This issue has been on my heart for a long time. I remember the very first day that I realized I struggled with my eating. I saw that I didn’t truly appreciate the way the Lord made my body. Since that day I began to put self behind and God first. Now I want to share what God has been teaching me about the hope that comes from being a Christian. He has given me the right perspective on issues with food. I have come to realize that my ultimate sins are selfishness and pride.

I am a child of the King of the universe. He is my Father. He has created me in His image, and through this book I want to communicate wonder and
gratitude for the amazing God I serve. I want to be more thankful for His creation and His awesome power. I often lose sight of this in my self-focused attitude, and I want to recultivate one that is God centered.

This is a difficult part of my life to share. It’s digging up one of my deepest secrets, one that has been dogging my footsteps for a long time. Yet, as a Christian, I know that God loves truth, as Paul states in Ephesians 4:25, “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.”

That’s not to say that everyone who has an eating disorder has to tell the world about his or her struggles. But we do know that God delights in truth. He tells us, “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.” (1 John 3:16)

Why would I want to tell people about how I scrutinized my food, obsessed over every sweet I ate, and counted every minute of exercise in my head over and over just to make sure I got enough? It’s
something I would rather keep buried and hidden away, but I want other girls to know the redemption I have been given in God, my Almighty Creator and loving Father. It’s not fun to talk about weight, binge eating, and restrictive eating. I know I sinned many times throughout my struggles with eating, but now I am back on the right track, by God’s grace. Hence, I want other girls to know that Jesus Christ is rich to all who call upon Him, even in this area.

I’ve been on forums and read the countless threads about those with an eating disorder. I’ve encountered topics such as:

“How to stop CALORIE COUNTING???”

“Calorie Needs - Help Please!!!”

“Not overweight, need to lose belly fat”

“Worried about weight”

“Metabolism questions”

“How can I gain weight but not gain an ounce of fat?”

They are all nice, roundabout ways to say, “I am insecure, lacking in confidence, and constantly
comparing myself to others in my weight, body shape, food intake, exercise habits, and general lifestyle.” They receive short-term solutions such as “Go to a counselor and find worth in yourself once again.”

People are looking for someone who will tell them that their beautiful body makes them acceptable. In fact, many girls will destroy themselves just to hear that one compliment, the one that makes their life worth living. But what does God’s Word say about where we should find our fulfillment? Matthew 5:6 says, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” Our hunger shouldn’t be after the temporal and carnal empty promises of this world but after the everlasting righteousness of Christ.

Jesus is the only way to fulfillment and truth, and no temporal, worldly thing will give us the satisfaction we truly need. We won’t find an everlasting and boundless treasure anywhere else, but in Him. Think about it. Where do we find our treasure day by day? Is it in people, our body, our fitness, or in Almighty God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth? Matthew
6:19 says, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal…”

The world offers many solutions to eating disorders that aren’t long term. Those struggling with a disorder find it nigh impossible to break free of the long term effects of anorexia, bulimia, or other eating issues. It is because they have been given solutions that do not delve into the true heart-issues behind the eating disorder.

Psalm 16:11 does not promise satisfaction with a heaping fourth helping of ice-cream or a third cookie. “Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” This verse promises satisfaction from the only place in the world from which we can gain satisfaction: God. We were made to be in His presence, and there we will find fullness of joy. John 10:10-11, “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”
The solutions the world offers emphasize one primary goal, “This life is about me, not others. It is about satisfying myself, my pleasures, my wants, and my desires. It does not include others, because I have time only to put into myself.”

It’s pure contradiction. Why fight a disorder that is focused on self by thinking about self even more? No, the eyes must come off the idol of self and focus on the ultimate Source of life and power, God. God gave us the power to run, eat, speak, breathe, and thank Him for these abilities. As Christians, our purpose is to serve others, not ourselves, to follow the example of our King Jesus. Philippians 2:5-7 states, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.” Jesus’ humility is a completely foreign idea in a world focused on selfish desires. There will be people who will hate what I’m saying. They will declare that I’m not helping, but hindering those recovering from eating disorders. Yet I believe this is the only way to
fully understand the extent of our inadequacy and the amazing, awesome power of the only True God and Jesus Christ.

