

Christian Diet Books: Thinning, Not Sinning

by Susanne Bostick Allen

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Kenneth Clay Smith, Jr.  
Associate Professor of Arts and Humanities

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To Becky and Mark

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## Abstract of Thesis

### Christian Diet Books: Thinning, Not Sinning

All women, including Christian women, are susceptible to the diet industry's selling of thin bodies as a commodity and media portrayals of thin women as desirable and successful. Overall, diet books are the most popular category of nonfiction, worth over \$1.2 billion annually as of 2005. Evangelical Christian women believe they are obeying God's will when they follow a Christian diet, but in reality they are subscribing to and perpetuating the prevailing American culture of thinness. The popularity of Christian diet books began in post-World War II America and continues today. They propose to solve the problem of women's dissatisfaction with their bodies by offering diets based on Biblical teachings and Christian beliefs. This paper examines five Christian diet books published between 1957 and 2013: *Pray Your Weight Away*; *First Place*; *The Weigh Down Diet*; *What Would Jesus Eat? The Ultimate Program for Eating Well, Feeling Great, and Living Longer*; and *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life*. As long as the culture of thinness is an integral part of American society, there will be a market for diet books, and among evangelical Christian women for Christian diet books. This phenomenon is pernicious because it damages women's self-assurance and alters their beliefs about the way they appear to the world.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In twenty-first century America, the desire to be thin is a national obsession. The culture of thinness affects women by increasing their dissatisfaction with their bodies. When average-sized women see images of super-thin models and celebrities in magazines, television, film, and the Internet, they believe they must be deficient. They diet in an attempt to achieve the thin ideal, but diets are rarely successful in the long term. So they start over again, trying to reach an impossible goal. The culture of thinness is the culture of defeat. Christian women are not immune to the diet industry's selling of thin bodies as a commodity. They believe they are obeying God's will when they follow the diets set forth in one of the many Christian diet books available today. But Christian diets are a multibillion-dollar business, and when women buy these books, they are subscribing to and perpetuating the prevailing American culture of thinness.

Women turn to Christian diet books because they have tried other diets without success, or because their evangelical beliefs compel them to seek a solution that uses God and the Bible to guide them in their quest for thinness. The users of Christian diet books are predominantly evangelical and fundamentalist women, but include women of many denominations and beliefs. Evangelical women take losing weight seriously; they see their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit, and they want those temples to flourish. The books tell them how to sustain and enhance their spiritual edifices. They are brought up to believe they should please God and their husbands, and they work earnestly to conform to the cultural ideal.

Christian diet books have been selling well ever since 1957, when Charlie Shedd published *Pray Your Weight Away*. Shedd, a Presbyterian minister, exhorted his readers



to “Ask God to Show You Why You Eat Too Much.”<sup>1</sup> Shedd’s book and its popularity started a trend for Bible-based diet books that expanded in the 1970s and 1980s. R. Marie Griffith says, “*Help Lord...the Devil Wants Me Fat!*...spent several months on the National Religious Bestsellers list and sold close to 100,000 copies between the fall of 1977 and 1978.” She adds that *Free to Be Thin* by Marie Chapien and Neva Coyle, published in 1979, “sold 1.4 million copies worldwide and spawned a virtual industry of diet products...”<sup>2</sup>

A staple among Christian diet books is *First Place* by Carole Lewis, published in 2001. The book explains and espouses a program of diet support groups, which started in 1981 in Texas. Today the program has, by its own accounting, “over half a million members in more than 12,000 churches...in all 50 states.”<sup>3</sup> *The Weigh Down Diet* is another popular title. In 1997, *The New York Times* said, “Doubleday...paid more than \$1 million to publish *The Weigh Down Diet*, by Gwen Shamblin...”<sup>4</sup> and the book appeared on *The New York Times* and Christian best-seller lists.<sup>5</sup> Shamblin’s Weigh Down Workshop was founded in 1986 in Tennessee, and her book is an unorthodox take on Christian diets, albeit a very popular one. *Slim for Him*, *The Maker’s Diet*, *Lose It for Life*, *Thin Within*, and *Made to Crave* are a few more titles. These books offer guidance

<sup>1</sup> Charlie W. Shedd, *Pray Your Weight Away* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company), 1957.

<sup>2</sup> R. Marie Griffith, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 172.

<sup>3</sup> “First Place 4 Health,” *First Place 4 Health*, 2015, accessed October 31, 2015, <http://www.firstplace4health.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> Doreen Carvajal, “A Good Villain Can Help Sales of Diet Books, Too,” *The New York Times* (New York), June 21, 1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/06/21/health/a-good-villain-can-help-sales-of-diet-books-too.html?pagewanted=print>.

<sup>5</sup> Daisy Maryles, “Seeking a Slimmer Summer,” *Publishers Weekly*, April 27, 1998, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/print/19980427/27812/pw/seeking/a/slimmer/summer.html>.

on losing weight based on scripture and faith in God; otherwise, the diets are very much like secular weight-loss plans. But the Christian diet book industry contributes to the commercialization of women's bodies by appealing to their religious beliefs. This maneuver is especially pernicious because it reaches them where they are most vulnerable: their deep concerns about the way they appear to the world.

Using carefully targeted marketing, publishers have carved out a niche for these books, which often appear on Christian best-seller lists. According to *The New York Times*, "The primary buyers of diet literature are women, according to publishers, who have increasingly tried to cater to them with specialized chapters, themes and titles..."<sup>6</sup> In 2015, the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association included *The Daniel Plan* in their list of "Top 100 Christian Bestsellers of 2015."<sup>7</sup> The book was also on bestseller lists of *The New York Times* and *Publishers Weekly*.<sup>8</sup>

As Roberta Seid says in *Never Too Thin: Why Women Are at War with Their Bodies*, "We have elevated the pursuit of a lean, fat-free body into a new religion." This is where Christian diet programs and the culture of thinness intersect. The woman who looks like a teenaged boy, a product of the American fixation with dieting, is diminished literally and figuratively by believing and acting on the tenets of a creed as powerful as the religion preached in Christian diet books: our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and should be treated accordingly.

<sup>6</sup> Doreen Carvajal, "A Good Villain Can Help Sales of Diet Books, Too," *The New York Times* (New York), June 21, 1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/06/21/health/a-good-villain-can-help-sales-of-diet-books-too.html?pagewanted=print>.

<sup>7</sup> "ECPA Top 100 Christian Bestsellers of 2015." *Christian Book Expo*, accessed January 21, 2016, <http://www.christianbookexpo.com/>.

<sup>8</sup> Kumar, Anugrah. "Rick Warren's Bestseller 'Daniel Plan' Seeks to Change Lives, Not Just Food Habits," *Christian News*, January 5, 2014, accessed January 21, 2016, <http://www.christianpost.com/>.

Like the entire diet industry, the Christian diet book industry is built around the cultural assumption that all women want to be thin. This assumption is the reason women look in the mirror and see a fat person when they are only five pounds overweight. To discuss Christian diet books in light of the culture of thinness, we must put them in context. The prospective buyer of a Christian diet book is most likely white, female, middle-aged or older, and living in the South, which has some of the highest obesity rates in the nation.<sup>9</sup> In 2014, Arkansas had a 35.9 percent rate of obesity, West Virginia's rate was 35.7 percent, Mississippi's was 35.5 percent, Louisiana's was 34.9 percent, and Alabama's was 33.5 percent.<sup>10</sup> In six Southern states (North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee), between thirty-five and fifty-two percent of adults are fundamentalist Christians.<sup>11</sup> As Kenneth Ferraro says, "...obesity is *higher* in states with a higher proportion of persons claiming a religious affiliation and in states with a higher proportion of Baptists...people who are more active in practicing their religion are also more likely to be overweight....many 'firm believers' do not have 'firm bodies.'"<sup>12</sup>

Marketers put Christian diet books in the category of Christian nonfiction.

Fifty-nine percent of Christian nonfiction buyers are female, fifty-two percent have an

<sup>9</sup> "The State of Obesity: Obesity Data Trends and Policy Analysis," *The State of Obesity*, accessed April 6, 2016, <http://stateofobesity.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> "New Report Finds 23 of 25 States with Highest Rates of Obesity are in the South and Midwest," *Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*, last modified September 21, 2015, accessed April 6, 2016, <http://www.rwjf.org/en/library/articles-and-news/2015/09/State-of-Obesity-Report-2015.html>.

<sup>11</sup> "Religious Landscape Study: Evangelical Protestants," *Pew Research Center: Religion in Public Life*, accessed November 30, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/evangelical/protestant/>.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth F. Ferraro, "Firm Believers? Religion, Body Weight, and Well-Being," *Review of Religious Research* 39, no. 3 (1998): 224-244, accessed August 30, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3512590>.

annual household income of under \$50,000, and fifty-one percent are under forty-five.<sup>13</sup> Such a woman is a good consumer of diet books, Christian or otherwise. She resembles buyers of general diet books more than she differs from them. Christian diet books appeal to her desire for a heavenly authority figure who knows her better than anyone else does. It comforts her to believe that God cares about all aspects of her life, including her personal appearance and the food she puts in her mouth. These women believe they can serve God better as witnesses if they are in good health and look attractive.

The books are also popular because their authors know how to promote themselves. For example, Gwen Shamblin is a dietitian, but her book sells, in large part, because of her personal charisma. With her bouffant blonde hairstyle and televangelist's delivery, she enthalls audiences with stories of *Weigh Down* dieters' achievements. Another celebrity author is Rick Warren, principal author of *The Daniel Plan*. Warren founded the huge Saddleback Church in California and wrote *The Purpose-Driven Life*, "the best-selling hardback book in American history," according to CNN.<sup>14</sup>

This thesis paper reviews the history of diet and nutrition movements in the U.S. The paper explores the culture of thinness, its origins, and how it affects women. Five Christian diet book titles are analyzed, with explanations of their scriptural approach to dieting and how they instruct readers to do God's will.

The paratextual elements of each of the five books, including design, typography,

<sup>13</sup>"Focusing on Our Strengths: Key Insights into the Christian Book Market," *The Nielsen Company*, August 6, 2015, accessed March 13, 2016, <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports/2015/focusing-on-our-strengths-insights-into-the-christian-book-market.html>.

<sup>14</sup>Burke, Daniel, "Short Takes: Gauging the impact of 'Purpose Driven Life,' 10 years on," *CNN Belief Blog*, November 29, 2012, <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/11/29/short-takes-gauging-the-impact-of-purpose-driven-life-10-years-on/>.

and layout, are explored. Gérard Genette, in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, defines paratexts as “those liminal devices and conventions, both within the book...and outside it...that mediate the book to the reader: titles and subtitles, pseudonyms, forewords, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, intertitles, notes, epilogues, and afterwords...”<sup>15</sup> Jerome McGann, in *The Textual Condition*, speaks of a double helix of bibliographic and linguistic codes.<sup>16</sup> The linguistic code is represented by the actual, page-by-page text of the book, and the bibliographic code by the paratext. According to Duncan I. Hassell, “The bibliographic code of a document is made up of...its size (length, width, and depth), the size and style of its typeface or typefaces, the use of white space (not only margins but also the spaces between lines and words), the quality of the paper and binding...”<sup>17</sup> He is describing design and layout, which include the purposeful arrangement of text in ways other than the traditional. These elements are similar to those of the paratext.

The paper will consider the phenomenon of Christian diet books in terms of the model proposed by Thomas Adams and Nicholas Barker and influenced by Robert Darnton’s work. Adams and Barker described “five events in the life of a book – publishing, manufacturing, distribution, reception and survival.”<sup>18</sup> Darnton sums this up by asking, “How do books come into being? How do they reach readers? What do readers

<sup>15</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xviii.

<sup>16</sup> Jerome J. McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 77.

<sup>17</sup> Duncan Ingraham Hassell, “Material Fictions: Readers and Textuality in the British Novel” (PhD diss., Rice University, 2009), 25.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker, “A New Model for the Study of the Book,” in *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society: The Clark Lectures, 1986-1987*, ed. Nicolas Barker (London: The British Library and New Castle: Oak Knoll Press), 5-39.

make of them?”<sup>19</sup> These questions are particularly fascinating in the field of Christian diet books because no studies have considered the bibliographic material that surrounds the linguistic text.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Darnton, “‘What is the history of books?’ Revisited,” *Modern Intellectual History* 4(3): 495-508, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:3403039>.

