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# Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

STEWARDSHIP OF THE BODY: A WEIGHT LOSS MINISTRY ADDRESSING  
GLUTTONY IN SOUTH HILLS RESIDENTS

Written by

HILLARY LIVINGSTON

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

  
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Date Received: March 20, 2013

STEWARDSHIP OF THE BODY: A WEIGHT LOSS MINISTRY ADDRESSING  
GLUTTONY IN SOUTH HILLS RESIDENTS

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

HILARY LIVINGSTON  
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## ABSTRACT

### **Stewardship of the Body: A Weight Loss Ministry Addressing Gluttony in South Hills Residents**

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2013

This paper outlines the pilot ministry project, *Take Care of the Temple*, a spiritual formation-based weight loss program addressing the spiritual condition of gluttony by cultivating stewardship of the body—a way of life that values, nurtures, and respects the body as God’s creation, redeemed by Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit for health, holiness, and glorifying God. This ministry’s purpose is to enable participants to develop a lifestyle of bodily stewardship through the integrated practice of healthy living habits and spiritual disciplines leading to weight loss and spiritual growth.

This pilot project was administered through the Westminster Recreation and Outreach Center under the auspices of Westminster Presbyterian Church in the South Hills of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Thirteen local residents participated in this forty-day pilot ministry. There were three main components of the pilot program—an opening retreat, six weekly small group meetings, and a closing retreat. The opening retreat laid out the ministry’s theological foundation from 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.” The small group meetings provided support, accountability, and instruction in the practice of key spiritual disciplines. The closing retreat gave participants the opportunity to worship and celebrate their wellness journeys.

The pilot was evaluated in the areas of program execution and overall effectiveness. The programmatic elements of the pilot functioned smoothly, and participants reported improvement in the areas of weight loss, lifestyle habits, and spiritual growth. The pilot sample was small and the ministry context limited. However, it was concluded that this pilot project could be effectively utilized in other ministry contexts to promote wellness and spiritual development.

Theological Mentor: Kurt Fredrickson, PhD.

Words: 298

To my parents, Jack and Barbara Livingston; your love and support means more to me  
than you will ever know

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## INTRODUCTION

Frederick Buechner once stated, “A glutton is one who raids the icebox for a cure for spiritual malnutrition.”<sup>1</sup> Gluttony is a concept not often discussed in today’s culture, yet its prevalence and impact upon broader society is undeniable. Gluttony is a spiritual condition marked by the overconsumption of otherwise good things, particularly food, in an attempt to mask deeper spiritual and emotional problems. Today’s culture is ripe with gluttony. Our culture promotes excess and overconsumption of all kinds, including food, creating an environment in which gluttony flourishes. The obesity epidemic in today’s society is one of the products of our consumerist culture of excess and overindulgence. An alarming number of Americans are overweight or obese—conditions that often lead to other serious health concerns such as heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, heart attacks, strokes, and premature death. Despite the plethora of available diet and exercise programs, many Americans struggle to successfully maintain a healthy weight. Although an abundance of information exists about the benefits of good nutrition and physical exercise, few people are actually successful at putting this information into practice for effective weight management. Education alone is not successful in bringing about long-term lifestyle change in regards to weight loss and maintenance. Instead, a more holistic approach is necessary to help people address the deeper spiritual issues surrounding food and eating, as well as provide the inner strength and reserves needed to combat the onslaught of cultural messages encouraging overconsumption.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 31.

This paper is inspired by my own struggle with overeating and weight-related issues. Through my journey of losing nearly seventy pounds, I have come to understand that there is a strong spiritual component to the underlying causes of my weight struggle. My chronic overeating and obsession with food were not merely physical problems, but spiritual ones as well. The spiritual condition of overeating and food obsession, referred to as “gluttony” in Christian tradition, is a subject that has been widely addressed throughout church history, yet one that is rarely discussed today. A fresh examination of the concept of gluttony can be applied to the problem of excess weight and obesity in contemporary American society in a manner that would be beneficial to those struggling with this spiritual condition. Spiritual issues related to overeating and excess weight are largely unaddressed by most standard weight loss programs. Most people do not understand the interrelationship between the body and the spirit in terms of health, fitness, and weight management. Most assume weight management is purely a physical issue—a matter of having the right knowledge of healthy living practices and the sheer will power to implement these practices successfully. This paper hopes to provide a plan to address the deeper spiritual issues surrounding overeating— a plan to help people develop a healthier way of life, both physically and spiritually, that is free from the bonds of gluttony.

This ministry focus paper presents a blueprint for a weight loss ministry that enabled residents in the South Hills of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to address the spiritual condition of gluttony by cultivating stewardship of the body through the practice of spiritual disciplines leading to weight loss and spiritual growth. The weight loss ministry was implemented through the Westminster Recreation and Outreach Center, (hereafter

WROC), an outreach ministry facility of Westminster Presbyterian Church providing programming to promote wellness, personal development, and spiritual nurture to South Hills residents. The blueprint for this weight loss ministry establishes a theological foundation for defining stewardship of the body based upon 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”<sup>2</sup> Stewardship of the body is a way of life that values, nurtures, and respects the body as God’s creation, redeemed by Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit for health, holiness, and glorifying God. Upon this theological foundation, the blueprint presents a framework to help participants practice stewardship of the body through the use of eight specific spiritual disciplines. The goal of this ministry project is to provide participants with the resources, support, and hands-on experience to replace the spiritual condition of gluttony with a stewardship of the body that will encourage healthy weight loss and spiritual growth.

The ministry blueprint will be presented in three parts. Part One includes two chapters that will discuss both the local cultural context and specific ministry context in which the project was implemented. Chapter 1 will discuss the issues of excess weight and obesity in America—the rates, trends, and health risks of these conditions, as well as the financial, social, and personal impact of these conditions on Americans in general. This chapter will also discuss how certain aspects of American culture fuel the obesity epidemic, making it more difficult for people to attain a healthy weight. Additionally, this chapter will address why many traditional diet and exercise programs fail to bridge

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the New International Version, ©2011.

the gap between education and long-term lifestyle change in regards to weight management. Lastly, Chapter 1 will survey the cultural landscape of the South Hills region of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, presenting relevant demographic information, social and religious customs, and a description of existing community resources and programming addressing weight management.

Chapter 2 will describe the WROC—the specific ministry context for this project. This chapter will discuss the WROC’s history, purpose, target population, and current programming, followed by an examination of the center’s current vision, leadership, and theology in relation to Westminster Presbyterian Church. The chapter will conclude by analyzing the potential benefits of the proposed ministry project, as well as possible resistance to it.

Part Two of the paper will establish the theological foundation of the ministry project, beginning with a review of relevant literature in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 will focus upon Reformed theology’s contribution to this proposed project, its limitations, and additional insight from other theological traditions. Chapter 5 will discuss the theology of the ministry project itself. Specifically, this chapter will define the spiritual condition of gluttony, discuss its causes and deleterious effects, and present Jesus as a scriptural model for overcoming gluttony in Matthew 4:1-11. Following this, the chapter will develop the concept of stewardship of the body based upon 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 as a means of overcoming gluttony. To conclude, this chapter will discuss the role of classic spiritual disciplines in cultivating stewardship of the body, culminating in a description of the practice of eight specific disciplines—silence/solitude, fellowship, confession/journaling, meditation/study, prayer, fasting, service, and worship/celebration.