Whenever I got upset over the number on the scale or the way I looked, I would stop and think, “Why am I reacting like this? Why do I want to look a certain way?” Of course, the excuses flooded in:

“Well, I just need to be fit because I live in a culture where everybody is fat.”

“Americans don’t have self-control, and I need to have self control.”

“I don’t want to be struggling with health issues because of weight.”

These are all legitimate statements, but I knew they weren’t the reason. In puddles of tears, I would try to convince myself that they were the reason, however, I realized that something was very wrong with the way I saw food, nutrition, health, and weight.

My standards were set by those around me, rather than a supreme authority. I wanted people to like me because of my “trim appearance” even if I had the
most rotten heart inside. I knew that the standards of the world were based upon the outward appearance rather than the attitude of the heart.

God does not judge or bless a man or woman by the outer appearance. 1 Samuel 16:7 states, “But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” God’s concern is with the outworkings of the inward attitude of the heart. I found that my heart was not right. I knew I was only seeking self. I was worried about my social status, not my standing before God.

Life is about loving and serving God and others, not ourselves. That’s the most effective cure for an eating issue such as anorexia or bulimia. The answer to selfishness is not more selfishness but selflessness. It’s coming out of yourself—out of self-focus—to focus on God and others. When you get up in the morning, your purpose must go beyond self aspiration to a loving, transcendent God, Who has designed and created you to live on this earth for His
purpose and glory.

What I am writing is neither a rant nor a scientific study. It’s not an encouragement to go to a psychiatrist who will solve all your problems, because they can’t fix every problem. In fact, they can “fix” very few, if any problems. They too, generally refuse to deal with the real issue, which starts in the heart. Rather, it is a story of my struggle with comparing myself to the standards that the world imposes.

This is a story of how the Lord showed me the worth of His children through His grace, by His Son’s sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection. We are precious in His sight. He made us in His image. Through Him, we are beautiful. God has given us a purpose here on this earth, and that’s what makes it easier to be hopeful in recovering from an eating disorder.

The culture is utterly opposed to what we will share in this book, but these words are tried and true. Only faith in the unfailing love and wisdom of God will pull one through an eating disorder and out on the other side to learn the true meaning of beauty. The
culture tells girls that all they need is a little bit more self esteem to pull them through. But no promises from men or from the glamour magazines will truly fulfill the purpose for which God created a human being.

In this book, I will begin by sharing some stories from different sisters in Christ, including my own, and how Christ has and is redeeming us from our sins and struggles. I will share what God has taught me about worshipping Him through eating food, exercising, and being healthy. My prayer is that God may speak through me to bless others with whom I share my journey.
1. Our Stories
Where we've Come from and Where we are Going

Hannah’s Story

My battle with anorexia started when I was about twelve. My family had just moved and found ourselves in a small community in Japan with several American missionary families. For whatever reason (probably the fact that we both spoke English) we became relatively close friends with the MKs (missionary kids) and hung out with them often. I think kids are very easily influenced during their early teens. The influence from that point in their lives gradually seeps in and either makes or breaks them later in life. The girls I made friends with
talked constantly about looks. So-and-so was “sooo pretty” or so-and-so was “sooo thin.” He was “good-looking.”

I had always been “chunky” and really didn’t care. I was strong, and quite satisfied with that. But, when a very close friend commented that I had “fat legs” and other girls compared their slimness, I was deeply affected. I began to associate appearance with everything. My dance teacher liked me less than her other pretty, petite students because of her natural grace. (That may or may not have been true, but I shouldn’t have cared.) Me? I was stumpy, had short legs, and was not nearly as vibrant and likable as the other students. Many Japanese are naturally thin and small. However, my body type was now a problem, and I thought I stood out like a sore thumb. At the pool, I became ashamed to swim with others because I felt fat.