## Chapter 2: Origins of American Diet Culture

Christian health and fitness movements began in the early 19th century. Sylvester Graham, the “de facto founder of the diet reform movement in the antebellum United States,” advocated a vegetarian diet, preached against alcohol and processed food, and instructed his followers to practice moderation in daily life.<sup>20</sup> Graham, a Presbyterian minister, was joined by health reformers and vegetarians such as William A. Alcott, a physician and health reformer who preached abstinence, and John Harvey Kellogg, who dispensed a water cure at Battle Creek Sanitarium.<sup>21</sup> John’s brother was Will Kellogg, and together they invented corn flakes in 1893. Graham influenced the New Thought movement, including the Seventh-Day Adventists and Christian Science. His diet reform movement became part of mainstream American culture.<sup>22</sup>

The New Thought movement of the late nineteenth century proclaimed that mind took precedence over matter, but shared principles for daily eating and exercise that influenced later American diets. Sydney Flower, the publisher of *New Thought* magazine, “...noted that the four tools for establishing health were ‘RIGHT THOUGHT, RIGHT MEDICINE, RIGHT EXERCISE, and RIGHT DIET.’” Horace Fletcher, another

<sup>20</sup> Cindy Nobel, “Sylvester Graham and Antebellum Diet Reform,” *History Now* 30 (Winter 2011), <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/first-age-reform-essays-sylvester-graham-and-antebellum-diet-reform>.

<sup>21</sup> Hillel Schwartz, *Never Satisfied: A Cultural History of Diets, Fantasies, and Fat* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 185.

<sup>22</sup> Cindy Nobel, “Sylvester Graham and Antebellum Diet Reform,” *History Now* 30 (Winter 2011), <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/first-age-reform-essays-sylvester-graham-and-antebellum-diet-reform>.

reformer, preached the virtues of mastication, or thorough chewing, as the way to health.<sup>23</sup> Fletcher had devoted followers who were called Fletcherites.<sup>24</sup>

Thin bodies were not always in fashion. In America, the culture of thinness originated in the 19th century. Cultural historian Sander Gilman says, “From the 1860s, it was the diet culture that dominated the market...”<sup>25</sup> In *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity*, R. Marie Griffith places its beginnings between 1890 and 1910.<sup>26</sup> The turn of the century was the age of the Gibson Girl, followed by the flat-chested flappers of the 1920s and the sweater girls of the World War II era. A look ahead to the late twentieth century shows the models Twiggy and Jean Shrimpton promoting thinness.

Major developments in the history of thinness occurred at the end of the nineteenth century. The bathroom scale became popular with consumers; now anyone could keep track of her weight in the privacy of home. In addition, the first standard daily calorie requirements were issued. In 1918, Lulu Hunt Peters published the first calorie guide: *Dieting and Health, with a Key to the Calories*. The book was the first of the “calorie lists that became ubiquitous in twentieth-century weight loss culture.”<sup>27</sup>

Fasting took hold of the American public between 1890 and 1930, thanks to the efforts of Edward Hooker Dewey, Bernarr Macfadden, Upton Sinclair, and others.

<sup>23</sup> R. Marie Griffith, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 106-107.

<sup>24</sup> Hillel Schwartz, *Never Satisfied: A Cultural History of Diets, Fantasies, and Fat* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 127.

<sup>25</sup> Sander L. Gilman, introduction to *Diets and Dieting: A Cultural Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2008), ix.

<sup>26</sup> R. Marie Griffith, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 70.

<sup>27</sup> Lynne Gerber, *Seeking the Straight and Narrow: Weight Loss and Sexual Reorientation in Evangelical America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 114.



Dewey published *The True Science of Living* in 1895, followed by *The No-Breakfast Plan and the Fasting Cure* (1900). Both books became bestsellers of the day and were reprinted in the United States and Britain and translated into French and German.<sup>28</sup>

In the 1930s, Father Divine (George Baker, 1879-1965), founder of the Peace Mission movement, offered his members “...a symbolic feast with offerings as sumptuous and plentiful as the dishes served daily at his banquets.” Father Divine “taught hearers to recognize that the feast set before them...was...the concrete symbol of heavenly love.”<sup>29</sup> During the 1950s and 1960s, he was succeeded by African American religious leaders who propounded a variety of eating schemes and “sought to transform the lives of African Americans by overhauling their food practices.” These included a range of options, from fasting to soul food.<sup>30</sup>

Contemporary Christian diet books have been popular since 1957, when Charlie Shedd, a Presbyterian minister, published *Pray Your Weight Away*. Thus, the trend for Christian diet books began in post-World War II America, when lifestyles grew more sedentary, automation took over, and high-calorie foods were cheap and readily available.

<sup>28</sup> R. Marie Griffith, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 113-114.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 140-143.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 155-157.

### Chapter 3: Five Christian Diets

#### *Pray Your Weight Away*

Charlie Shedd (1915 - 2004), was a Presbyterian minister for over fifty years and wrote more than forty books. He was a syndicated columnist and appeared often on television and radio. In *Pray Your Weight Away*, he dispenses homespun wisdom and common-sense advice, and tells stories that illustrate the need for prayer and divine guidance. His humor seems quaint to today's reader. He opens each chapter with a Bible verse and ends it with a prayer.

His untrammelled faith in the medical profession is from an earlier, more innocent time when doctors were more likely to be trusted. According to Shedd, they are helpers sent from God. He praises diet books as a fount of wisdom and admits that when it comes to diets in periodicals, "the women's magazines carry most of this material."<sup>31</sup> He reinforces an old stereotype of the fat, jolly man or woman when he smirks, "You have a nice smile. Most fat people do."<sup>32</sup> Telling readers, "...secretly, folks sense that something's wrong with you,"<sup>33</sup> looks insulting when viewed from 2016. His writing instills powerful feelings of self-hatred in any reader who feels she has a few pounds to lose. But he attempts sympathy when he says, "Everybody doesn't love the fat man, because the fat man doesn't love himself...his being is flooded with a hatred of self."<sup>34</sup> He waxes metaphysical: Chapter 4 is titled, "Ask God to Show You Yourself as He

<sup>31</sup> Charlie W. Shedd, *Pray Your Weight Away* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1957), 26.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-48.

Dreamed You.” Here, he says, “...sometimes I meet a serene soul who says little but inside there is a light shining through the temple windows...”<sup>35</sup> “God created you in His image and that means glorious things for you when you tune yourself to His creation...you feel a Divine vigor beginning to work its power in you.”<sup>36</sup> He tells his audience, “Only when he prays his weight away can he tie himself back into the source of true love. Only then can he feel the warm inflow of love for self and the healing outflow of love toward all the world.”<sup>37</sup>

Today’s reader is bound to think of his taunts as cruel insults. “Some doors never open to the shove of a padded shoulder,” means the fat person will not be able to achieve her goals or dreams. When a church tells its members, “Don’t call a preacher who is overweight,” it discriminates against fat people.<sup>38</sup>

Yet in Chapter 5, “Ask God to Show You Why You Eat Too Much,” he locates the source of overweight deep inside us: “...we will remain obese...*unless our inner problem is resolved.*”<sup>39</sup> (Emphasis in original.) When he speaks of loneliness, he is poetic: “Loneliness...is a barren land where a voice goes crying through the night; morning and noon there is a daily shouting; a desolate soul knocks on countless doors...And no answer comes...loneliness digs a deep inner gorge which can never be filled with food.”<sup>40</sup> To Shedd, the Divinity is a light that shines forth from inside us: “...people will beat a path to your door if the Inner Light shines in your little

<sup>35</sup> Charlie W. Shedd, *Pray Your Weight Away* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1957), 42.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

window...the Divine purpose will feed those empty places where you have eaten and never had enough.”<sup>41</sup> He speaks to contemporary feelings of self-hatred when he prays, “When I hate myself, give me a self I can respect.”<sup>42</sup>

Shedd locates resentment as “the most prevalent problem of the plump people whom I have counseled...”<sup>43</sup> and advises readers to list all the people they resent. His language closely resembles that of the Twelve-Step program of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). AA literature states unequivocally, “Resentment is the number one offender. It destroys more alcoholics than anything else.”<sup>44</sup> He also recommends making amends for past wrongs “wherever it will do more good than harm.” This is identical to Step Nine of the AA Twelve Steps.<sup>45</sup> In Chapter 7, “Ask God to Attend Each Bite,” he refers to AA by name, explaining that members sometimes get “‘on the program’ with a frown on [their] face[s].” This is called a “dry drunk,” and for fatties it means “resentful reduction” or the “‘I’m-on-a-diet-but-I-sure-hate-it’ approach.”<sup>46</sup> He promotes the American gospel of everyone’s right to happiness, and its salutary results for fat people, when he tells his audience, “The happier you make others, the happier you will be yourself...By filling yourself with good feelings about others you will help to fill that inner void which you have been stuffing with food.”

<sup>41</sup> Charlie W. Shedd, *Pray Your Weight Away* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1957), 61.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>44</sup> Alcoholics Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism, Fourth Edition* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001), 64.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>46</sup> Charlie W. Shedd, *Pray Your Weight Away* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1957), 93.

Chapter 9 is titled, “Ask God to Help You Face This Hard Fact: All Your Life You’ll Be Fat-Prone.” This places Shedd’s book in another era, but it also shows that his philosophy is consistent with the culture of thinness. He makes no allowance for different body types; to him, thinness is the goal, period. He says it outright: “...you must remember – you’re not a fattie who is made permanently thin; instead you are forever potentially fat.”<sup>47</sup>

*Pray Your Weight Away* comes from the school of thought that produced *The Power of Positive Thinking*, written by Norman Vincent Peale and published in 1952. According to R. Marie Griffith, “In words that echoed [Peale’s] wildly popular” book, “Shedd enthused about the power of prayer to effect change and produce the thing desired.”<sup>48</sup>

Where does Shedd leave the reader? Admitting that she will always have a fat person’s soul, even if it resides in a newly thin body. Carrying a hefty load of guilt for an equally hefty amount of fat. It is guilt that can only be dispersed through constant prayer and remembering that “We fatties are the only people on earth who can weigh our sin.” He orders us, “Thank God for your problem...Get glad and give glory.”<sup>49</sup>

In Chapter 5 is a “Fat Man’s Check List” that explicates nine “problem centers” representing “the major subconscious causes of obesity.” Shedd calls these problem centers “check points” and lists them as rejection, loneliness, disappointment, inferiority, self-hatred, selfishness, boredom, unhappy marriage, and resentment. He directs the

<sup>47</sup> Charlie W. Shedd, *Pray Your Weight Away* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1957), 120.

<sup>48</sup> R. Marie Griffith, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 167.

<sup>49</sup> Charlie W. Shedd, *Pray Your Weight Away* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1957), 122.

reader to score twenty “if you are heavy...ten for medium; five for a little and zero...where no problem is.”<sup>50</sup> This gives the book a methodical air, as if quantifying our deepest feelings could produce weight loss.

Several physical and bibliographical features of Shedd’s book contribute to its platform of authoritative guidance for the overweight. The front of the book jacket (see Figure 1, page 62) is conventionally designed, but incorporates an image of a red ribbon that might appear as a badge of honor or an award. The back jacket displays two photographs: the before and after of Charlie Shedd. This is meant to lend authority by vividly showing the weight loss that Shedd has been able to achieve. But more information is conveyed by these images. The small “before” photo shows a freewheeling Shedd wearing, not a business suit, but a dark sport shirt with open collar and no tie. This portrays a more unconstrained Shedd, possibly free of the restrictions that apply to a man of the cloth. By contrast, the “after” photograph is much larger and shows a minister Shedd in the proper costume: dark suit, white shirt, tie, and horn-rimmed glasses, which lend him a scholarly air and put the reader in mind of a pastor reading the Scriptures at Sunday service.

The photographs are the most important elements of the paratext, conveying the message that God helped the author lose weight and will help the reader as well. This message is reiterated on the inside front book jacket, which says, “It worked for him – after everything else failed, and it ought to work for you.”

<sup>50</sup> Charlie W. Shedd, *Pray Your Weight Away* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1957), 70-71.