Chapter 5 will discuss how the practice of each of these disciplines contributes to developing stewardship of the body as a means of overcoming gluttony, thus promoting weight loss and spiritual growth.

Part Three will discuss the specifics of the ministry project, including the plan, implementation and evaluation of the project. Chapter 6 will begin with a review of the theological foundations presented in Part Two and how these undergird the ministry plan. This chapter will then present the goals, content, leadership, and target population of the ministry project. Chapter 7 will discuss the implementation of the ministry project. After presenting a project summary, this chapter will discuss the project's timeline, leadership development, resources, and support personnel. Chapter 7 will conclude with a detailed assessment plan for the ministry project, followed by a report on the project's results.

In addition to their health and financial costs, excess weight and obesity have also caused a great deal of pain, frustration, and discouragement in those who have suffered with them. Therefore, a great deal of sensitivity will be exercised in addressing these matters.<sup>3</sup> Obesity and excess weight are complex conditions involving many factors. This paper does not intend to render judgment on anyone, nor add to anyone's existing shame, suffering, or struggle. It is also not intended to provide the ultimate solution to these conditions, but merely be an additional voice from someone who has wrestled with these issues herself. It is hoped that the inclusion of spiritual insight to issues surrounding excess weight and obesity will add much needed dimension to the overall treatment of these serious medical issues. God created human beings as whole persons,

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<sup>3</sup> Disclaimer: This paper does not represent medical advice of any kind. Medical questions or concern arising from this paper should be directed toward a physician or other qualified medical professional.

and desires all people to live lives of health, wholeness, and freedom. My own personal experience attests to the fact that in Jesus Christ anyone can be free from destructive patterns that damage one's health. It is hoped that this paper will inspire hope that true change is possible. With God's help, anyone can live a life that values, nurtures, and respects the body as God's creation, redeemed by Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit for health, holiness, and glorifying God.

PART ONE  
MINISTRY CONTEXT

## CHAPTER 1

### THE CHALLENGE OF EXCESS WEIGHT AND OBESITY IN THE SOUTH HILLS AREA OF PITTSBURGH, PA

In developing this weight loss ministry project, it is first important to explore the cultural context of the South Hills area of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This chapter will describe the general cultural landscape of this region, followed by an examination of the particular problem of excess weight and obesity in the region. To begin, the chapter will discuss the overall cultural impact of excess weight and obesity on American society as a whole. Before engaging in this discussion, a word of caution is warranted. This exposition is not an attempt to equate excess weight and obesity with gluttony, thus making the assumption that all individuals who struggle with excess weight and/or obesity also necessarily struggle with gluttony. Instead, this discussion is intended to describe how the problem of excess weight and obesity are aspects of an overall cultural milieu of excess and overconsumption. As the following research will show, cultural factors play a significant role in the rise of obesity as a health epidemic in America today.

These cultural factors also set up an environment in which spiritual conditions such as gluttony can flourish. Thus, in developing this weight loss ministry, it is important to explore the interrelationship among the factors of obesity, gluttony, and the broader cultural milieu contributing to them in order to fully understand the ministry context in which this weight loss ministry will take place.

### **Excess Weight and Obesity in America: A Health Crisis**

Excess weight and obesity are serious health problems in America.<sup>1</sup> According to the Center of Disease Control and Prevention, two-thirds of Americans are overweight.<sup>2</sup> Of this percentage, half are considered obese—7.2 million people in America.<sup>3</sup> Excess weight and obesity can lead to a host of serious medical conditions including coronary heart disease, type-2 diabetes, certain types of cancers, hypertension, dyslipidemia, stroke, liver and gallbladder disease, sleep apnea and respiratory problems, osteoarthritis, and gynecological problems.<sup>4</sup> Obesity rates are high in every state. In no state is the obesity rate less than 15 percent of the population. In nine states, over 30 percent of the population is obese. Obesity tends to affect African Americans at a

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<sup>1</sup> Medically, a person is diagnosed as being overweight or obese according to their Body Mass Index (BMI), a means of measuring body fat based upon standardized height and weight comparisons. BMI is calculated by dividing one's weight in kilograms by one's height in meters squared. A BMI of 25 or greater is considered overweight, while a BMI of 30 or greater is considered obese.

<sup>2</sup> D. Keener, K. Goodman, A. Lowry, S. Zaro, and L. Kettel Khan, *Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States: Implementation and Measurement Guide* (Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009), 1. [http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/community\\_strategies\\_guide.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/community_strategies_guide.pdf) (accessed January 22, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention: Vital Signs, "Adult Obesity: Obesity Rises among Adults" (August 2010) [www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/AdultObesity/](http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/AdultObesity/) (accessed January 12, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "Overweight and Obesity: Health Consequences," <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/causes/health.html> (accessed January 22, 2011).

disproportionately higher rate than other populations. An estimated 54 percent of non-Hispanic African American women are obese, compared to 32 percent Mexican-Americans and 30 percent white women of the same age. In men, 34 percent of non-Mexican Americans African Americans are obese, compared to 32 percent of Hispanics and 31 percent of whites. These higher rates are believed to be the result of a combination factors, including genetics, food and exercise habits, and cultural attitudes toward body weight.<sup>5</sup>

Obesity rates are on the rise. In 2009, about 2.4 million more adults were obese than in 2007.<sup>6</sup> Adult obesity rates doubled between 1980 and 2008 and have markedly increased in societal groups regardless of age, sex, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or education level.<sup>7</sup> Some experts project that as much as 50 percent of the population will be obese by 2030.<sup>8</sup> If the current trend continues, excess weight and obesity will replace cigarette smoking as the most significant contributing factor in reduced quality of life, increased health care costs, and premature death in America.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Kara A. Witzke, “The Physiology of Obesity” in *ACE Health Coach Manual: The Ultimate Guide to Wellness, Fitness, and Lifestyle Change*, Cedric X. Bryant, Daniel J. Green and Sabrena Merrill, eds. (San Diego: American Council on Exercise, 2013), 203.

<sup>6</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention: Vital Signs, “Adult Obesity.”

<sup>7</sup> National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, *Healing the Epidemic by Making Health Easier: At a Glance 2010* (Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Avi Dor, Christine Ferguson, Casey Langwith, Ellen Tan, *A Heavy Burden: The Individual Costs of Being Overweight and Obese in the United States* (Washington D.C.: The George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services Department of Health Policy, 2010), 1.

<sup>9</sup> David H. Freedman, “How to Fix the Obesity Crisis,” *Scientific American* (February 2011): 42.