I eventually grew distant from those friends. I quit my swimming out of necessity along with lacking motivation after my coach dropped me to a lower-level class. When I stopped my regular exercise, I found a logical excuse to eat much less. I didn’t
need as much energy anymore; I wasn’t using it. My food portions gradually became smaller. At some point, I began refusing myself food even when I was excruciatingly hungry. Change in appearance wasn’t evident for a long time.

I was about 5’2”, and my weight hovered at about 110 pounds for a little over a year. When my weight began to slowly decrease, my period stopped coming. That worried me. My parents took me to a gynecologist, who couldn’t find anything wrong with me and simply gave me a few pills and advised me to stay healthy. Meanwhile, I underwent a lot of inner turmoil as my older sister Marie left for college. I took on an overwhelming load of babysitting jobs, while struggling through my most rigorous year in high school. Lack of food and adequate nutrition probably worsened my state. I remember fluctuating terribly in emotions, constantly stressing out, being perpetually tired, and never feeling energetic. My period still hadn’t returned. That was about March of 2008.

In the summer of 2009, my weight had fallen to around 94 pounds. I ate primarily vegetables, a few
carbs, and as little meat as I could, often scraping away fat on anything I ate. I didn’t realize I was what people would categorize as an “anorexic” and finally felt very content with how I looked; I was far thinner than I had been. When I went to my dance lesson for the first time in about a year, my teacher was shocked at how thin I was and went so far as to ask me if I was all right. Ironically, I was pleased. That’s how you think when you are ok obsessing over looks. I didn’t feel self-conscious to be around people anymore; I was thin and, therefore, “pretty.” Right?

I went to America in the summer with my sister and spent most of my time feeling homesick. Because of the change in my diet, I ate even less than I had in Japan. When I went home, I weighed 81 pounds. My parents started noticing that I was thin but didn’t think much about it until my mom took me to the mall to buy me some clothes as a treat. I looked like a rail with clothes on when I tried on any piece of clothing. When my parents discovered my actual weight, they panicked. I was severely underweight and was refusing to eat. And even I was beginning to notice that I was too thin.
When I sat down, it hurt because I had no muscle for support. When I was outside, even in the summer, I constantly felt cold and needed a jacket. I couldn’t stand for long periods of time. Showering was a nightmare because I would freeze whenever I had to shut the hot water off. My dad told me that if I was not able to gain weight before winter, I could possibly die.

My parents began having me eat more than I was able to handle at that time. However, my stomach had shrunk during my prolonged “fast” and to eat a normal meal was much more than I could handle. I strenuously resisted for the first few months because I didn’t want to become the person I was before. Several times my parents had to severely rebuke me, simply because I was so stubborn. But, I saw how I had hurt my own parents by what I had done. They worried about me and missed the person I had once been—a strong-willed, able-bodied, spunky girl. She had been replaced with a wispy little shadow who hated herself and willingly starved. The little doubt that had settled in my mind had grown into a consuming sin.
Somewhere I began to realize that I had gone much too far. Years ago, when I saw my dad struggling with an older sibling’s rebellion, I had told myself I would be the “one who would not give him trouble but would make him glad.” I had repeated that to myself constantly, and it came back to me now. My recovery was one of continual repentance and stumbling. One day I was doing well; another day I was not. Some days, I would eat well in front of my dad and then refuse to eat when he was gone.

My parents put me back on a swim team, and I was shocked at how difficult it was to swim. I had no strength at all. My eating gradually increased with the exercise and with encouragement from my parents. My weight came with time. After three years, my period came back. How I looked and felt, as well, was gradually changing.

I don’t think a girl ever truly realizes how damaging self-starving is until she’s been pulled out of it. I look back at old pictures now and shudder, but I was pleased with myself then. I was systematically destroying the body God had given me.
Life is not about how one looks. Looks fade and all will wither. You won’t keep your youth, and you won’t keep your black, blonde, brown, or red hair. You will get wrinkles and become old. When you take God’s Word and make it your heart, you begin to see beauty as He sees it. Outward appearances are a very small part of beauty. And yet even now I sometimes look in the mirror and detest the body I see. What is that but my flesh wanting what it did not receive? Everyday is an opportunity to put down my pride, covetousness, self esteem, and to grow in the daily walk of sanctification.