## *First Place*

*First Place* was written by Carole Lewis, national director of the First Place 4 Health diet program. The program was founded in Houston in 1981 by a group of evangelical Christians, men and women, who wanted to follow a Biblically-based diet. By 1999, it was used in 12,000 churches and represented more than half a million people.<sup>51</sup> The two most financially successful Christian weight-loss organizations are *First Place* and Shamblin's *The Weigh Down Diet*.<sup>52</sup> *First Place* was published in 2001 and could serve as a recruiting tool or handbook. It could expand the diet program's reach by explaining it to an audience that has not joined yet, or provide guidelines to present members.

*First Place* is an earnest book, written by a woman who knows what she believes and knows her audience. Unlike *The Weigh Down Diet*, it uses a mainstream approach to Christian weight loss, relying on sound nutritional information and medical authority.<sup>53</sup> The Introduction to *First Place* highlights the competition between Christian diets. Lewis writes of a program that "teaches that God created every food, but if we pray and study our Bible but still want Ding-Dongs or Twinkies, that's OK; we just need to stop eating when we're full."<sup>54</sup> Without naming *The Weigh Down Diet*, she is clearly referring to it in the context of diet programs that offer a "quick fix." She says *First Place* is instead "a

<sup>51</sup> "History," *First Place 4 Health*, last modified 2016, <http://www.firstplace4health.com/about/history.html>.

<sup>52</sup> R. Marie Griffith, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 176.

<sup>53</sup> Lynne Gerber, *Seeking the Straight and Narrow: Weight Loss and Sexual Reorientation in Evangelical America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 7.

<sup>54</sup> Carole Lewis and W. Terry Whalin, *First Place* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2001), 14.

safe weight-loss program” which avoids leading the dieter down the path of fad diets that do not ensure lasting changes to eating habits.

Lewis begins Chapter One, “Putting God in *First Place*,” with an example of a *First Place* member who lost a significant amount of weight and improved her spiritual life in the process. Similar examples begin every chapter. Chapter One discusses the “Nine Commitments” that are required of everyone who joins *First Place*. The first eight commitments are attendance, encouragement, prayer, Bible reading, memorizing a Bible verse each week, studying the Bible, following the “Live-It” plan (as differentiated from a diet, or “Die-it”), and exercise. The ninth commitment is completing a weekly Commitment Record (CR) to keep track of how members are fulfilling the other commitments, especially food intake. These requirements may seem burdensome, and a member needs to be highly motivated to carry them out. Members might wonder at the necessity for these commitments when their primary purpose in joining is to lose weight. However, as Lewis assures her readers in Chapter Five, “The entire *First Place* program is designed to take bite-sized pieces of time every day. It does not require hours of your time.” In fact, members chafe at some requirements, according to Lynne Gerber. She writes, “Many members resist the CRs, finding it onerous to record their food intake so diligently.”<sup>55</sup> Other members, perhaps more serious about their growth as Christians, regard weight loss as desirable but not the most important aspect of the program, which Lewis says is regular prayer and Bible study.

In Chapter Two, “Dig Down Deep – What’s Your Motivation?” Lewis discusses “Wrong Reasons for Making a Lifestyle Change.” She states, “pause...and see if that

<sup>55</sup> Lynne Gerber, *Seeking the Straight and Narrow: Weight Loss and Sexual Reorientation in Evangelical America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 123.



[wrong] motivation is your motivation. If it is, then you are almost doomed to continue in your present state.”<sup>56</sup> In Biblical language, she predicts utter failure if the dieter embarks on the *First Place* diet without the “proper motivation.” Improper motivations include a desire to lose weight before a class reunion or family wedding. Another is a wife’s desire to please her husband, combined with the husband’s offer of a financial incentive for her weight loss:

Some husbands try to motivate their wives to lose weight by dangling a financial carrot. They sweetly look at their wives and say, “Honey, if you lose 50 pounds, then you can spend \$500 on a new wardrobe.” The thought of shopping for new outfits – in smaller sizes – is enticing, but let’s look at the message underneath: “You are not OK. You don’t look OK, and you would look a lot better if you didn’t weigh so much. In fact, I’m backing that idea with my billfold and an investment in your clothes.”<sup>57</sup>

Lewis clearly disapproves of the husband’s maneuver. In addition, although it may be an uneasy coexistence, she aligns herself here with those who question the gospel of thinness.

Another improper motivation is the overweight person’s reaction to double-edged compliments such as “You have a pretty face.” An overweight person would probably be offended by this comment. Lewis also states, “Many single people hope to lose weight because they think it will magically transform their social lives...this is another improper motivation for shedding pounds.”<sup>58</sup> She says, “Improper motivations...are temporary and are usually centered on another person.”<sup>59</sup> But as the next section, “Proper Motivations,” tells us, God – not a husband or potential date – is the only being a dieter should hope to

<sup>56</sup> Carole Lewis and W. Terry Whalin, *First Place* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2001), 32.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

please. You should “give your body to God” because “we are urged to present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice.”<sup>60</sup>

Some advice in the section, “Three Ways to Keep Motivated,” differs markedly from Charlie Shedd’s in *Pray Your Weight Away* and highlights the differences between Christian approaches to weight loss. Considering that *Pray Your Weight Away* was published 44 years before *First Place*, one might expect *First Place* to be more conversant with the language of feelings, but the opposite seems true. Shedd’s belief, stated definitively, is: “Whatever our problem, the fact is that we will remain obese, or return to heaviness again after weight loss, *unless our inner problem is resolved*.”<sup>61</sup> (Emphasis in original.) He names problems such as loneliness, inferiority, and self-hatred. In his discussion of “Prayer and the Subconscious,” he declares, “The major part of you is below the surface, in the dark.”<sup>62</sup> But “below the surface” is the realm of feelings, and Lewis says feelings are not to be trusted. “Don’t be ruled by your feelings,” she tells us. “Recognize the pitfalls of moods and kick yourself into action, rather than dwell on the negative sensation.”<sup>63</sup> She quotes Oswald Chambers, an evangelist from the early twentieth century, who said, “We will never get rid of moodiness by praying, but we will by kicking it out of our lives. Moods are nearly always rooted in some physical circumstance, not in our true inner self.”<sup>64</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Carole Lewis and W. Terry Whalin, *First Place* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2001), 34 – 35.

<sup>61</sup> Charlie W. Shedd, *Pray Your Weight Away* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1957), 52.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>63</sup> Carole Lewis and W. Terry Whalin, *First Place* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2001), 37 – 38.

<sup>64</sup> Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest: An Updated Edition in Today’s Language*, ed. James Reimann (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1992), n.p.

Chapter Three is “Obstacles to Overcome.” In the personal example at the chapter’s beginning, Lewis says *First Place* member Rhonda Holbrook used several Bible verses, such as Rom. 12:1, to “present her life to God...Rhonda got down on her knees and prayed, ‘God, I can’t do this program on my own, but I’m willing to do what You want.’ ” Rom. 12:1 reads, “I urge you...in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship,” (NIV).

Lewis cites fear of failure as one of the obstacles dieters need to overcome. She says that “fear is alive and well in the world of weight loss. Many people are afraid they will fail again after so many previous attempts to lose weight.”<sup>65</sup> Overweight people are often afraid they will be thought unattractive or will not succeed in their careers or relationships. These fears affect the way they function in life. Because *First Place* is a Christian diet program, Lewis is confident that God will deliver dieters from their fears. Lewis is also realistic about the difficulty of losing weight. She says, “God didn’t promise us that life would be rosy and without difficulty. Instead, the Lord promised to carry us through any situation and any trial.” She speaks from personal experience; in Chapter One, she reveals, “For many years I had tried repeatedly to lose forty pounds. When I was thirteen years old, I started dieting and from then on I tried almost every available weight-loss plan.”<sup>66</sup> She joined *First Place*, then became a leader and eventually the national director of the program. She uses her own life as an example to encourage other dieters to overcome their own difficulties.

<sup>65</sup> Carole Lewis and W. Terry Whalin, *First Place* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2001), 44.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

In Chapter Four, “The Spiritual Foundation,” Lewis emphasizes that *First Place* is built on “Biblical basics.” Like most Christian diet authors, she speaks of our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. We need balance and moderation in our lives: “Jesus Christ had a sense of balance in His life,” she says. She advocates for physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional balance, and says we must “obey God’s desire for our lives”<sup>67</sup> to enjoy the blessings He can give us. She also says, “feelings of peace don’t come until I obey with my mind and my will.”<sup>68</sup> *First Place* and other books in the Christian diet genre have this in common: they uniformly insist that dieters follow God’s will.

Lewis contradicts herself when discussing exercise. Early in Chapter Four, she says, “I loved jogging, but I despised strapping into a weight machine and lifting weights.”<sup>69</sup> However, less than a page later, she says proudly that “I’m one of the few people you will meet who absolutely loves to exercise.”<sup>70</sup> A few pages later, she tells us, “I always have plenty of excuses when I don’t want to exercise.”<sup>71</sup> In a later chapter, she admits that “in the area of exercise I can’t remember a single morning when I woke up and said, ‘Oh, this is wonderful. I get to exercise today.’ . . . But one of the commitments of *First Place* is exercise, and I know it’s important. Therefore I get up and show up for exercise.”<sup>72</sup> She has mixed feelings, but she is willing to make those feelings known in the interest of helping her fellow dieters and *First Place* members.

Lewis uses an unfortunate example in Chapter Five, “Discovering Balance.” In the discussion of “Life Out of Control,” she says, “For many years I loved reading good

<sup>67</sup> Carole Lewis and W. Terry Whalin, *First Place* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2001), 53.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

novels, and this area of my life got out of control.” She has recast an enriching leisure activity as an addiction. Yet a few pages later, she presents reading as one of several ways to achieve balance. She tells her audience, “Begin to read on a regular basis and it will increase your mental capacity.” These conflicting views of reading are a surprise, and leave us wondering why she holds both opinions. In the section on physical balance, she says, “Many thin people have high body fat, making them walking time bombs for a variety of diseases. It is wonderful to be thin if low body fat and lots of lean mass accompany it.” Here she is directly aligned with the culture of thinness.

Lewis declares, “Every sin is equal in God’s sight, but the sin of gluttony is worn like a walking advertisement.” Two observations can be made about this statement. Some sins truly are more serious than others; shoplifting is very different from acts of genocide or terrorism. The issue is a thorny doctrinal one, and cannot be resolved in the pages of a diet book. Yet Lewis repeats it in Chapter Six, where she says, “God’s Word teaches that there are no degrees of sin; one sin is not more horrible than another.” In addition, Lewis’s naming gluttony as a sin resembles Gwen Shamblin’s viewpoint that fat is sinful. Lewis also says, “Our primary motivation should not be for more energy or to avoid a heart attack but to please God with our bodies.” If this is the case, and being thin is wonderful, the way to please Him the most is to be as thin as possible.

Here and in Chapter Seven, Lewis quotes the Apostle Paul in I Cor. 9:27: When preparing for a race, Paul says, “...I beat my body and make it my slave...” This quotation is disturbing; it speaks of the body as an enemy to be conquered. Beating the body into submission also has the earmarks of anorexia or exercise addiction. Lewis says, “Our heavenly father is extremely patient and merciful with us. Therefore, shouldn’t we

be patient and merciful with ourselves?” A dieter who is able to be patient with herself should not find it necessary to mistreat her body in such a manner. In Chapter Two, Lewis has told us, “Don’t be ruled by your feelings,” but here, in Chapter Five, she says, “It is rare to find anyone in our society who has emotional stability...Many of us live totally out of our emotions.” Emotions are acceptable in Christian life if we turn them over to God and ask Him to heal our hurts. Lewis insists that “weight loss is not our primary goal” in *First Place*. She says, “Many people have never succeeded in weight loss because they haven’t dealt with their emotional pain.” She also acknowledges the many *First Place* members are “overeaters from emotional reasons...” In Chapter Seven, she aligns herself with Charlie Shedd, who locates the source of overweight deep inside us when he discusses “inner problems.” These may be loneliness, feelings of inferiority, self-hatred, resentment, and other unpleasant feelings. But God will deal gently with us, Lewis says, if we trust Him with those feelings.