## Financial, Social, and Personal Impact of Excess Weight and Obesity

The effects of excess weight and obesity profoundly impact both individuals and society alike. According to recent estimates, excess weight and obesity cost patients \$152 billion in direct medical expenses annually.<sup>10</sup> An overweight person pays an average of \$346 more per year in health care costs than a person of normal weight, while an obese person pays an average of \$2,845 more per year.<sup>11</sup> An obese woman pays an average of \$4,879 a year in medical expenses, while an obese man pays an average of \$2,646.<sup>12</sup> While private payers bear most of the financial burden, public-sector spending pays a significant portion of these increased health care costs. According to recent estimates, Medicare spending would be over 8 percent less and Medicaid spending would be almost 12 percent less if excess weight and obesity were no longer significant issues for the population.<sup>13</sup>

Excess weight and obesity also affect workplace productivity in this country. Studies show that overweight and obese individuals miss more days of work and are generally less productive at work than those of normal weight. When compared to their normal weight coworkers, overweight and obese men miss an average of two additional days of work per year, while overweight and obese women average between one and five

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<sup>10</sup> Dor et al., *A Heavy Burden*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Ross A Hammond and Ruth Levine, "The Economic Impact of Obesity in the United States," *Diabetes, Metabolic Syndrome and Obesity: Targets and Therapy* (17 August 2010): 287, <http://www.dovepress.com/the-economic-impact-of-obesity-in-the-united-states-peer-reviewed-article-D> (accessed January 22, 2011).

additional missed days of work per year. Overweight and obese people are also more prone to work-related disabilities.<sup>14</sup>

Excess weight and obesity affect individuals on a personal level. Those who are overweight or obese are more likely to struggle with low self-esteem, depression, and even thoughts of suicide. The psychological problems associated with excess weight and obesity can cause individuals to become more socially isolated, which can exacerbate low self-esteem and depression.<sup>15</sup> According to the American Psychological Association, excess weight and depression often create a vicious cycle that is difficult to break. Individuals who are overweight are more likely to develop depression, and depressed individuals are more likely to overeat to cope with their symptoms.<sup>16</sup> This cycle can become debilitating.

#### America: An Obesogenic Environment

The causes of excess weight and obesity are varied and complex. On one hand, excess weight and obesity have a simple and straightforward cause—one consumes more calories than one burns. However, a deeper examination reveals that the matter is not so simple or straightforward. For instance, there are various medical conditions that can cause one to become overweight or obese, including hypothyroidism, Cushing's syndrome, and depression. Certain inherited conditions and brain diseases can cause

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<sup>14</sup> Dor et al., *A Heavy Burden*, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Partnership for Prevention Organization, *Straight Talk about Obesity and Health*, Partnership for Prevention, 2005, 5, <http://www.acsworkplacesolutions.com/wpsPDFs/ActiveForLife/ObesityImpact-v2.pdf> (accessed January 22, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> American Psychological Association Website, "Mind/Body: Obesity," American Psychological Association, <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/obesity.aspx> (accessed March 29, 2011).

people to overeat and become obese. Also, certain medications have been linked to weight gain, including steroids, high blood pressure drugs, seizure medications, and some antidepressants.<sup>17</sup> In addition to these medical conditions, there are many other complex factors that contribute to obesity. Kinesiology professor, Dr. Kara A. Witzke explains,

The exact cause of obesity remains a mystery. Unfortunately, obesity involves a complex interaction of many factors with psychological, environmental, evolutionary, biologic, and genetic causes. In its simplest context, the maintenance of body weight can be seen as involving three main factors: metabolic utilization of nutrients, dietary habits, and physical activity. In turn, these factors are affected by susceptibility genes, which may influence energy expenditure, fuel metabolism, muscle fiber function, and appetite or food choices.<sup>18</sup>

Genetics is one major factor cited as a cause for obesity. Experts point to humans' evolutionary makeup as a major cause of the current obesity epidemic. Obesity expert Dr. Mark Hyman argues that human bodies are genetically designed to gain and maintain excess weight.<sup>19</sup> He states, "We have evolved over hundreds of thousands of generations under conditions of food scarcity. The genes and molecules that control our eating behavior were shaped by those times. Our DNA was designed for accumulating fat in the days when we had to forage for food in the wild."<sup>20</sup> However, genetics alone does not explain the rapid increase in excess weight and obesity in America today. Dr. David Kessler questions why the same evolutionary processes that protected our ancestors from starvation would not also protect us against excess weight today. Kessler

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<sup>17</sup> WebMD, "Medical Causes of Obesity," WebMD, <http://www.webmd.com/diet/medical-reasons-obesity> (accessed January 26, 2013).

<sup>18</sup> Witzke, "The Physiology of Obesity," 209.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Hyman, *Ultrametabolism: The Simple Plan for Automatic Weight Loss* (New York: Scribner, 2006), 13.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

wonders why our genetic makeup does not cause our metabolisms to simply self-regulate, enabling us to maintain a healthy weight.<sup>21</sup> He hypothesizes that there are other factors at work besides genetics causing the current obesity epidemic.

Kessler and others believe that profound environmental changes have occurred in the culture since humans' hunter-gatherer days that have led to the rapid increase in excess weight and obesity in America today. Past generations consumed diets that were primarily made up of nutrient-packed lean meats, leafy vegetables, fruits, nuts, and seeds.<sup>22</sup> Today's Western diet, by contrast, is made up primarily of nutrient-poor processed foods that are high in salt, fat, and sugar. When these foods are consumed in excess, they override the body's natural ability to discern satiety, making the metabolism harder to regulate. These foods are also believed to possess a highly palatable, addictive quality—the more of these foods people consume, the more they want to consume.<sup>23</sup> Compounding matters is the fact that these foods are abundantly available in American culture today. Kessler observes, "During the past two decades there has been an explosion in our ability to access and afford highly palatable foods."<sup>24</sup> The food industry spends billions of dollars every year creating and marketing new highly-palatable processed foods that are high in salt, sugar, and fat. Data indicates that Americans are consuming these foods in ever-increasing amounts. According to the United States

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<sup>21</sup> David A. Kessler, *The End of Overeating in America: Taking Control of the American Appetite* (New York: Rodale, 2009), 22.

<sup>22</sup> Jill Fullerton-Smith. *The Truth About Food: What You Eat Can Change Your Life* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), 20.

<sup>23</sup> Kessler, *The End of Overeating*, 18.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

Department of Agriculture, Americans are consuming more of just about everything today. Americans have increased their per capita consumption of oils and fats by 63 percent—from fifty-three pounds to about eighty-six pounds—over a thirty-three-year period. Sugar and sweetener consumption has also risen by 19 percent over that same time period. Americans eat 46 percent more grains and 7 percent more meat, eggs, and nuts than in previous years. Even vegetable consumption is up by 24 percent, which may seem like a positive development, until it is noted that French fries contribute to the majority of this increase.<sup>25</sup>

Americans are also eating larger portion sizes of food items today than in past years. Table 1.1 presents data from the Obesity Education Initiative, illustrating changes in average food portion sizes and number of calories in just twenty years:

Table 1.1 – Serving Size Comparisons 20 Years Ago vs. Today<sup>26</sup>

<u>Food item, serving size/calories</u> 20 years ago:	<u>Food item, serving size/calories</u> Today:
Muffin, 1.5 oz – 210 calories	Muffin, 4 oz – 500 calories
2 slices of pizza – 500 calories	2 slices of pizza – 850 calories
Chicken Caesar salad, 1.5 cups – 390 calories	Chicken Caesar salad, 3.5 cups – 790 calories
Bagel, 3 in. diameter – 140 calories	Bagel, 6 in. diameter – 350 calories
Spaghetti and meatballs, 1 cup pasta with 3 small meatballs – 500 calories	Spaghetti and meatballs, 2 cups pasta with 3 large meatballs – 1,025 calories
French Fries, 2.4 oz – 240 calories	French Fries, 6.9 oz – 610 calories
Soda, 6.5 oz – 85 calories	Soda, 20 oz – 250 calories
Coffee with whole milk and sugar, 8 oz – 45 calories	Mocha coffee with steamed whole milk and syrup, 16 oz – 350 calories

<sup>25</sup> Kessler, *The End of Overeating*, 83.

