I was able to lose weight and have kept it off for more than 15 years now.

God can do the same for you no matter how much you have to lose. Because here's the truth: No matter how much extra weight we carry, we all believe the same lies that make us overeat. I've gained hundreds of pounds throughout my life, but I've never been more than 25 pounds overweight. And even at that body size, I dealt with the same lies that I would have dealt with at 100 pounds of extra weight. I experienced feelings of insecurity, shame, despair, and self-condemnation because I wasn't skinny enough.

So part of saying goodbye to emotional eating is taking off the lies that make us overeat. But another part of the journey will be to take off the lies that tell us we have to be skinny to be acceptable, that life is terrible (and no one likes us) if we're not skinny, and that we'll never, ever break free from the control of food.

I hope this book will give you tools you can use to go to God for help with

emotional eating and body image. The renewing exercises will help you take charge of your negative emotions and say, “Hey guys, I’m not going to let you be in charge of my life anymore. From now on, I’m living by design, not desire!”

Before we get started, let’s look at an overview of the book. In Part One, we’ll look at some biblical foundations and practical tips for breaking free from emotional eating. We’ll also go over some renewing-of-the-mind techniques that will help you gain victory over emotional eating. In Part Two, we’ll put that knowledge to use with 100 exercises you can use in the moment—when everything in you wants to soothe your emotions with food—to walk away, free to wake up in the morning with no regret.