In Chapter Six, “The First Six Commitments,” the author gives another example of a *First Place* member who is convinced that overeating is a sin. Carol, the member, says, “God...convicted me that my eating habits were sinful and that I needed to change.”<sup>73</sup> This remorsefulness is a reminder of Gwen Shamblin’s preaching that we are all sinners and must be saved and abandon our old ways of eating and living. Another claim that bears a strong resemblance to Shamblin’s view is Lewis’s instruction to “start by adoring God for his character.” Shamblin says, “...He is waiting to ‘show off’ His

<sup>73</sup> Carole Lewis and W. Terry Whalin, *First Place* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2001), 78.

love and character to us in totally fresh and unique ways. He is such a genius!”<sup>74</sup>

Although the two diets are very different, both uphold the belief that God is infinitely generous and benevolent.

*First Place* dietary requirements are found in Chapter Seven, “The Final Three Commitments.” Here the advice is straightforward and practical: “...eat fresh fruits and vegetables...Use whole-grain wheat products...Eliminate high-fat cheeses when possible.” She recommends that members give up processed sugar until they reach their goal weight, lower their fat intake, and drink at least eight glasses of water each day. “In fact,” she writes, “if you’re currently not drinking enough water, *it’s one of the significant lifestyle changes you can make.*” (Emphasis in original.) The eighth and possibly most important commitment is the Commitment Record, or CR. The CR is a form that members are asked to fill out daily to record their food intake and completion of the other eight commitments. Lynne Gerber’s research shows that members often resist filling out their CRs.<sup>75</sup> They may find the requirement to complete CRs, in addition to the other eight commitments, too burdensome.

The ninth commitment, exercise, is explained at length. Lewis generally follows exercise guidelines of the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (health.gov). *First Place* members are asked to “exercise three to five times a week aerobically and incorporate flexibility and strength training into your lifestyle...”<sup>76</sup> Lewis recommends walking, jogging, or running at least

<sup>74</sup> Gwen Shamblin, *The Weigh Down Diet* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 1997), 124.

<sup>75</sup> Lynne Gerber, *Seeking the Straight and Narrow: Weight Loss and Sexual Reorientation in Evangelical America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 123.

<sup>76</sup> “Adults: 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines,” *health.gov*, last modified April 6, 2016, accessed April 6, 2016, <http://health.gov/paguidelines/guidelines/adults.aspx>.

three miles a day; keeping an exercise log – not a formal commitment, but a suggestion – and choosing the best workout times. She also reminds the reader that exercise has great benefits for senior adults. It is interesting to note the order of the last two commitments. Instead of discussing the CR at the end to synthesize all the other commitments, she makes it the penultimate commitment and follows it with exercise, giving the exercise commitment a stronger position.

A *First Place* member who would like to become a leader can refer to Chapter Eight, “Beyond the Basics,” for a discussion of the organization’s conferences, fitness programs, and training. Chapter Nine, “A Dream for Tomorrow,” is intended to inspire *First Place* members who want to continue “the journey of a lifetime” as they “put God in first place in every aspect of . . . life.” In Chapter Ten, “*First Place* in My Life: Personal Testimonies,” eleven *First Place* members tell their own stories of losing weight while becoming closer to God. In four appendixes, Lewis gives nutritional information and food exchange lists; provides a sample Commitment Record; and gives advice on exercise and a sample Bible study. The book also includes brief endnotes.

The book has a number of paratextual features. The front cover is illustrated in color and crowded with elements (see Figure 2, page 63). The design incorporates three modified images of a Christian cross. The “T” in *First Place* is altered so it is shaped like a cross and calls to mind the figure of Christ on the cross, to make the connection between the diet and Christian principles. Two more crosses are created out of the letters in “spiritual,” “emotional,” “mental,” and “physical.” These crosses are in the cruciform shape of two lines crossing at right angles. One cross shows “spiritual” vertically and “emotional” as the horizontal crossbar, with the letter “i” at the intersection. The other



cross is a greatly modified cruciform shape, created out of the letters in “physical” and “mental.” This cross is upside down, so that the words intersect at the bottom instead of the top. The letter “i” is at the intersection of the arms, two of which are shortened. The repetition of the cross image on the cover emphasizes the importance of obeying God and living a Christian life.

The cover has color photographs of healthy foods, a man and woman running along a beach, and a woman in a yoga pose. The yoga pose is surprising, since yoga has been in disfavor with some evangelical and fundamentalist Christians. In 2010, the *New York Daily News* reported that “Southern Baptist Seminary President Albert Mohler unleashed a storm of controversy when he penned a critical essay...titled ‘Should Christians Practice Yoga?’ ...Mohler cautions Christians against the practice of yoga, saying that despite its evolution into a popular pastime, its spiritual basis violates the tenets of Christianity.”<sup>77</sup>

The cover also includes several lines of inspirational text summarizing the benefits of *First Place*. The back cover is typical of many nonfiction books. The text is advertising copy that declares the benefits of *First Place* and includes three endorsements, one from Beth Moore, a well-known Christian author. The back cover also shows a photograph of a woman dieter smiling at a balance-beam scale, the kind found in doctors’ offices. This photograph prepares the reader for the program’s claims to be a safe, medically-approved weigh loss plan. Both the front and back covers are visually busy, but the bright colors convey an impression of cheer and wholesomeness.

<sup>77</sup> Meena Hartenstein, “Yoga a dangerous ‘risk’ for Christians, cautions evangelical leader Albert Mohler, sparking backlash.” *New York Daily News* (New York), Oct. 8, 2010.

The first three pages of the book are endorsements from pastors, Christian authors, and educators. These endorsements assure the potential buyer that authorities vouch for the book's Christian viewpoint and the effectiveness of the diet. The title page shows, for the first time, the *First Place* logo: four stylized human figures with arms outstretched, inside a diamond shape that is actually a square turned on its side. The figures represent the four types of balance that a member needs for a successful *First Place* program: mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional balance. The logo conveys a lively and positive attitude, full of possibilities, and is repeated at the beginning of each chapter and appendix, as well as in other locations throughout the book.

A striped band appears at the top of the acknowledgements page and preface and the first page of each chapter and appendix. The band has a clean, tailored look that suggests a businesslike attitude to the work of dieting. Two typefaces are used in the book, in different sizes and weights. One typeface, a serif, is used for body type and in the tables that appear in Appendixes A and B. Sans serif type is used as a display type for the names of endorsers on the first three pages of the book, and for headings within each chapter. Appendixes A, B, and C include a form – a sample Commitment Record – and extensive tables of food exchanges and goals for walking and jogging. The tables contain a great deal of information that needs to be digested, and could intimidate the reader. They convey the message that the diet is to be taken seriously.

Chapter Ten, “*First Place* in My Life: Personal Testimonies,” includes before-and-after photographs of ten individuals who have lost weight using *First Place*. A few of the photographs appear to have been taken professionally; most are amateur photos. The black-and-white reproductions are not high quality; all are grainy, and some are out

of focus. This gives them a homespun look; they say to the reader, “We are ordinary people. If we can lose weight on this program, so can you.” Almost all of the photos, in both the “before” and “after” poses, show cheerful, smiling subjects. It is impossible to say whether the smiles are genuine, but these people seem happy at either weight, high or low.

The last pages of the book contain contact information, repeated several times, and advertising. *First Place* is an organization that wants to be accessible to readers and potential dieters. The *First Place* mission statement is included, along with an address where members can send their personal testimonies. Subsequent pages advertise starter kits for members and leaders, Bible studies, and the organization’s e-newsletter. There is an order form for *First Place* materials, and two pages of advertising for other books (mostly non-*First Place*) published by Regal Books, a division of Gospel Light.

The paratextual features of *First Place* demonstrate the earnestness of its concept. The book attempts to convert the reader to its point of view, to convince her of the rightness of its cause. The look of *First Place*, with its sincere presentation, encourages the reader to strive for a holier life, closer to God.

### *The Weigh Down Diet*

Gwen Shamblin is a dietitian from Tennessee. She developed her faith-based diet in 1986 and began holding workshops. *The Weigh Down Diet* was published in 1997 and sold over a million copies. When combined with the Weigh Down Workshop, it has been one of the most financially successful weight-loss ventures.<sup>78</sup>

Weigh Down “avoids strict rules and emphasizes transferring a relationship with food to a relationship with God,” says Rona Cherry of *Vegetarian Times*. Shamblin “believes that overweight people mistake a spiritual emptiness for a hunger for food. If you’ve tried every diet fad, try God instead.”<sup>79</sup> As Shamblin puts it, “...we have a ‘crush’ on food; food is our stronghold. We have given our heart to food.”<sup>80</sup>

We are assured that if we fall in love with God and focus on Him, we will be able to eat a few M&M’s® and save the rest of the bag for later. The author positions her readers for failure, because any dieter with a sweet tooth knows the futility of such an attempt. But she tells us to ignore the calorie counting guides and food exchange lists. Jesus has liberated us from dietary rules, and if we submit to God’s will, follow His rules for eating, and learn to pay attention to our own hunger signals, we will eat only when we are hungry and stop when we are full. Then the pounds will come off. She says we need to train “our focus...to turn toward the will of God and away from a focus on foods.”<sup>81</sup>

No food is a bad food, and we can eat anything we like. God created all foods and put them on earth to sustain us and give us pleasure. God has a wonderful personality and

<sup>78</sup> R. Marie Griffith, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 167.

<sup>79</sup> Rona Cherry, “Can You Pray Your Pounds Away?” *Vegetarian Times* 339 (March 2006): 80-83, accessed November 24, 2015, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.proxygw.wrlc.org>.

<sup>80</sup> Gwen Shamblin, *The Weigh Down Diet* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 1997), 144.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

“likes burrito supremes with extra sour cream.”<sup>82</sup> We are told, “The foods you want are not evil. This includes pizza, Fritos®, sour cream, desserts and ice cream... God is the genius chef behind lasagna and chocolate cheesecake. He did not put bagels and cream cheese on earth to torture us!”<sup>83</sup> “...God intended for us to enjoy all foods. I love both broccoli and Häagen-Dazs® ice cream, and I feel no guilt for whatever my body desires.”<sup>84</sup>

Shamblin advises us, “If we have not studied [God’s] personality, we might all be still eating chicken with the skin pulled off and lettuce with low-calorie dressing!”<sup>85</sup> This God does not want us to deny ourselves; yet, as we see later, we are bound to suffer and, while we are free to eat any food we like, we must also “die to food.” These two statements are contradictory.

Reading *The Weigh Down Diet* is torture for dieters who are accustomed to staying away from many of the foods Shamblin lists. She directs her readers, “Just barely skim the edge of the lemon meringue pie onto your fork and savor the smallest amount. Nibble on the edges of your favorite cookie. Let paper-thin slices of chocolate melt in your mouth.”<sup>86</sup> Most dieters could not bear this mouth-watering description of foods that are normally forbidden. Verbal pictures of tantalizing foods help to give Shamblin’s diet its controversial reputation.

<sup>82</sup> Gwen Shamblin, *The Weigh Down Diet* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 1997), 106.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

Promoting the culture of thinness, she says, “The motivation to be thin is not vanity – it is natural. God has programmed us to want the best for our bodies.”<sup>87</sup> God wants us “...to desire that the body should be at its right weight.”<sup>88</sup> And the best, the right weight, according to Shamblin, is the thinnest. Unfortunately, she dispenses misinformation when she announces, “...the single most related factor to longevity is thinness and, vice versa, the single most related factor to early death or accelerated aging is overeating.”<sup>89</sup> However, according to a study done by Glenn A. Gaesser at the University of Virginia and published in *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, “For overweight individuals in good health, there is no compelling evidence to show that mortality rates are reduced with weight loss.”<sup>90</sup>

Shamblin also says, “I just did not buy the idea that all overweight was a result of genetics or was inherited.”<sup>91</sup> This is in contravention to findings of medical researchers. Obesity is strongly heritable in humans, according to a study published in 2013 at the University of California Los Angeles.<sup>92</sup> Another study, published in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* in 2008, shows that adiposity in preadolescent children born

<sup>87</sup> Gwen Shamblin, *The Weigh Down Diet* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 1997), 5.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>90</sup> Glenn A. Gaesser, “Thinness and Weight Loss: Beneficial or Detrimental to Longevity?” *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* 31, no. 8 (1999): 1118-128, doi:10.1097/00005768-199908000-00007.

<sup>91</sup> Gwen Shamblin, *The Weigh Down Diet* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 1997), 17.