<sup>26</sup> Table 1.1 statistics from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Website, “Portion Distortion: Do You Know How Food Portions Have Changed in 20 Years?” Interactive Quizzes I & II, Obesity Education Initiative of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov> (accessed January 22, 2011).

The larger portion sizes available today indicate that people are likely consuming many more calories than they were just two decades ago. These findings have led to the conclusion that “the increasing rates of obesity cannot be explained solely by changes in the gene pool, but it is possible that genetic variants are more often triggered in modern society by an obesogenic environment that includes high availability of energy- and fat-dense foods and people’s increasingly sedentary lifestyles.”<sup>27</sup>

Obesogenic cultural factors are even more pronounced among lower socioeconomic status populations. Obesity rates are higher among those of lower income and education levels, especially among women and certain ethnic groups. To explain the higher rates among these populations, researchers point to socioeconomic factors such as the availability and low cost of high-calorie, high-fat foods versus the unavailability and high cost of fresh fruits and vegetables.<sup>28</sup> Low income neighborhoods also tend to have a higher presence of fast-food restaurants and convenience stores with a conversely lower presence of supermarkets and grocery stores.<sup>29</sup> In all, research has shown that living in a low-income neighborhood is independently associated with both obesity and a poor diet, which is largely due to socioeconomic and environmental factors.<sup>30</sup>

In light of all this evidence, The Center for Disease Control and Prevention concludes, “American society has become 'obesogenic,' characterized by environments

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<sup>27</sup> Witzke, “The Physiology of Obesity,” 209.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

that promote increased food intake, nonhealthful foods, and physical inactivity.”<sup>31</sup> One obesity expert observes, “Our society is becoming increasingly “hostile” to sensible food management.”<sup>32</sup> Obesogenic cultural factors are further exacerbated by socioeconomic discrepancies that disadvantage lower income residents, putting them at a greater susceptibility to obesity and obesity-related health problems.

#### Adaptive Challenge: Healthy Weight Management in an Obesogenic Culture

America’s obesogenic culture clearly is a strong contributing factor to the rise in excess weight and obesity today. However, many believe it is not the cause, but merely a symptom of a deeper problem. Addiction expert Gabor Maté believes, “Although it is commonplace to blame the current epidemic of obesity on junk-food consumption and sedentary living, these are only the behavioral manifestations of a deeper psychological and social malaise.”<sup>33</sup> He further explains, “The obesity epidemic demonstrates a psychological and spiritual emptiness at the core of consumer society.”<sup>34</sup> Compulsive eating specialist and author, Geneen Roth observes, “The bottom line, whether you weigh 340 pounds or 150 pounds, is that when you eat when you are not hungry, you are using food as a drug, grappling with boredom or illness or loss or grief or emptiness or

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<sup>31</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention Website, “Overweight and Obesity,” Center for Disease Control, <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/index.html> (accessed April 25, 2011).

<sup>32</sup> Lance Levy, *Understanding Obesity: The Five Medical Causes* (Buffalo: Firefly Books, 2000), 4.

<sup>33</sup> Gabor Maté, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2010), 243.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

loneliness or rejection. Food is only the middleman, the means to the end.”<sup>35</sup> Though cultural forces create an environment that promotes excess food consumption, it is the deep inner unmet emotional and spiritual needs that actually drive people to overeat. Many diet and exercise programs fail because they do not address these underlying spiritual and emotional issues. Individuals may have a great deal of information about healthy eating and exercise but do not always make the behavioral changes necessary to reach and maintain a healthy weight. Registered dietitian Susan McQuillan believes, “A dieter’s overeating is often a symptom of underlying emotional problems or bad eating habits that need to be resolved before the weight will come off and stay off. No diet can do that for you.”<sup>36</sup>

Successful weight loss requires effective behavioral changes practiced over the long term, not mere information about healthy diet and exercise. Such behavioral changes cannot take place unless the underlying causes of a person’s overeating are addressed. Most weight loss programs available today do not address the most fundamental issues at the heart of human behavior—the spiritual ones. Most weight loss programs also fail to give people the inner mental and emotional resources to consistently make healthy, moderate food choices in our culture of excess and overconsumption. This ministry project aims to address these underlying spiritual issues related to weight loss so that people can make healthier choices regarding food consumption over the long-term. This ministry project will also help people tap into spiritual reserves that can strengthen

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<sup>35</sup> Geneen Roth, *Women, Food: An Unexpected Path to Almost Everything* (New York: Scribner, 2010), 52.

<sup>36</sup> Susan McQuillan, *Breaking the Bonds of Food Addiction* (New York: Penguin Group, 2004), 59.

their minds and wills, thus enabling them to withstand the cultural pressures that surround them. To effectively develop this weight loss ministry for South Hills residents, the following sections will explore the cultural landscape of this region, and more specifically, the problem of excess weight and obesity in this area.

### **The South Hills: A Microcosm of American Suburbia**

The South Hills region is comprised of all the townships, municipalities, and boroughs across the Monongahela River from downtown Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in southern Allegheny County. The South Hills hosts a varied population spread out across a large region. Therefore, exploration will be limited to the four areas of the South Hills that comprise most of the WROC's ministry population—the communities of Upper St. Clair, Bethel Park, Mt. Lebanon, and Peter's Township.<sup>37</sup>

These communities depict quintessential American suburbia—nuclear families living in safe, affluent neighborhoods with good school districts that provide a relatively high quality of living. Wealthy, middle to upper-middle class, highly educated professionals populate these four communities of the South Hills. Residents are predominantly White—about 97 percent of the total population.<sup>38</sup> Nearly 93 percent of the population has earned a high school degree or equivalent, while almost 46 percent

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<sup>37</sup> Peter's Township is considered part of the South Hills, even though it lies in neighboring Washington County.

<sup>38</sup> United States Census Bureau Website, "Census 2000 Demographic Profile Highlights: General Characteristics: Zip Code Tabulation Areas 15102, 15228, 15241, 15317," <http://factfinder.census.gov/> (accessed April 12, 2011).

have earned a Bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>39</sup> These figures are much higher than the state educational attainment rates of 82 percent for high school degree or equivalent and 22 percent for Bachelor's degree or higher. The socioeconomic standard of living is also higher in these areas when compared with both state and national averages. The average median household income is \$62,720, compared to the state median household income of \$40,106 and the national median household income of \$41,994.<sup>40</sup> Over 58 percent of area households earn more than \$50,000, and 23 percent earn over \$100,000. By comparison, 40 percent of state households earn over \$50,000, and only 11 percent earn over \$100,000.<sup>41</sup> The average median home price of these four communities is \$142,950, compared to the state median price of \$97,000 and the national median price of \$119,600.<sup>42</sup> One out of every five homes in these communities is priced over \$200,000.<sup>43</sup> Poverty levels are low in these communities as well. Only 3 percent of area families live below the poverty level, compared to state rates of 12 percent and national rates of 13

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<sup>39</sup> United States Census Bureau Website, "Census 2000 Demographic Profile Highlights: Educational Attainment: Zip Code Tabulation Areas 15102, 15228, 15241, 15317," <http://factfinder.census.gov/> (accessed April 12, 2011).

