

BY DALE FLETCHER, M.S.

Faith and HEALTH connection

“Spiritual Exercises to Help Us Know God Better and Manage Our Weight... for a Healthier Life”

Once heard a woman who has traveled the weight loss journey say, “I fed my feelings. I sought comfort in food, not God.” She acknowledged that she had attempted to meet her deep emotional needs by eating food. Many of us eat to manage the stress in our lives and to cope with our negative emotions. Do you? The French philosopher Pascal once wrote “There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only God the creator.” Instead of turning to food to sooth any inner pain and uncomfortable emotions consider turning to God in a deeper way for help.

Knowing God is the first step in Warren Weirsbe’s model of how one can enjoy living an abundant life. An abundant life includes a healthy life. The primary way in which we can get to know someone, including God, better is to communicate with them. Two ways we communicate with God is through prayer and by reading and studying the Bible. God speaks to us through His Bible and we speak to Him when we pray. As we study the Bible we learn about the nature and character of God. Let’s see what the Bible has to say about the spiritual exercises of praying and Bible reading that might be relevant to this issue of emotional eating.

What the Bible Says: In Matthew 4:4, Jesus told his disciples “The Scriptures say, ‘People need more than bread for their life; they must feed on every word of God.’” In Psalms 63:5 David writes to God saying, “You satisfy me more than the richest of foods.” In Psalms 145:15-16 he also writes, “All eyes look to you for help; you give them their food as they need it. When you open your hand, you satisfy the hunger and thirst of every living thing.” In just these few verses we have insight that our deep needs are to be met by knowing God and by receiving His love that flows from getting to know Him personally.

What the Research Says: Studies consistently show that prayer and study of the scriptures is correlated to improved health and well being. “Keeping the lines of communication open between whatever or whomever we conceive God to be is among the healthiest things we can do,” says Jeff Levin, Ph.D. in his book *God, Faith, and Health*. In one study of over 2,000 African Americans, frequent prayer led to greater life satisfaction and happiness. In another study of 1,000 people conducted by Duke University researchers, frequent private worship, prayer, and devotional reading was associated with less agitation, loneliness, life dissatisfaction and greater ability to cope with tension. In a 3-year study of cancer patients at Duke, researchers found that frequent prayer, meditation, or Bible study led to a happy and contented mood. The bottom line—private religious worship leads to positive emotions which can then lead to improved health.

Physical exercise has some value, but spiritual exercise is much more important for it promises a reward in both this life and the next

—1 Timothy 4:8 NLT

What You Can Do: By reading the Bible we get to know God better. Try to get in the habit of a daily devotion time to spend time alone with God. I find it helpful to do this in the early morning and I start this time by reading a printed devotional that is accompanied by related scripture. For years I have read a booklet by Charles Stanley, *In Touch* magazine. Another devotional I often read is from Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost For His Highest*. To go deeper into a specific area, consider completing a more in-depth Bible study. Christian book stores will have numerous studies on a variety of topics and books of the Bible.

Prayer is simply conversation with God. He hears us when we speak to him. As we spend more and more time alone with Him, we can hear Him as He speaks to us, often in that soft voice deep inside. When you pray, praise Him, give Him your thanks, tell Him your concerns, and cry out to Him in your distress. And when you pray, know and believe that He hears you.

The theme of this issue of Faith and Fitness Magazine is weight management and so you might be asking, what’s the connection between knowing God better and weight management? Part of living an abundant is being healthy and part of being healthy is managing our weight. The nourishment God can give us through Bible reading and prayer and a resulting deeper faith is so much richer and satisfying than food. As you get to know God better you’ll experience His love more deeply. You’ll have a greater sense of hope and inner peace and be able to manage your emotions in a healthier way. Additionally, His power will give you the ability to make healthier choices.

I think Pascal was right. We do have a vacuum, a hole, deep in our spirit that was designed by God to be filled by knowing Him and experiencing His love. Instead of eating to fill this hole, allow God to fill it. The more we grow in a personal relationship with God, through the spiritual exercises of praying and reading the Bible, the healthier we will be.

Secrets of Living an ABUNDANT LIFE

*The secret of living is fruitbearing.
The secret of fruitbearing is abiding in God.
The secret of abiding is obeying God.
The secret of obeying is loving God.
The secret of loving is knowing God.*

Adapted from *5 Secrets of Living* by Warren W. Wiersbe

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