<sup>92</sup> Brian W. Parks, Elizabeth Nam, Elin Org, Emrah Kostem, Frode Norheim, Simon T. Hui, Calvin Pan, Mete Civelek, Christoph D. Rau, Brian J. Bennett, Margarete Mehrabian, Luke K. Ursell, Aiqing He, Lawrence W. Castellani, Bradley Zinker, Mark Kirby, Thomas A. Drake, Christian A. Drevon, Rob Knight, Peter Gargalovic, Todd Kirchgessner, Eleazar Eskin, and Aldons J. Lusa. “Genetic Control of Obesity and Gut Microbiota Composition in Response to High-Fat, High-Sucrose Diet in Mice,” *Cell Metabolism* 17.1 (2013): 141-52, accessed April 2, 2016, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov.proxygw.wrlc.org/pubmed/23312289>.

since the onset of the obesity epidemic is highly heritable.<sup>93</sup> Shamblin makes pronouncements that are not based on sound nutrition: “Good health is more related to when you eat and how you eat than what you eat, since most meal selections are so similar in chemical and nutrient content.”<sup>94</sup> Also, she says, “By drinking a couple of ounces of [orange] juice [or sweet beverage] before eating, you will quickly bring the blood sugar up enough to give you a calming effect that will allow you to approach the food with more control.”<sup>95</sup> These statements contradict advice from any dietitian except Shamblin herself.

She shares more misinformation: “You do not have to go to the health food store for good organic foods...If organic means chemical-free to you, think again. All foods contain carbon...No matter how someone grows them, they will have picked up the normal sprinkling of harmful substances.”<sup>96</sup> However, the U.S. Department of Agriculture states: “Produce can be called organic if it’s certified to have grown on soil that had no prohibited substances applied for three years prior to harvest. Prohibited substances include most synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.”<sup>97</sup> In the chapter titled, “Isn’t Broccoli Righteous and Häagen-Dazs a Sin?” she declares, “Vitamin C is found all through the pantry and refrigerator, and it is even in your French fries and ketchup!” To

<sup>93</sup> Jane Wardle, Susan Carnell, Clare MA Haworth, and Robert Plomin, “Evidence for a strong genetic influence on childhood adiposity despite the force of the obesogenic environment,” *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 87, no. 2 (February 2008): 398-404, <http://intl-ajcn.nutrition.org>.

<sup>94</sup> Gwen Shamblin, *The Weigh Down Diet* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 1997), 85.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>97</sup> Miles McEvoy, “USDA Blog,” March 22, 2012, accessed December 9, 2015, <http://blogs.usda.gov/2012/03/22/organic-101-what-the-usda-organic-label-means/>

characterize these highly processed foods as nutritious is irresponsible. But because they are popular, she says that “thin eating is fun.”<sup>98</sup>

When we read *The Weigh Down Diet*, we might be listening to an evangelist preaching. Her metaphoric reach extends far beyond food; she castigates those who indulge in “idolatry and witchcraft...drunkenness [and] orgies...”<sup>99</sup> She denies that depression is an illness; she calls it a “guilt-depression self-focused path which usually includes anti-depressants.”<sup>100</sup> She says that “anger and depression accompanied the first sin and every sin thereafter...all people have felt this *guilt-depression*...”<sup>101</sup> (Emphasis in original.) Her hyperbolic language cheapens deep spiritual beliefs. We should forget pills; God is the cure for depression. We are expected to feel badly; she says, “It is really hard even to know what God’s will is until we have a broken and contrite heart – a deeply sorrowful heart...”<sup>102</sup> Feeling terrible is no guarantee of success at dieting. But we were born to suffer, she tells us. “Try to get out of any suffering, including the painful suffering of dying to yourself with food.”<sup>103</sup> We must die to our own wills and submit ourselves to God’s. Otherwise, “God will make the heart feel bad if it is not in line.”<sup>104</sup>

Not all of us are privileged to have her special insight into God’s personality. “You may not really believe He is there and is that personal...If you run to Him for everything, you will be rewarded...Are you low in money, need your roof fixed or your car repaired?... God is our Financier, Comforter, Mechanic, Lawyer, Physician,

<sup>98</sup> Gwen Shamblin, *The Weigh Down Diet* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 1997), 171.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 239-40.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.



Counselor, Friend, Husband, Defender, Trusting Leader, and Father.”<sup>105</sup> This God will answer all our requests; we will not need extra potato chips to make us happy.

We must face “death to this desire to eat,”<sup>106</sup> yet we can eat anything we want. Shamblin qualifies this seemingly lenient direction by telling us we must eat only when hungry and stop when full. But if we could abide by these rules, we would not need a diet book.

We read that counselors feed “the population the untruth that people do not love themselves.”<sup>107</sup> Not true, she says; we love ourselves too much. “Do not take the bad advice to pamper yourselves, because you will despise your overly self-indulgent actions.” If we indulge in “desire eating,” we have only ourselves to blame; not the restaurants that sell super-size portions, not the magazines that publish fattening recipes, not the food industry that adds fat, salt and sugar to processed foods to make us crave them.

The Bible is invoked as a diet book. In Mark 7:19 (NIV), Jesus said, “‘For it doesn’t go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.’ (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)”<sup>108</sup> Col. 2:16 (NIV) advises: “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink....” Dieters will need all the help they can get to train themselves to listen to their bodies’ hunger signals and withstand the temptation to eat an entire bag of M&M’s®. She offers reassurance: “God loves to feed you and will never let you starve...There is no food and no occasion that should cause you to eat

<sup>105</sup> Gwen Shamblin, *The Weigh Down Diet* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

outside of the context of hunger! God knows your favorites. Be a little more patient and let Him indulge you with them under His rules: hunger and fullness.”<sup>109</sup>

Some opinions in *The Weigh Down Diet* show common sense. Its author says, “...billions of dollars are spent by the food industry to make us feel needy...so we will consume whatever is sold. In fact, the more diets fail, the better off the industry is.”<sup>110</sup> We are asked, “After dieting for a couple of decades, have you become even more focused on food than you were before...?” The author says that “...diet rules...make us focus on food. We get up in the morning thinking about what we are going to eat and what we are not going to eat.”<sup>111</sup> Shamblin also states, “...dieting is the perfect environment to cultivate a deeper love for food...years of dieting breeds the ‘starve-binge-purge’ cycle.”<sup>112</sup> But a few paragraphs later, she preaches that “...purging is not some disease or obsession. It is all a consequence of your lust for food.”<sup>113</sup> Bingeing and purging should be treated as the serious illnesses they are. Yet she says that “when food is the object of our affection, bingeing is a delight.”<sup>114</sup>

The most serious flaw in *The Weigh Down Diet* is the author’s disparagement of anorexia nervosa. She claims that anorexia is a “coping path” and “is successful in drawing attention; however, the anorexic person needs to know that this behavior will not be rewarded by God...This means of control does not bear fruit.”<sup>115</sup> A study published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* in 1995 concluded that anorexia nervosa is “...a

<sup>109</sup> Gwen Shamblin, *The Weigh Down Diet* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 1997), 87.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

serious psychiatric disorder with a substantial risk of mortality.”<sup>116</sup> But instead of accepting the seriousness of anorexia, Shamblin attributes it to sinful behavior. She says that anorexics “are ‘self-disciplined’ controllers who have not tasted the fruit of ‘God-control.’”<sup>117</sup>

Being fat is sinful, and thinness is the way to win God’s approval. We must submit to His will and His rules, and He will teach us how to know when we are truly hungry and when we are full and it is time to stop. Although she preaches that “the world will tell you...that you must indulge or take care of yourself...,”<sup>118</sup> many self-help books and mental health practitioners would agree with the following: “To embrace changing our self is to embrace growing pains.”<sup>119</sup> “Dying to yourself with food”<sup>120</sup> is going to be painful, but reading Shamblin’s salaciously mouth-watering descriptions of chocolate desserts is agonizing.

Shamblin’s book, like *Pray Your Weight Away*, has a number of paratextual features that lend themselves to interpretation. The first is the cover (Figure 3, page 64). A conventional title would read *The Weigh Down Diet* with the author’s name below it. Instead, the book’s full title is *Gwen Shamblin’s Inspirational Way to Lose Weight, Stay Slim, and Find a New You: the Weigh Down Diet*. Use of the possessive connotes not only authorship, but familiarity – a friendly, casual relationship between Shamblin and potential book-buyers – and ownership. This book is Shamblin’s very own creation, and she is offering it to the beleaguered dieter in need of divine assistance. A photograph of

<sup>116</sup> P.F. Sullivan, “Mortality in Anorexia Nervosa,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 152, no. 7 (1995): 1073-074.

<sup>117</sup> Gwen Shamblin, *The Weigh Down Diet* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 1997), 262.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

Shamblin with her teased blonde hair and slash of bright red lipstick is displayed prominently on the front cover instead of the back. This also emphasizes the personal connection to her readers; she is inviting us into the book.

Every chapter contains figures that give the book a pseudo-scientific air. For instance, Figure 1-1<sup>121</sup> is emblematic of a human form with two shapes inside it, representing the heart and the stomach. The caption reads, “God created two empty places in each of us.” We are given to understand that the “person who attempts to feed a longing heart with food will stay on the path to overweight.” Figure 7-1<sup>122</sup> is the same human form over the caption, “As the heart fills up with love from God, the desire to ‘feed’ the soul with physical food disappears.” This is the central point of Shamblin’s message and the reason she tells us that no foods are off-limits: we will not want them if God is satisfying our deepest needs.

Figure 12-1<sup>123</sup> shows a divided highway with a human figure standing at the fork. “God’s Will” is the path that leads to the shining figure above the clouds, but if the dieter focuses on the world (a globe), she is headed down the “Road of Sin and Guilt.” Shamblin makes good use of this illustration; Figure 18-1<sup>124</sup> is a much expanded version of the “Road of Sin and Guilt,” with several side paths leading to dead ends. The dead ends are labeled “there is no guilt,” “self-focus, guilt and depression,” “deeper self-focus, compulsive behaviors,” “anger projection,” and “passion seekers.” These are the results of focusing on the world instead of God. When the dieter gives God primacy in her life, she reaches her goal of a right relationship with Him. Both figures, and three other

<sup>121</sup> Gwen Shamblin, *The Weigh Down Diet* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

illustrations that are similar but not numbered, are a road map for life: they give the reader clear directions and warn of the consequences of straying.

The most powerful illustration in the book is Figure 13-2,<sup>125</sup> which shows a statue representing “false Gods” and a column that stands for “YHWH, the Lord Almighty.” Simulated carved lettering on the statue defines “false Gods” in language that fundamentalists will understand, and describes the dire results of giving in to these “parasitic leeches.” On the column representing God is a lengthy list of His many roles and attributes, including “perfect artist, organizer, coordinator, physician, financier, perfect lawyer, and architect.” Grimly, the “False Gods” statue is shaped like a coffin, while the column symbolizes strength and ancient, exalted wisdom.

The book includes several worksheets that fall into the liminal space between text and illustration. One, a “Heart and Behavior Change List,”<sup>126</sup> contains space to write “your positive behavioral changes.” A second, “*Weigh Down* Workshop Seek Ye First,” resembles a page in a personal planner. It has spaces to list “Worries I give to God today,” “Areas of obedience to God,” and “Things to do today.” Appendix D,<sup>127</sup> a “Travel Diary,” is for the journey from Egypt, a metaphorical desert, to the Promised Land. The reader has half a page to write “Loving thoughts to the Father.” Another half page is allotted to “Heartfelt lessons from the Father.” These worksheets are offered as an efficient way to do God’s will.

The lack of restraint in food choices is a radical concept for a dieter. It offers a seeming freedom limited only by her own hunger: a drawing of a handful of M&M’s®

<sup>125</sup> Gwen Shamblin, *The Weigh Down Diet* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 1997), 146.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 307-14.

entices the reader. In addition, the author is Southern and may perceive herself as needing approval from the male establishment. The result is an attempt to make her material appear authoritative by including figures and illustrations that lend the book an air of credibility.