<sup>40</sup> United States Census Bureau Website, "Census 2000 Demographic Profile Highlights: Income Distribution: Zip Code Tabulation Areas 15102, 15228, 15241, 15317," <http://factfinder.census.gov/> (accessed April 12, 2011).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> United States Census Bureau Website, "Census 2000 Demographic Profile Highlights: Value, Mortgage Status, and Select Conditions: Zip Code Tabulation Areas 15102, 15228, 15241, 15317," <http://factfinder.census.gov/> (accessed April 12, 2011).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

percent.<sup>44</sup> People in these communities tend to enjoy a higher socioeconomic standard of living when compared to state and national levels.

#### Status/Image-Conscious

The residents of Bethel Park, Upper St. Clair, Mt. Lebanon, and Peter's Township are status-conscious, desiring to project an image of their wealth and societal achievement. Residents spend a lot of time and money on the upkeep of their property and grounds, making sure these are visually in keeping with community standards. Many residents drive luxury brand vehicles such as Lexus and BMW. The area's two major local shopping centers, South Hills Village Mall and The Galleria, both contain a variety of high-end retailers that sell goods from name-brand designers like Coach, Ralph Lauren, and Tommy Hilfiger. The school districts are also a sign of social status. These four communities within the South Hills boast nationally acclaimed school districts with high graduation rates and many students who go on to attend prestigious colleges and universities. The above factors make these South Hills communities desirable places to live. For many, residency in these communities equals safety, prosperity, and upward social mobility—successful fulfillment of the American dream.

#### Suburbia's Isolation: Hunger for Relational Connectedness

In these image-conscious communities, residents experience a certain level of isolation and desire for relational connectedness. Most households in these communities have two income earners—often a necessity to support their socioeconomic lifestyles.

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<sup>44</sup> United States Census Bureau Website, "Census 2000 Demographic Profile Highlights: Poverty Status: Zip Code Tabulation Areas 15102, 15228, 15241, 15317," <http://factfinder.census.gov/> (accessed April 12, 2011).

Often this means that community residents spend most of their time at their places of employment or with their immediate families, rather than in their neighborhoods mingling with fellow residents. Also, the suburban neighborhoods of these communities are primarily residential, necessitating the use of a car to travel to shopping areas and businesses. This further reduces the interactions residents have with one another. Most social interaction comes in the form of structured activities usually related to their children's school functions, such as sporting events and music concerts. Parents often spend a great deal of time shuttling children from one activity to another, leaving little time to interact with other parents. Residents without children have an especially difficult time forming meaningful relationship in these communities. Although the suburban lifestyle provides comfort, stability, and social status, it can also be relationally isolating.

#### Institutional Religious Participation with Spiritual Curiosity

The religious landscape of these four communities in the South Hills is marked by some institutional religious participation coupled with spiritual curiosity and a hunger for deeper meaning. While many are content to settle into the suburban lifestyle, there are others who sense a deeper restlessness—a desire to connect with something or someone bigger than themselves and idyllic suburbia. Some residents search for deeper meaning in organized religious institutions, while others find alternative means of seeking deeper truth. Those who participate in organized religious institutions tend to be Christian, both Catholic and Protestant, with a few from the Orthodox tradition. There is also a significant Jewish population in this region, along with several smaller communities of

other faith traditions. Organized religious institutions seek to provide for their congregations' social and spiritual needs. Many of these religious organizations have programming targeted to specific age groups—children, youth, seniors, parents, etc. They also provide programming that addresses specific topics of interest such as parenting, finances, and current events. Additionally, these faith communities support humanitarian efforts within the local community and throughout the greater Pittsburgh area. Many organized religious communities also offer programs such as Bible studies, book discussions, and other educational classes designed to meet members' spiritual needs.

In addition to traditional religious organizations, many in the South Hills are seeking spiritual nourishment through nontraditional means. Many “New Age”-style retreats and workshops are cropping up in various places throughout the South Hills. Also, several private-practice Reiki masters, yoga instructors, and holistic health practitioners have begun offering spiritual services to South Hills residents. Whether through organized religious venues or nontraditional means, residents in these South Hills communities seek deeper spiritual meaning to help them process their everyday life experiences.

### **Excess Weight and Obesity in the South Hills**

As in the rest of America, excess weight and obesity are serious health concerns in the South Hills region of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (hereafter, BRFSS), a research division that publishes health-related statistics for counties and major

metropolitan areas, a large percentage of Allegheny County residents report being overweight or obese. Additionally, many report having serious health conditions related to excess weight and obesity. Data collected by the BRFSS in 2009 reveals that nearly 38 percent of the county's population is overweight and another 27 percent is obese.<sup>45</sup> Almost 11 percent of the county's population has been diagnosed with diabetes or borderline/pre-diabetes.<sup>46</sup> Over 38 percent of the population has been diagnosed with high cholesterol.<sup>47</sup> Over 5 percent of county residents have been diagnosed with heart disease, while an additional 5 percent have actually had a heart attack.<sup>48</sup> Another 3 percent of county residents have had a stroke.<sup>49</sup> These statistics demonstrate that excess weight and obesity are significant health concerns for people of this region, contributing to a host of more serious medical conditions.

Lifestyle practices of the county population likely contribute to obesity and obesity-related medical conditions in this region. According to the BRFSS, nearly three-quarters of the county's residents do not consume the recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables per day.<sup>50</sup> Only half of the population reports participating in twenty minutes of vigorous exercise at least three times per week or thirty minutes of

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<sup>45</sup> Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Report, "SMART: Selected Metropolitan/Micropolitan Area Risk Trends, View Health Risk Data: 2009 - Allegheny County, PA," Center for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/BRFSS-SMART/SelCountyQuestion.asp?MMSA> (accessed April 12, 2011).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

moderate exercise at least five times per week.<sup>51</sup> One in four county residents engages in more than twenty minutes of vigorous exercise at least three times per week.<sup>52</sup> These lifestyle practices are likely a contributing factor to the health problems reported by residents in this region.

### Community Resources Addressing Weight Loss and Management

Clearly excess weight and obesity are major health concerns in this region. Fortunately, there are a number of existing community resources and programs dedicated to helping people with excess weight and obesity, and their resulting health problems. St. Clair Hospital, the region's main health care facility, provides resources and services focused upon preventing and managing excess weight and obesity. The hospital offers both inpatient and outpatient nutritional counseling, as well as web-based educational resources through a participating organization called Healthwise.org. These web-based resources include information on diet, exercise, and other lifestyle factors. Additionally, Healthwise.org provides interactive web tools that help people calculate their BMI, measure risk factors for various health conditions, and create plans to meet wellness goals.