**Emily’s Story**

For most of my childhood, I was never concerned about weight. I ate without reservation. I was the kid who loaded up my salad plate at the buffet, not because I was worried about health, but just because I loved salad.

My parents always reflected a balanced perspective on food. They never encouraged us to excess, never obsessed over their weight, or raved over their
favorite comfort foods. Now that I look back at how I was raised, I’ve realized that my parents had some of the most balanced perspectives on food and exercise of anybody I’d ever met.

We even ate dessert once a day. However, we were never encouraged to eat ten cookies in one sitting. I was never overweight or skinny, just average. At around age 14, I started to exercise more regularly. I was hired by a neighbor to run her miniature horse around our one mile loop. I would huff and puff about half a mile and walk/jog the rest of the way home. We lived in a rural neighborhood, and it was perfect for being outside without my mom having to worry about someone running us over.

My sisters and I spent countless days in the backyard, playing make-believe for hours on end. We rarely spent time watching TV or vegging out on the couch with our homework on our laps. Our family took frequent walks around our block—usually right before or after dinner or early in the morning.

When I was about 15, our family purchased our first exercise machine, a stationary bike. I rode it every
day for twenty minutes. At that point, I don’t really remember how much I weighed. We had a scale, but I never cared about those numbers.

When I began making exercise a regular habit, I also fell into habitual calorie counting while doing research on exercise and nutrition. I scrutinized every calorie. Then, I was probably eating a small amount of calories per day. That is also when I lost weight and hit my lowest weight at 103 pounds. This may not seem excessively low to most readers, but I knew it was low for my naturally muscular body.

During this time, I obsessed about anything related to food or exercise. I would cry in the bathroom if I ate too much, and yet I refused to discipline myself to have self-control and be truly grateful for the food and abilities God had given me.

I finally realized I was obsessed when my period stopped for about six months. I read about amenorrhea and discovered that a woman’s cycle is one of the first bodily functions to stop when a girl starves her body. God made women to reproduce, to have babies. I wanted to be able to fulfill and live
out the purpose for which God had created me. So I started eating more. A number of months later, I was back up to 108 pounds.

I was gaining weight but still wasn’t where I needed to be. Always hungry, I was often still unwilling to eat what my body needed because I feared gaining weight. This cycle finally brought me “down to brass tacks” with my parents. My parents sat me down in my brother’s room in our basement one night. I knew something was the matter. I was thinking, “What did I do?” They confronted me gently about searching for calorie counts online and reflecting a general pattern of obsession over my weight.

Mom and Dad encouraged me to try to gain some more weight in order to bring my period back. For a person who is struggling with her weight, this is not the easiest thing to do or hear. She wants to ignore it, to scream, “No, I don’t have any problems!” Yet, it’s often necessary to show the person the destructive path down which she is going. I didn’t appreciate the idea, but I began to realize that my pride was getting in the way of listening to my parents’ wise judgment. By God’s work in my heart, I heeded their counsel
and gained weight. I finally realized that I needed to glorify Him with my body instead of glorifying myself.

Now, I have my period back, and I am so grateful for my body functioning normally. I feel better, and I’m less obsessive than I used to be. I know that I’m not what is considered “normal” for my height, by the world’s standards. It is normal for me, and I’m learning to use my body to give the utmost praise to my Lord, Savior, and King Who has truly given me salvation from all my sins and borne the weight of my iniquities on the cross! Ignoring all thoughts of self-fulfillment, I desire to glorify my Savior and King and place my hopes in Him!

I’m definitely not past all the frustration over the number on the scale, the tears over how my clothes fit, or the guilt over eating too many cookies. There are still times when I sit at the table, trying to count the calories in the food I’m eating before I eat. Each time I have to remind myself of how I need to focus on God’s gifts instead of how many calories are going into my body.