### *What Would Jesus Eat?*

Don Colbert, M.D., the author of *What Would Jesus Eat? The Ultimate Program for Eating Well, Feeling Great, and Living Longer*, is a Florida physician. He has written several books on diet and health, including *Dr. Colbert's "I Can Do This" Diet* and *The What Would Jesus Eat Cookbook*. *What Would Jesus Eat?* was published in 2002; the book owes its title to the WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) movement that peaked in the late 1990s, when Christian merchandise, including bracelets, T-shirts, and books, all bearing the initials WWJD, was heavily marketed.<sup>128</sup> Colbert describes the book as presenting a “diet plan,” but it differs from *First Place*, for example, by being an eating guide based on the foods Jesus ate instead of restricting types and amounts of allowable foods and setting specific rules for dieters to follow. In the Introduction, he says his approach “presents ‘the Jesus way of eating’ . . . If we eat as Jesus ate, we will be healthier.”<sup>129</sup> His eating plan emphasizes “whole foods; fresh foods; pure water and foods without pesticides, fungicides, or additives; and foods that have not been laced with sugar or infused with fat, salt additives, or chemical preservatives.”<sup>130</sup> He also says, “Eating a diet high in salt, low in fiber, very high in fat and sugar, and virtually void of nutrients is

<sup>128</sup> Mike Fleischmann, “7 Priorities That Guided Jesus' Decisions,” *ChristianityToday.com*, May 1, 2003, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/articles/theology/7-priorities-that-guided-jesus-decisions.html>.

<sup>129</sup> Don Colbert, *What Would Jesus Eat? The Ultimate Program for Eating Well, Feeling Great, and Living Longer* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2002), x.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

not the way Jesus ate.”<sup>131</sup> Colbert is concerned with more than losing weight; good overall health and nutrition are his goals.

According to Colbert, we should ask ourselves “...two key questions about everything [we] eat today: ‘Why do I eat this?’ and ‘Would Jesus eat this?’”<sup>132</sup> This will help us realize that we are not making good, healthy food choices and need to change them.

He agrees with researchers<sup>133</sup> who have found that the Southern diet is not healthy: “When you think of Southern cooking, of what do you think? Almost everything is fried.” He is speaking to an audience of evangelical Christians about the Southern diet in general. These readers use Christian diet books, but also attend church suppers where a great variety of high-calorie, high-fat foods are served. He hopes to convince them to change their eating habits.

The nutritional advice in the book is sound; dietitians would generally agree with it. Citing Eric Schlosser’s *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*, Colbert asks, “Are you aware that the three most commonly consumed foods in America are white bread, coffee, and hot dogs?”<sup>134</sup> He recommends that we avoid convenience foods, or highly processed foods, that “range from chips to sodas, white bread to French

<sup>131</sup> Don Colbert, *What Would Jesus Eat? The Ultimate Program for Eating Well, Feeling Great, and Living Longer* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2002), xii.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>133</sup> James M. Shikany, Dr.P.H., Monika M. Safford, M.D., P.K. Newby, Sc.D., M.P.H., M.S., Raegan W. Durant, M.D., Todd M. Brown, M.D., Suzanne E. Judd, Ph.D., “Southern Dietary Pattern Is Associated With Hazard of Acute Coronary Heart Disease in the Reasons for Geographic and Racial Differences in Stroke (REGARDS) Study,” *Circulation* 132 (2015): 804-14, accessed February 13, 2016, doi:10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.114.014421.

<sup>134</sup> Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Underside of the All-American Meal* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 6.

fries, crackers to cookies, high-sugar cereals to margarine...<sup>135</sup> and choose foods in their natural state as often as possible. “Jesus did not eat processed foods, too much sugar, or food additives,”<sup>136</sup> and we should follow His example.

The author describes Jesus as a model eater, for His own or any other time period. He expands on what Jesus actually ate to include foods that Jesus would have eaten, had they been available to Him. For example, soybeans, “One of the major sources of high-quality protein...were not available in Israel at the time of Jesus. Had they been, I feel certain that Jesus would have eaten them regularly.”<sup>137</sup> This conclusion is convenient, but we cannot know with certainty whether Jesus would have done so.

He gives extensive Scriptural references for his nutritional advice. In the chapter on bread, “the food that Jesus ate most often,” he tells the story of how the Israelites survived in the desert for forty years by eating manna provided by God. Manna was an unfamiliar substance that fell from the skies nightly and could be cooked like grain in pans or made into cakes. Manna “...had the taste of ‘pastry prepared with oil’ or ‘wafers made with honey’ (Num. 11:8; Exod. 16:31, NKJV).” He says that bread was used as “food payment for...security services.”<sup>138</sup> The young David (before he was king of Judah) and his men provided these “security services,” which today would be known as protection money,<sup>139</sup> “...for farmers who had flocks grazing in the areas near where David

<sup>135</sup> Don Colbert, *What Would Jesus Eat? The Ultimate Program for Eating Well, Feeling Great, and Living Longer* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2002), 3.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>139</sup> “Protection Money,” *BusinessDictionary.com*, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/protection-money.html>.



and his men hid out in caves...”<sup>140</sup> A woman named Abigail gave bread and other foods to David when her husband refused to do so. Colbert defends this practice, which is carried out by criminal organizations, saying, “God, through the services of Abigail, provided bread for David.”

He also discusses Jewish dietary laws on clean and unclean fish, explaining that fish with fins and scales are considered clean, while shellfish, which include clams, oysters, crabs, lobsters, shrimp, and prawns, are unclean and should not be eaten. Catfish are also unclean; applying this sanction to today, Colbert says, “Catfish caught in rivers and streams are perhaps the most contaminated of all bottom-feeding fish...”

Like shrimp, lobsters, and all other shellfish, catfish were initially created by God to act as cleansing agents for natural water sources. These creatures have a great ability to absorb pollutants but not become sick by them. They can and do, however, pass on those pollutants to human beings who eat their flesh.<sup>141</sup>

Basing his advice on the eating customs of Biblical times, Colbert recommends that we “limit our consumption of red meat” and avoid pork altogether. He says, “The eating of meat in the Scriptures is regularly associated with gluttony... The Bible takes a strong stance against gluttony—the routine practice of overeating...”<sup>142</sup>

Throughout their history, the Jews have regarded those who overate and drank excessively to be people who were selfish, self-indulgent, and undisciplined. These character traits are opposite of the godly character qualities of restraint, self-control, and generosity toward others.<sup>143</sup>

The injunction against gluttony carries the weight of a Biblical command. The desirable character traits could be goals that any faithful evangelical Christian hopes to

<sup>140</sup> Don Colbert, *What Would Jesus Eat? The Ultimate Program for Eating Well, Feeling Great, and Living Longer* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2002), 21.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

achieve. But two millennia separate today's Christians and the ancient Jews whose diets Colbert is encouraging Christians to emulate. He states, "Many of the vegetables that have high amounts of phytonutrients—those nutrients that are most potent in protecting us from cancer and heart disease—are not mentioned in the Bible. They are not commonly available in Mediterranean nations, yet they are powerful allies for health."<sup>144</sup>

The Biblical story of Daniel is given as an example of the benefits of eating vegetables. Daniel and three friends were captured by the Babylonians, but were well treated; they "were given a portion of the king's own dietary fare... wine to drink and delicacies from the king's table."<sup>145</sup> However, they refused this rich fare and asked for vegetables and water instead. At the end of their captivity, "these four young men were 'ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in his realm' in matters of 'wisdom and understanding' (Dan. 1:20)."<sup>146</sup> Including this story is prophetic: a more recent Christian diet book, *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life*, is a bestseller and will be discussed next.

Considering evangelicals' views on alcohol and the potential for alcohol abuse in the wider society, pointing out the health benefits of wine places Colbert in a difficult position. He is careful to give both sides of the argument, citing Biblical warnings about excessive alcohol consumption as well as scientific and medical evidence defending the use of moderate amounts of wine. He concludes that wine should be used sparingly and encourages the use of nonalcoholic wine and wine substitutes. For dessert, Jesus would have eaten fruits such as grapes, raisins, figs, and dates. Eating healthy fruit instead of

<sup>144</sup> Don Colbert, *What Would Jesus Eat? The Ultimate Program for Eating Well, Feeling Great, and Living Longer* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2002), 94.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

high-fat processed foods such as cake and ice cream is a start toward losing weight, which the author discusses in a separate chapter.

Three chapters of the book cover exercise, losing weight, and the Mediterranean Diet. Jesus exercised by walking, Colbert says, and he recommends both aerobic exercise, which includes walking, and weight-bearing exercise, which helps maintain bone density and prevent osteoporosis. In the chapter titled “Using the Foods Jesus Ate to Lose Weight,” Colbert lists six eating guidelines that repeat the advice given earlier about limiting consumption of starches; olive oil; fish, poultry, and red meat; and red wine. The Mediterranean Diet is very similar to the foods that Jesus ate, and Colbert says he is “a strong advocate for the Mediterranean Diet as a whole.”<sup>147</sup> The last chapter includes a daily eating plan and menus for one week.

The cover of *What Would Jesus Eat?* (Figure 4, page 65) is smart and inviting. Designed by the coauthor of *Branding for Dummies*, one of a series of popular how-to guides, it reinforces the book’s message that eating foods in their natural state is the way to stay healthy. The front cover displays the title in white type on a black panel. It is dramatic and authoritative, and resembles the label on a business report. Four different type sizes are used on the panel; this type hierarchy, with “Jesus” and “Eat” the largest, emphasizes the theme of the book. The panel is surrounded by color photographs of fresh, natural foods: vegetables and fruits, olive oil, bread, and fresh fish. These are the foods that Jesus would have eaten, and the clear, bright earth tones and crisp photography convey a clean look, full of optimism and the possibility that our health can indeed be improved by eating these foods. The author’s name is below the title, but still very

<sup>147</sup> Don Colbert, *What Would Jesus Eat? The Ultimate Program for Eating Well, Feeling Great, and Living Longer* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2002), 196.

prominent; he is identified as a physician, which lends credibility to his work. The panel and author's name are surrounded by a double rule, less than one-half inch from the edges of the book, which frames and emphasizes them. At the top right corner of the front cover is a red triangle with "175,000 copies sold" in white. The triangle resembles a tab or bookmark that invites the browser to turn the page and open the book.

On the back cover, the foods are shown in an unusual design. Most of the photograph is lightened so that it is transparent, and several paragraphs of text are printed over it. Repeating the front cover design, these paragraphs and the transparent part of the photograph are surrounded by a border. The border consists of the edges of the photograph in full color. This framing effect sets off the text nicely and reinforces the theme established on the front cover, that we should emulate Jesus in the foods we eat. The text within the frame describes and promotes the book and gives a brief summary of the author's qualifications.

The book includes one chart and two illustrations. In Chapter Eleven, "Using the Foods Jesus Ate to Lose Weight," there is a full-page chart that can be used to determine a person's body mass index (BMI). The chart is unlabeled and unnumbered. In the text on the facing page, Colbert gives the equation (in metric measurements) for determining BMI. Two food guide pyramids are found in Chapter Twelve, "The Mediterranean Healthstyle." First is the food guide pyramid developed by USDA; second is the Mediterranean Diet pyramid. Neither pyramid is labeled or numbered, but both are discussed at length in the text.

Following the last chapter are notes, a bibliography, information about the author and how to contact him, and an advertisement for *The What Would Jesus Eat Cookbook*,

also written by Colbert. The last page before the back cover is an invitation to become a Christian. Colbert invites the reader to pray:

Lord Jesus, I want to know You as my Savior and Lord. I believe You are the Son of God, and that You died for my sins. I also believe you were raised from the dead and now sit at the right hand of the Father praying for me. I ask You to forgive me for my sins and change my heart so that I can be Your child and live with You eternally. Thank You for Your peace. Help me to walk with You so that I can begin to know You as my best friend and my Lord.<sup>148</sup>

He then invites the reader to attend a local church and read the Bible daily. It is unusual for a diet book to offer such an invitation. Here Colbert is taking the role of pastor in a Protestant evangelical church. At the end of a typical church service, there is a period when members of the congregation are invited to come forward, speak to the pastor, and profess their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. This is the conversion experience for an evangelical Christian. Colbert's prayer is similar to what a non-Christian, or unsaved, person might say as he tells the pastor that he wants to become a Christian.

*The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life*

Rick Warren, D.Min., the principal author of *The Daniel Plan*, founded "...the seventh-largest church in the U.S...the 20,000-member Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California."<sup>149</sup> He wrote *The Purpose Driven Life*, "...the best selling hardback in U.S. history with more than thirty million copies sold and translated into over fifty

<sup>148</sup> Don Colbert, *What Would Jesus Eat? The Ultimate Program for Eating Well, Feeling Great, and Living Longer* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2002), n.p.