St. Clair Hospital also has several specialized departments that target the treatment and prevention of more serious health concerns related to excess weight and obesity. One of the largest and most comprehensive of these departments focuses upon

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<sup>51</sup> Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Report, "SMART: Selected Metropolitan/Micropolitan Area Risk Trends," [http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/BRFSS-SMART / SelCountyQuestion.asp?MMSA](http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/BRFSS-SMART/SelCountyQuestion.asp?MMSA) (accessed April 12, 2011).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

cardiovascular care. The hospital's cardiovascular services include cardiac catheterizations, diagnostics, surgery, and rehabilitation. The facility also provides preventative services, such as *The Healthy Heart Primary Prevention/Wellness Program*, offering patients a comprehensive plan to prevent or reduce the progression of cardiovascular disease.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to providing comprehensive cardiac treatment, St. Clair hospital also offers specialized medical services for the treatment and prevention of other health conditions related to excess weight and obesity. The hospital's diabetes department provides a wide variety of services, including blood glucose monitoring, insulin administration, medications, exercise strategies, meal planning, and sick-day management.<sup>54</sup> The facility also has a sleep center that provides comprehensive diagnosis and treatment of sleep apnea and related disorders.<sup>55</sup>

There are other community resources in the South Hills region that address excess weight and obesity. All four of the South Hills communities explored in this survey have community-operated recreation centers that provide comprehensive fitness and wellness programs for people of all ages. These newly-constructed, state-of-the-art centers contain large gymnasiums, fitness centers with high-end exercise machines and equipment, studio rooms for smaller fitness classes, indoor tracks, and pools for water activities. These center offers fitness classes for all ages, sports programs, personal training, and

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<sup>53</sup> St. Clair Hospital Website, "Cardiac Rehab and Wellness," St. Clair Hospital, <http://www.stclair.org/160/cardiac-rehab-and-wellness> (accessed April 12, 2011).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

nutritional services. These centers also sponsor a variety of community events throughout the year focused upon health and fitness.

In addition to these major community resources and programming, there are other weight loss and fitness programs and facilities in the South Hills region. Most major weight loss franchises have offices in the area, including *Weight Watchers*, *Jenny Craig*, *Nutrisystem*, and *L.A. Weight Loss*. Also, the region possesses many major fitness center franchises including *Bally's*, *L.A. Fitness*, *Curves*, and *Anytime Fitness*. Several non-profit weight loss groups operate in the area, including *Take Off Pounds Sensibly* and *Overeaters Anonymous*. The region also hosts a number of smaller locally operated gyms and weight loss centers. Some private-practice certified wellness coaches are also emerging throughout the region.

Several churches in the region are branching out into the fitness and wellness field, offering exercise classes, personal training, and even workout facilities on the premises. Many churches also offer a Christian weight loss program called *First Place 4 Health*.<sup>56</sup> This program focuses upon four pillars of health—physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual—with the goal of helping participants develop an overall healthier lifestyle grounded in Christ. Lastly, the WROC at Westminster Church offers a variety of fitness and wellness programming, and will serve as the venue for the pilot of this ministry project. A detailed analysis of this community resource will be presented in Chapter 2.

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<sup>56</sup> Carole Lewis and Marcus Brotherton, *First Place 4 Health: Discover a New Way to Healthy Living* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2008), 7.

## CHAPTER 2

### WESTMINSTER RECREATION AND OUTREACH CENTER: MINISTRY CONTEXT FOR PROPOSED WEIGHT LOSS MINISTRY

The WROC is a ministry facility providing creative programming as a means of outreach to residents of the South Hills. The WROC operates under the auspices of Westminster Presbyterian Church, a 1,700-member congregation affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (USA) located in Upper St. Clair. Since its founding in 1946 under the leadership of Rev. John Galbreath, Westminster has had a vision of being a center of spiritual development and community service in the South Hills.<sup>1</sup> As one of the largest churches in the area, Westminster's extensive facility and ample financial resources have enabled the church to develop a wide variety of ministry programming for both the congregation and surrounding community. The WROC is an extension of Westminster's community outreach mission.

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<sup>1</sup> Westminster Presbyterian Church Website, "Our History," Westminster Presbyterian Church, <http://www.westminster-church.org/aboutus/history.html>. (accessed May 19, 2011).

## **The WROC: History, Purpose and Target Population**

The vision for the WROC began in 1993 when the leadership of Westminster Presbyterian Church determined there was a need for a recreational-focused outreach ministry to reach residents of the South Hills. The leadership envisioned the WROC to be “an outreach tool to individuals and families regardless of age within our local communities.”<sup>2</sup> This vision stems from the larger vision of Westminster Presbyterian Church, whose members believe “we are called to be a ‘beacon church’ and are committed to ‘bring people to Christ.’”<sup>3</sup> A proposal for this facility describes the rationale for this vision: “For many people sports, recreation and instructional classes serve as an important function in the center of their often busy and frantic lifestyles. These programs address the physical, mental and social needs of these individuals and families . . . No longer do we live in a culture that places a high priority on church involvement . . . therefore it is critical that the church reaches out to this large number of people.”<sup>4</sup> The proposed facility would provide South Hills community residents with a unique ministry of recreation and enrichment, while at the same time providing a non-threatening entry point into the larger church life of Westminster. Following a period of discussion and discernment, the leadership of Westminster approved the proposal to build the WROC. After a year-long capital campaign, the WROC was constructed and opened its doors in 1994.

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<sup>2</sup> Westminster Presbyterian Church, *Westminster Recreational Outreach Center Capital Campaign Proposal* (Pittsburgh, PA: Westminster Presbyterian Church, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

The WROC's purpose is "to reach out to people for Jesus Christ and develop their faith through recreational activities and Christian fellowship."<sup>5</sup> In keeping with its mission, the WROC provides a wide range of programming for the recreational, educational, and spiritual enrichment of the community. Westminster Presbyterian Church's web information on the WROC states:

Programs are geared to provide insights and solutions for whatever problems or issues people might be facing in their lives and to know that they are not alone in life's struggles. Programs address issues such as being new to the community and getting settled in, living a healthier life and adopting healthier habits, getting and staying organized, strengthening parenting skills, instructional classes on computers and other topics, and activities designed for fun and fellowship.<sup>6</sup>

The WROC was built to meet the needs of the whole South Hills community. The WROC seeks to offer programming that meets the needs and interests of residents of all ages and walks of life. Its ministry is primarily targeted to residents outside the worshipping community of Westminster Church. From its inception, one of the main goals of the WROC is "to reach out to the unchurched in our community by offering sports, recreational activities, and instructional classes as a doorway into the life of Westminster Presbyterian Church fellowship."<sup>7</sup> The WROC's outreach ministry "is extended to those of all ages for the expressed purpose of drawing people into the life of our church."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> WROC website, "WROC's Mission," Westminster Presbyterian Church, <http://wroc.westminster-church.org/>. (accessed May 19, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Westminster Presbyterian Church, *WROC Campaign Proposal*.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

## **Current Programming of the WROC**

Since its creation, the WROC's main programming has consisted of a wide range of sports, exercise, and wellness programs for all ages. The WROC's main facility is a large gymnasium that hosts a variety of sports and fitness classes. Through the WROC, adults from the community can participate in weekly basketball and volleyball games. Community residents can also take a variety of exercise classes geared toward different fitness levels. The WROC also offers classes for special needs and special populations within the community, such as seniors and youth, including adult enrichment programming such as arts, crafts, and day trips. The WROC also provides programming to meet practical needs of community residents, offering classes in such topics as parenting, job seeking, and integrating into the community as new residents.

More recently, the WROC has begun to offer programming to meet the spiritual needs of the community. This type of programming was introduced through topical courses with a spiritual focus, such as a weight loss class with a Bible study component. These "crossover" programs straddled the line between practical needs and spiritual content. They are designed to present spiritual content in a non-threatening way by relating the spiritual to a practical topic such as weight loss or financial management. *First Place 4 Health* is a good example of this type of "crossover" spiritual programming that the WROC offers. As people learn about good nutrition, exercise and healthy lifestyle change, they are also exposed to scripture related to these topics. These "crossover" programs whet the appetite for further spiritual inquiry and reflection. These types of classes encourage unchurched community members to seek spiritual meaning in

their lives, perhaps leading them to attend worship or a more formal Bible study at Westminster Church.

Providing this type of “crossover” programming paved the way for the WROC to offer more explicitly spiritual programming such as formal Bible studies and Christian events. For instance, the WROC currently offers a Wednesday morning Bible study for women where they are studying Beth Moore’s *Believing God*. The WROC also offers spiritual programming for men, including a monthly men’s fellowship breakfast with a Bible study. This group recently studied John Eldridge’s *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man’s Soul*.<sup>9</sup> Some of these WROC Bible study classes have moved under the umbrella of Westminster Church’s Adult Spiritual Development (hereafter, ASD) committee as permanent small groups that continue fostering Bible study, fellowship, and spiritual growth among their members. The WROC is likely to continue offering this kind of spiritual programming as the need and interest for it continues to increase.

### **WROC’s Current Vision, Leadership and Theology in Relation to Westminster Presbyterian Church**

The WROC’s initial vision was to be an outreach venue to people of all ages in the South Hills with the purpose of drawing unchurched participants into the worshipping community of Westminster Presbyterian Church. However, the WROC drifted from its original mission in the years following its creation. By the mid 2000s, the WROC was operating as primarily a recreation center—a place where people came to exercise or take an art class, but with no intentional strategy to draw people into the life of the broader

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<sup>9</sup> Westminster Presbyterian Church Website, “Men WROC,” <http://wroc.westminster-church.org/menwroc.htm> (accessed February 18, 2012).

church community. In 2006, the WROC underwent a revisioning process under the leadership of Westminster’s Senior Pastor, Dr. James Gilchrist. Gilchrist worked with the leadership of Westminster Church to revitalize the WROC’s ministry and mission, returning it to its original vision of community outreach and drawing people into the life of the church. At this time, the WROC underwent a subtle but important name change—from the Westminster Recreational Outreach Ministry to the Westminster Recreation *and* Outreach Ministry.<sup>10</sup> This change was intended to reflect this ministry’s rejuvenated focus. No longer was the WROC merely to be a recreation center for the community—it was to be a form of intentional Christian outreach. The leadership clearly stated, “The WROC is more than just a gymnasium—It is a ministry.”<sup>11</sup> Though the leadership believed it was important to maintain the center’s recreational programming, the WROC’s renewed focus would be on community outreach. Specifically, the programming would have a more spiritual focus and would more intentionally draw participants into the life of the church.

#### “Thirty-One Doors”: The WROC as Community Outreach

In recasting the WROC’s vision, Gilchrist drew from a sermon preached by former Associate Pastor, Dr. Gail Buchwalter King, entitled “Thirty-One Doors,”

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<sup>10</sup> James Gilchrist, interview by the author, Pittsburgh, PA, June 27, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Deborah Waller, *Westminster Recreation Outreach (WROC) Memorandum* (Pittsburgh, PA: Westminster Presbyterian Church, 2006).

referencing the fact that Westminster Church has thirty-one external doors.<sup>12</sup> In this sermon, King uses the concept of a physical door as a metaphor for how one enters into a life with Jesus Christ. She describes how people not only enter the church building through one of physical doors, but also enter into a community where they can grow spiritually and explore the Christian faith through various church activities. Thus, the thirty-one doors of the church represent a potential spiritual pathway to encountering Jesus Christ.

Gilchrist took King's metaphor of the thirty-one doors and applied it to the WROC's new spiritually-focused outreach mission to the South Hills community. He views the various WROC activities as "doors" through which people enter the church from the community. The "door" might be an aerobics class, an art workshop, or a children's program, but these all provide a safe, non-threatening entry point into the church. The WROC's programming is designed to be inherently beneficial for people in its own right. People can attend WROC programming and benefit from it with no further expectations for additional church involvement. However WROC programming positions people to explore greater spiritual matters if they so choose. He sees the WROC operating as a "felt-needs" ministry—a ministry that brings people through the doors of the church to meet specific needs for recreation, health, and personal enrichment. From this entry point, people can explore deeper spiritual needs as well.

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<sup>12</sup> Gail Buckwalter King, "Thirty-One Doors" (sermon, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh, PA, April 29, 2007).

## WROC Director's Leadership: Integrated Wellness and Spiritual Growth

The WROC's ministry is coordinated by its director, Lisa Boyd. Boyd not only serves as the primary administrative personnel for the WROC's ministry, but has also played a crucial role in developing its programming and implementing its vision. Boyd shares Gilchrist's vision for the WROC—an outreach ministry offering felt-needs-based programming with the hope of drawing community residents into deeper spiritual reflection, and eventually into a relationship with Jesus Christ. Boyd is largely responsible for developing the WROC's diverse programming, as well as recruiting its leadership and promoting it in the community. During her five-year tenure, Boyd has introduced a wide range of creative programming to the WROC. Under Boyd's leadership, the WROC's programming took more of an Evangelical trend. While many WROC programs had no explicit faith element to them, Boyd initiated several programs that met specific felt needs while also explicitly reflecting Christian faith. For instance, Boyd introduced several programs such as, *Lose It for Life*, *First Place 4 Health*, and *Just Moved*. Additionally, Boyd resourced men's programming with Christian book studies that included Tony Dungee's *Uncommon* and John Eldridge's *Wild at Heart*. These programs successfully met participants' felt needs, while introducing them to the Christian faith.

As the WROC grows and incorporates more explicitly spiritual programming, Boyd hopes that its ministry will focus more upon cultivating the whole person. She desires to see greater integration of people's spiritual lives into their physical wellness—

what Boyd refers to as “You growing the whole you.”<sup>13</sup> Boyd is working with the leadership of Westminster to create a stronger, more intentional connection between the WROC’s programming and participants’ holistic growth. To accomplish this goal, Boyd believes that it is crucial to forge a stronger, more intentional link between the WROC’s programming and the larger ministry of Westminster Church. When she first began her position as WROC Director, the WROC and Westminster Church functioned as separate entities with little coordination between their respective ministries. Over the course of her work, Boyd has worked to bridge this gap and create more synergy between the WROC and Westminster. Currently the WROC operates more or less autonomously with loose oversight from Westminster Church. In order to bridge the two ministries together more closely, the WROC was placed under the administration of the ASD committee and its staff liaison, David Fetterman. The objective in making this change was to promote greater synergy between the two ministries, as well as begin to facilitate a more structured process for moving people from WROC programming into the ministry of the larger church.