<sup>149</sup> Olga Khazan, "The Diet from God," *The Atlantic*, last modified November 26, 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/11/the-diet-from-god/281816>.

languages...”<sup>150</sup> *The Daniel Plan* was number one on *The New York Times* bestseller list on December 22, 2013,<sup>151</sup> and was on the *Publishers Weekly* bestseller list for fifteen weeks in 2014.<sup>152</sup>

*The Daniel Plan* was coauthored by Daniel Amen, M.D., a physician and psychiatrist, and Mark Hyman, M.D., also a physician. The book opens with “How It All Began,” which introduces the program and gives its history. Rick Warren told his congregation, “...I’ve only gained two to three pounds a year, but I have been your pastor for thirty years. So I need to lose ninety pounds!” Warren says that he “...recruited three nationally known doctors –Dr. Daniel Amen, Dr. Mark Hyman, and Dr. Mehmet Oz – to coach me in getting healthy and help me design *The Daniel Plan* to be used in our church.”<sup>153</sup> After following *The Daniel Plan* for one year, “...Saddleback members collectively lost more than 250,000 pounds!”<sup>154</sup>

About the title, Warren says, “Since I was preaching...about a man in the Bible named Daniel who refused to eat junk food and challenged a king to a health contest, I named the program The Daniel Plan.”<sup>155</sup> In *What Would Jesus Eat? The Ultimate Program for Eating Well, Feeling Great, and Living Longer*, Don Colbert also tells the

<sup>150</sup> Michelle A. Vu, “Christian Books Still Dominate All-Time Best-Sellers Lists,” *The Christian Post, CP Entertainment*, last modified July 4, 2007, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/christian-books-still-dominate-all-time-best-sellers-lists-28293/print.html>.

<sup>151</sup> “Best Sellers: Advice, How-to and Miscellaneous,” *The New York Times*, December 22, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/best-sellers-books/2013-12-22/advice-how-to-and-miscellaneous/list.html>.

<sup>152</sup> Daisy Maryles, “What the Numbers Reveal About the 2014 Bestsellers,” *Publishers Weekly*, January 9, 2015, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/bookselling/article/65249-what-the-numbers-reveal-about-the-2014-bestsellers.html>.

<sup>153</sup> Rick Warren, D.Min., Daniel Amen, M.D., and Mark Hyman, M.D., *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 15-16.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

story of Daniel and his friends' experience in Babylonian captivity.<sup>156</sup>

“How It All Began” includes several lists of principles, traits or components; dividing the material into short lists makes it easy to follow, and suited to today's short attention spans. The first of these lists is *The Daniel Plan*'s “five essential components: Food, Fitness, Focus, Faith, and Friends.”<sup>157</sup> Each component has its own chapter in the book.

Faith, the first essential, is the basis of all evangelical projects. Warren says, “We know our faith relies on God. He's the one who builds it and sustains it....*The Daniel Plan* starts with faith...Where God guides, he provides. What he calls you to do, he equips you to do...But you must rely on Jesus.”<sup>158</sup> This reliance on Jesus is the underpinning of all belief, and evangelical Christians see it as an absolute: it is not open to debate. He also says, “You have to keep going even when you want to quit...God's grace is always there, even when you are tired or tempted.”<sup>159</sup> Not giving up, not being a quitter, continuing to press on – these are bywords for any diet. Here they are strengthened by adding faith to the formula.

Warren uses business metaphors, saying, “...invite Jesus to be the Savior and Lord (manager) of your life.”<sup>160</sup> Characterizing Jesus as a business manager appeals to the businessmen he hopes to reach. He asks, “Would you like to succeed at everything you do? God makes that promise.” This is the American gospel of success in a diet book. If

<sup>156</sup> Don Colbert, *What Would Jesus Eat? The Ultimate Program for Eating Well, Feeling Great, and Living Longer* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 98-99.

<sup>157</sup> Rick Warren, D.Min., Daniel Amen, M.D., and Mark Hyman, M.D., *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 16.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

we follow his prescriptions and obey God's will, we are bound to succeed.

He says, "Food is the most powerful drug on the planet...It can cure most chronic diseases, and it works faster, better, and cheaper than any drug."<sup>161</sup> Cooking and eating "real" food is an important principle of *The Daniel Plan*. Warren says, "'convenience' foods" have "led to depression, obesity, fatigue, and...lifestyle diseases such as heart disease, depression, and acid reflux."<sup>162</sup> He tells us, "As Dr. Hyman says, 'Cooking is a revolutionary act...' We have unfortunately abdicated the essential act of cooking...to the food industry. We have outsourced our cooking to corporations. We need to bring the cooking back home."<sup>163</sup>

Fitness, the third essential, is vital for health. To encourage people to exercise and move their bodies, Warren asks them to focus on activities they enjoy. This will help ensure that they persevere with exercise instead of attempting it, but quitting later. He uses the prophet Daniel as an example, saying that Daniel "...wasn't born with his strength..." but "nurtured it" so he would have "a strong body."<sup>164</sup>

Discussing "The Focus Essential," Warren says, "Your mental health is vital for your overall health. Negative thoughts, positive thoughts, or lack of thought can consume you...Whatever gets the most of your mind's attention will direct many other areas of your life."<sup>165</sup> Learning to replace negative thoughts with positive ones is a technique used in cognitive-behavioral therapy.

The section on "The Friends Essential" emphasizes the need for support from

<sup>161</sup> Rick Warren, D.Min., Daniel Amen, M.D., and Mark Hyman, M.D., *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 36.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.



like-minded others. “God created the universe in such a way that we need each other,”<sup>166</sup> Warren says, and “God never meant for you to go through life solo.” Like many other diet books, *The Daniel Plan* is declared unique. “Diet and nutrition books can give you the nuts and bolts,” Warren says, “but only the mutual support of others can increase your results and sustain them.”<sup>167</sup> Stressing the need for community, Warren says, “...some habits are so strong, we must team-tackle them together.”<sup>168</sup> By using a sports metaphor, he appeals to a male audience. One of the most important features of *The Daniel Plan*, in both the writing and design, is its relatability; readers can see themselves in the examples used. He also outlines the “ways that a small group can assist you in your journey to health...” They can assist by “encouraging you, praying for you, supporting you, and giving you feedback.”<sup>169</sup> Warren is a pioneer in using small groups in his church “to worship and pray.”<sup>170</sup> In a *New Yorker* article about Warren and Saddleback Church, Malcolm Gladwell refers to the “...small group as an instrument of community...in the postwar years Alcoholics Anonymous and its twelve-step progeny perfected the small-group technique.”<sup>171</sup>

Warren gives himself as an example of the benefit of having a group of friends. After “a tragic loss”<sup>172</sup> (his son’s suicide),<sup>173</sup> he says, “I didn’t sleep much, and that left

<sup>166</sup> Rick Warren, D.Min., Daniel Amen, M.D., and Mark Hyman, M.D., *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 46.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>170</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, “The Cellular Church: How Rick Warren’s Congregation Grew,” *The New Yorker*, September 12, 2005, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/09/12/the-cellular-church>, n.p.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, n.p.

<sup>172</sup> Rick Warren, D.Min., Daniel Amen, M.D., and Mark Hyman, M.D., *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 16.

me exhausted, both emotionally and physically...I stopped making healthy choices and began to add unwanted weight.”<sup>174</sup> He continues, “as anyone in recovery will tell you, setbacks are part of the process in long-term change...I simply asked God and my friends to help me get back on track.”<sup>175</sup>

Warren also shares “five radical truths about our bodies that run counterculturally to everything you hear today.”<sup>176</sup> Several passages are of interest. Warren refers to popular television programs to show how much our bodies are worth to Jesus. He says, “Millions of TV viewers love watching *American Pickers* and *Pawn Stars* because it’s fun to guess how much old items are worth.”<sup>177</sup> This is another example of the book’s relatability. Using popular TV programs as examples helps to make concepts and principles accessible. Warren adopts the language of computer software to make a point about eternity. He says, “Right now you are living in the 1.0 version of your body. You will get the 2.0 version of your body in heaven.”<sup>178</sup>

Warren says, “Lasting change requires new ways of thinking...The way you think determines the way you feel, and the way you feel determines the way you act. If you want to change how you act, you must begin by changing the way you think. Your thoughts are the autopilot of your life.”<sup>179</sup> He has adapted a principle from cognitive-behavioral therapy, as popularized by David D. Burns in *The Feeling Good Handbook*.

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<sup>173</sup> Kate Shellnutt, “Rick Warren Tells Story of Son’s Suicide on CNN,” *Christianity Today, Gleanings*, last modified September 18, 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2013/september/rick-warren-tells-story-son-matthew-suicide-cnn.html>.

<sup>174</sup> Rick Warren, D.Min., Daniel Amen, M.D., and Mark Hyman, M.D., *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 16.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-21.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

According to Burns, “Your thoughts and attitudes, not external events, create your feelings. You can learn to change the way you think, feel, and behave in the here-and-now.”<sup>180</sup> Readers must use their God-given minds to change their actions and form healthier eating and fitness habits.

In another comparison of *The Daniel Plan* to non-Christian self-improvement programs, he says, “...diets, quit-smoking plans, and other self-help efforts based on willpower eventually fail.” He uses the autopilot as a metaphor: “Your autopilot is the collection of thoughts and ideas in your mind that you believe to be true about yourself and what feels natural.”<sup>181</sup> Here he draws again from cognitive-behavioral therapy, where a collection of thoughts and ideas about oneself is known as a belief system.<sup>182</sup> “...God can change your mental autopilot...He specializes in giving you a new mind-set. That new mind-set will change the way you feel, which will change the way you act...”<sup>183</sup>

The message of *The Daniel Plan* is about wellness as much as weight loss. It is about encouraging people to heal, and giving them the tools they need. The paratext conveys this message of healing by using soothing colors for the cover and interior. Chapters and subchapters are divided into short sections, making them easy to digest. Throughout the book, concepts and tools are arranged in lists such as “five elements for

<sup>180</sup> David D. Burns, *The Feeling Good Handbook, Revised ed.*, (New York: Plume, 1999), 4.

<sup>181</sup> Rick Warren, D.Min., Daniel Amen, M.D., and Mark Hyman, M.D., *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 64.

<sup>182</sup> Aaron T. Beck, “Cognitive Therapy: Nature and Relation to Behavior Therapy,” *Behavior Therapy*, vol. 1, iss. 2 (May 1970): 184-200, accessed March 4, 2016, doi: 10.1016/S0005-7894(70)80030-2.

<sup>183</sup> Rick Warren, D.Min., Daniel Amen, M.D., and Mark Hyman, M.D., *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 64.

lasting change;”<sup>184</sup> five “Essentials;” five ways that “God’s power works,”<sup>185</sup> and numerous lists of foods and exercises, many of them set apart in light green boxes to make them more usable. These divisions and lists make the content of the book approachable, and the reader feels that following *The Daniel Plan* is doable, a reasonable project that can be carried out in everyday life.

The examination of paratextual features begins with the book jacket and cover (Figure 5, page 66). They are aesthetically pleasing and eye-catching because they are designed in appealing shades of pastel green and blue and printed on heavy, glossy paper. The combination makes *The Daniel Plan* sleeker than the average Christian diet book. The colors call to mind kitchen appliances of several decades ago, and could belong in a kitchen today. They gently invite the reader to open the book and explore it. They soothe the viewer and convey a message of simplicity and peace.

Green and blue are also used for the hard covers of the book itself. Green is the dominant color on the front of the book jacket, and blue is used for the end flaps. The front book jacket is divided into three bands. The most prominent is the light green center band, which contains the title, *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life*, in white capital letters. “*The Daniel Plan*” is in larger, sans-serif type, and “Daniel” is bold. Inside the D in “Daniel,” a cross is centered. The cross is symbolic on two levels: it is the same shape as the International Red Cross symbol, suggesting that The Daniel Plan offers aid. It also resembles a Christian cross, reminding the reader that Christian principles are the basis of The Daniel Plan. The combination of striking colors, sophisticated typefaces, and

<sup>184</sup> Rick Warren, D.Min., Daniel Amen, M.D., and Mark Hyman, M.D., *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 23.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-61.

secular and Christian crosses establishes the brand of *The Daniel Plan*, both book and diet, with a subtle appeal to non-Christian readers.

The band at the top of the cover consists of five small color photographs. The first three photographs – of a woman holding a Bible, a cornucopia of fruits and vegetables, and a runner’s legs and feet – represent faith, food, and fitness, the first three of the five Daniel Plan essentials. The fourth photograph shows a man from behind. He sits on a bench and appears to be reflecting as he looks out at a peaceful scene – a lake and trees beyond it – which represents focus, the fourth essential. Reading the fifth photograph is revealing. It represents friends, the fifth essential, and shows two young men laughing and enjoying each others’ company. One of the young men is white and the other is African American; this does not appear to be an obstacle to their friendship. This photograph conveys the message that friendships made through The Daniel Plan transcend racial boundaries. When all the photographs are viewed together, they suggest that the reader of *The Daniel Plan* is a well-rounded person who is active in all aspects of life.

A small band of light beige, directly below the five photographs, contains the words “faith,” “food,” “fitness,” “focus,” and “friends.” Between each of the five words is a small cross that echoes the much larger cross inside the D in the “Daniel” of the title. Using the crosses repeatedly sends subliminal messages about Christ’s sacrifice.

The band at the bottom of the cover is pastel blue. It lists the authors’ names and titles in white serif type in capital letters. Rick Warren, the principal author, has his name listed first, followed by Daniel Amen and Mark Hyman. However, in the text of the book, Mark Hyman is quoted more often than Daniel Amen, making it seem more likely that

Hyman's name would be directly under Warren's.

Green and beige are both important in the color scheme of the back book jacket. The background is the same light green used on the front jacket. Within the green background and framed in white is a beige rectangle that contains six tributes to the book from physicians, a diet doctor, and a pastor. The combination of placing the tributes in the beige rectangle and framing the rectangle in white makes it stand out visually and calls to the reader, sending the message that a distinguished group of experts is providing opinions on the book, and their comments are more worthwhile than one usually sees on a back cover.

There are two small logos at the lower left corner of the back cover. One is the website logo of Zondervan.com, the publisher, and the other is a logo for the book that is not found elsewhere between its covers. The logo consists of "The Daniel Plan" in all capital letters, with "Daniel" in bold and the white cross inside the D in Daniel. Beneath "The Daniel Plan" is a rule, and beneath the rule are the words "God's Prescription for Your Health" in capital letters. This logo appears on *The Daniel Plan* website, not on the home page, but as a devotional written by Rick Warren.

The title page of *The Daniel Plan* is printed in two colors: black and the light green used on the cover. In addition to the three authors' names, it lists Sean Foy, an exercise physiologist, and Dee Eastman, director of The Daniel Plan, as co-authors. Both are mentioned by name in the book, but their names are not printed on the cover.

Design and editing are very important to the look and content of *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life*. The most notable features of the interior are the use of light green for several levels of headings, and for the many charts, tables, and sidebars that are

printed in green ink to set them off from the main text. They contain Bible verses, personal stories, quotations from experts, inspirational messages, suggestions for food, and medical information.

Another feature of book design is the placement of supplementary material. Chapters 10 and 11 contain fitness plans, meal plans, shopping lists and recipes. In other diet books, including *First Place*, this material is placed in appendices. However, *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life*, has no appendices. The “Metric Conversion Chart” is not an appendix, but functions as one. The authors’ acknowledgements are placed after the “Metric Conversion Chart.” Part of the front matter is a page titled “Bible Versions,” which lists six Bible translations or paraphrases used in *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life*. This material could also be an appendix. The endnotes are extensive and are divided by chapter, with each chapter title shown for ease in locating the note. The endnotes are numbered by chapter, not sequentially for the entire book. There are a total of eighty-seven endnotes, a high number for a popular diet book.

After the endnotes, there are five full-page advertisements for other books and materials: *The Daniel Plan Journal*; *The Daniel Plan Cookbook*; *The Daniel Plan Study Guide with DVD*; *The Daniel Plan Mobile APP*; and a set of workout DVDs, *The Daniel Plan: Fitness for Life*, which was scheduled for release in April 2014. *The Daniel Plan Mobile APP* had not been released as of April 2016. These advertisements are similar to those found in *First Place*.

Additional exercises for *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life* are found on the website, [danielplan.com](http://danielplan.com). By making this information available digitally, the book

has extended itself beyond paper covers. All of the paratextual features might seem inconsequential; however, they reinforce in subtle ways the strategies of best-selling Christian diet books.



## Chapter 4: Conclusion

Christian diet books are a publishing phenomenon of the late twentieth century and occupy a large place on Christian bestseller lists, in chain and Christian booksellers, and online retailers. In 2000, Christian nutritionist David Mainz estimated that the dieting industry in America was worth \$30 - \$50 billion. “A conservative estimate is that 5 percent [\$1.5 billion] of that is the Christian dieting industry,” Mainz wrote.<sup>186</sup> In 2006, William L. Weis reported, “The weight-loss ‘book’ industry – the most lucrative sector of the self-help publishing genre, is estimated at over \$1.2 billion in annual sales.”<sup>187</sup>

The Adams and Barker model of the stages in the life of a book applies to Christian diet books in several ways. *The Christian Writer’s Market Guide 2015–2016* lists two hundred and twenty publishers of them.<sup>188</sup> Fifty-one of these companies publish books in the health category, which includes diet books.<sup>189</sup> Four of the five books discussed in this paper were published by Christian publishing companies.

The distribution of Christian diet books is itself an enormous industry: in 2014, over fifty-two million books and related items were sold.<sup>190</sup> Christian diet books are distributed in many outlets. Christian booksellers, both brick-and-mortar stores and online merchants, are a major source of sales. Amazon.com has “10s of millions of titles

<sup>186</sup> Lauren F. Winner, “The Weigh and the Truth,” *Christianity Today*, Aug. 25, 2000, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/september4/1.50.html>.

<sup>187</sup> William L. Weis, William L. 2006. When the Forces of Industry Conflict with the Public Health: The Case of Obesity, *Academy of Health Care Management Journal* 2 (2006): 1-10, accessed April 3, 2016, <http://proxygw.wrlc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/214438264?accountid=11243>.

<sup>188</sup> Jerry B. Jenkins, *The Christian Writer’s Market Guide 2015-2016: Everything You Need to Get Published* (Nashville: WestBow Press, 2015), 75-128.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>190</sup> “Focusing on Our Strengths: Key Insights into the Christian Book Market,” *nielsen.com*, accessed March 13, 2016, August 6, 2015, <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports/2015/focusing-on-our-strengths-insights-into-the-christian-book-market.html>.

available across all formats,” according to Russ Grandinetti, a senior vice-president of the company,<sup>191</sup> and Christian diet books such as *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life* are bestsellers. *The Weigh Down Diet*, which was published nineteen years ago, still holds its own in sales figures. Today, Christian diet books are also available as e-books, podcasts, and downloads.

Reviews and press coverage show how Christian diet books are often received. In 1957, the year Charlie Shedd’s *Pray Your Weight Away* was published, *The New Republic* gave it a humorous and not entirely respectful review entitled, “A Family that Prays Together Weighs Together.”<sup>192</sup> *The Weigh Down Diet* has been covered by *The New York Times*, with articles published in 1998<sup>193</sup> and 2004,<sup>194</sup> and by *Christianity Today* magazine in 2000.<sup>195</sup> These reviews were not flattering. Electronic media have criticized diet books; also in 2000, a religious website, belief.net, censured Gwen Shamblin for her severe teachings.<sup>196</sup> Some Christian diet books have been praised by the media. R. Marie Griffith says, “Don Colbert’s 2002 book, *What Would Jesus Eat? The Ultimate Program for Eating Well, Feeling Great, and Living Longer*, garnered

<sup>191</sup> Jim Milliot, “20 Years of Amazon.com Bookselling: The country’s largest bookseller has driven lots of change in its two decades,” *Publishers Weekly*, September 4, 2015, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/paper-copy/by-topic/industry-news/bookselling/article/67986-20-years-of-amazon-com-bookselling.html>.

<sup>192</sup> Gerald Weale, “The Family that Prays Together Weighs Together,” *The New Republic*, March 25, 1957, 19-20.

<sup>193</sup> Doreen Carvajal, “A Good Villain Can Help Sales of Diet Books, Too,” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), June 21, 1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/06/21/health/a-good-villain-can-help-sales-of-diet-books-too.html?pagewanted=print>.

<sup>194</sup> Abby Ellin, “Religion Journal; Seeing Overeating as a Sin, and God as the Diet Coach,” *The New York Times* (New York), May 29, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/29/us/religion-journal-seeing-overeating-as-a-sin-and-god-as-the-diet-coach.html?pagewanted=print>.

<sup>195</sup> Lauren F. Winner, “The Weigh and the Truth,” *Christianity Today*, Aug. 25, 2000, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/september4/1.50.html>.

<sup>196</sup> “The Christian Diet Craze: The guru of godly dieting could afford to lighten up a little,” *beliefnet.com*, accessed March 31, 2016, <http://www.beliefnet.com/Entertainment/2002/02/The-Christian-Diet-Craze.aspx?p=1>.

extraordinary popular attention in American newspapers, most of it positive.”<sup>197</sup> Christian diet books are also covered by trade magazines; the launch of *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life* was the cover story in the December 2013 issue of *Christian Retailing*.<sup>198</sup>

The universal message of Christian diet books is: Thin is better. Every element of the books examined conveys that belief. From photographs to cover art to illustrations, all of the paratextual features in the books are designed to promote “a better reception of the text and a more pertinent reading,” as Gérard Genette says.<sup>199</sup>

The pursuit of thinness is so ingrained in middle-class consciousness that the majority of women do not question it. Instead, they question every bite of food they put into their mouths. The belief that they must live up to an impossible standard of thinness is inculcated in them when they are very young, and it is a lifelong preoccupation; indeed, it never abates.

In our culture, women learn that being thin is the best way to get along in the world. Powerful societal forces are at work to convince them that fat people are lazy, sloppy, and don’t care about themselves. No one wants to look like a loser, and fat people are thought of as losers. To be successful, the face a woman presents to the world must sit atop a thin body. To appear healthy, she must be thin.

<sup>197</sup> R. Marie Griffith. *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 178.

<sup>198</sup> Ann Byle, “‘The Daniel Plan’ expected to drive strong sales,” *christianretailing.com*, November 12, 2013, accessed April 3, 2016, <http://christianretailing.com/index.php/news/industry-news/26389-the-daniel-plan-expected-to-drive-strong-sales>.

<sup>199</sup> Gérard Genette and Marie Maclean, “Introduction to the Paratext,” *New Literary History* 22, no. 2 (1991): 261–72, doi: 10.2307/469037.

A woman today is inundated with messages from media of all types. They are impossible to ignore; they surround her and paper the walls of her existence. Long before she can read, these messages tell her what to eat. As she grows older, she sees that models on television, in magazines, and on the Internet are all impossibly thin. Advertisers use artifice to make models appear flawless. Such perfection is unachievable by ordinary women, but they are conditioned to want to look like models or celebrities.

The desire to be thin is universal; it affects all women, whether they are Christians or not. But for an evangelical Christian woman, thinness has special significance because it is a way of pleasing God. "Doing the will of God" means many things; it means reading and studying the Bible, praying, making everyday choices that honor God, believing God's hand is in everything that happens, and pleasing God in all her actions. The Christian woman knows her body is the temple of God and should be treated with respect.

Christian diet books are popular, in part, because they promote the culture of thinness. When the Christian woman works on her body to make it thin, she does so for altruistic reasons: she wants to be an effective witness for God. What may not be obvious to her is that she is also subscribing to the American ideal of thinness. Meanwhile, Christian publishers profit from her desire to please God. Dieting is a merry-go-round that starts with the first time a young girl looks in the mirror and sees a fat girl staring back. For most women, dieting leads to initial weight loss, followed by regaining weight, followed by another diet. Publishers have an endless supply of book-buyers, repeat customers, for as long as the culture of thinness is perpetuated.

## Figures



Figure 1. Front cover. Charlie W. Shedd, *Pray Your Weight Away* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1957).



Figure 2. Front cover. Carole Lewis and W. Terry Whalin, *First Place* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2001).



Figure 3. Front cover. Gwen Shamblin, *The Weigh Down Diet* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 1997).



Figure 4. Front cover. Don Colbert, *What Would Jesus Eat? The Ultimate Program for Eating Well, Feeling Great, and Living Longer* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2002)





Figure 5. Front cover. Rick Warren, D.Min., Daniel Amen, M.D., and Mark Hyman, M.D., *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013)

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