Boyd has noticed some positive outcomes as a result of this administrative change. For instance, after the completion of some WROC programs, participants wanted to stay together to continue their growth and fellowship. Boyd helped these participants coordinate resources and logistics so that they could grow into a functioning small group with a more spiritual focus. Through this process, a number of ongoing small groups grew out of WROC programs. These small groups went on to become part of the larger ministry of Westminster Church under the administrative leadership of the

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<sup>13</sup> Lisa Boyd, interview by the author, Pittsburgh, PA, June 6, 2011.

ASD committee.<sup>14</sup> Boyd hopes and dreams that the WROC will continue to open the doors of the church to the South Hills community in creative ways so that its residents can eventually draw closer to Jesus Christ.

### **Spiritual Formation-Based Weight Loss Ministry: Potential and Resistance**

When the idea of launching a pilot spiritual formation-based weight loss ministry through the WROC was presented to Westminster's leadership, they were enthusiastically supportive. They believed the project was very much in keeping with the WROC's mission and ministry. They especially appreciated the project's integration of the spiritual as well as physical aspects of weight loss and wellness. They also thought the program could be a creative "door" through which members of the community may enter the church. After considering the pilot proposal, Westminster was pleased to offer the WROC as a ministry venue for this program. In order to give the program broader exposure, as well as to integrate it more tightly with the Westminster's overall ministry, the ASD offered to co-sponsor the project in partnership with the WROC.

#### Ministry Potential

Based upon research of the South Hills area, it was concluded that there was significant potential for the ministry project to be successful. Health statistics for the South Hills area indicated that there was a need for people to lose weight and improve their overall wellness. The number of existing weight loss and wellness resources in the community also indicated that there was a demand for such programs, particularly ones that offered a unique approach. The spiritual focus of this program, coupled with its

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<sup>14</sup> Lisa Boyd, interview by the author, Pittsburgh, PA, June 6, 2011.

integration of spiritual and physical wellness practices met this interest for unique approaches to weight loss in the community. This program complemented, rather than competed with existing weight loss programs. The ministry pilot could be undertaken in conjunction with or as a supplement to an existing weight loss program. Since most commercial weight loss programs do not address the spiritual aspects of a person's wellness, this program filled the gaps left by other programs. Additionally, South Hills residents demonstrated a general interest in spirituality, particularly as it relates to health and wellness. For these reasons, there was great potential for this weight loss ministry offered through the WROC at Westminster Church. As an established entity providing wellness programs to the community, the WROC was an ideal venue for this ministry endeavor.

#### Ministry Resistance

Despite the potential for this weight loss ministry, there was possible resistance to this program. Although there was a community demand for weight loss services, there were also many existing programs and resources that could have been viewed as potential competition to this program. Although this weight loss ministry took a unique approach and met needs not already addressed by existing programs, it was still a challenge to market such a program in a field with so many competitors. In promoting this program, it was important to emphasize the ministry's unique qualities, as well as how it complemented other existing weight loss programs.

Another possible resistance to the weight loss ministry was participants' potential uneasiness with the spiritual content and practices of the program. Although there was

interest among community members in spirituality and spiritual practices as they relate to wellness, such spiritual practices were foreign to the average South Hills resident. Some South Hills residents may have found certain spiritual practices strange or intimidating. They may have hesitated to participate in a program that emphasizes such practices, preferring a more traditional weight loss program. To overcome this possible resistance, it was necessary to present spiritual practices in a relaxed, non-threatening, and non-compulsory way. This program provided tools and resources to help participants lose weight and achieve holistic wellness. Practices were offered, not forced upon people in an uncomfortable or unhelpful way. Spiritual practices were also introduced gradually and gently. Participants were encouraged, but not mandated to practice them. In this way, participants were exposed to a variety of spiritual practices that may be helpful to them on their wellness journey without the pressure of having to practice ones that are uncomfortable or threatening.

A third possible resistance to the proposed weight loss ministry was the desire of many for a “quick fix” approach to weight loss rather than a long-term lifestyle change. It is tempting to believe the advertisements seen on TV that promise dramatic weight loss in very little time with very little effort. However, these depictions of weight loss do not reflect reality. Long-term weight loss takes both time and effort. Permanent weight loss is a lifelong process requiring dramatic lifestyle changes in order to be successful. This program is not designed to be a “quick fix” plan for weight loss. It is designed to help people take a holistic approach to wellness and weight loss—one that incorporates a healthy diet, exercise, rest, and good spiritual practices to address the inner issues that often lead to overeating. The program’s length—forty days—was enough time to begin

to make permanent lifestyle changes, however it was just the beginning of what would hopefully become a long-term lifestyle of integrated wellness. Honesty regarding realistic program expectations at the outset was crucial so that participants did not become disappointed, frustrated, or disheartened in the process. This ministry program equipped participants to develop a wellness regimen that works with their lifestyle and meets their goals—a roadmap for a lifetime of successful weight loss and wellness. By establishing realistic expectations at the outset, participants were able to benefit from the ministry project’s content and practices.

PART TWO  
THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Before laying out the specifics of the weight loss ministry, it was necessary to develop an adequate theological foundation for the project. To assist in developing this foundation, this chapter reviews a number of relevant sources whose insights were integrated into the ministry's theology. The first section of this chapter reviews sources that address the theology of the Christian life and spiritual formation. The second section reviews sources that describe the theological concept of gluttony—its cause, effects, and spiritual remedy. The third section surveys two contemporary spiritual weight loss approaches—one from a Christian perspective and the other from a new-age, self-actualization spirituality.

## Theology of the Christian Life and Spiritual Formation

In exploring the theology of the Christian life and spiritual formation, two main sources are surveyed. The first is the classic work by the great Reformed theologian John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, with particular attention to Book Three. The second source is a contemporary work by author Dallas Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines: How God Changes Lives*. Both works provide insight on the subject of inner transformation through spiritual formation.

### John Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book Three

In this work, Calvin explains how Christians receive, benefit from, and are transformed by Christ's grace. Calvin believes that Christ's grace is active in believers' lives through the Holy Spirit, who indwells and empowers them to bear spiritual fruit in the Christian life. This grace is applied through faith, which Calvin defines as "a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit."<sup>1</sup> Without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, human beings are unable to come to faith—to respond to God's goodness. However, those whom the Spirit has enlightened, according to Calvin, are assured faith, which is grounded solely upon God's mercy and not on human effort. Calvin asserts, "There can be no firm condition of faith unless it rests upon God's mercy."<sup>2</sup> Faith not only promises the believer blessings in the life to come, it also empowers the believer for living the

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, in *The Library of Christian Classics*, vol. 20, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 551.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 576.

Christian life in the present world. Calvin believes that faith leads to regeneration through repentance—a turning from a life of sin to a life with God in Christ. Calvin asserts that this new life is a gift of God, brought about by the free gift of God’s justification, which he defines as “the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as righteous men,” and consists of both “the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness.”<sup>3</sup> Calvin refutes the idea that salvation can be earned through one’s works, though he does believe that good works will naturally occur in the lives of those who are justified. Calvin states, “In our sharing in Christ, which justifies us, sanctification is just as much included as righteousness.”<sup>4</sup>

The theology presented in Book Three of Calvin’s *Institutes* lays the foundation for much of the Reformed tradition. Therefore, Calvin’s work will contribute extensively in establishing a theological foundation of the Christian life from the Reformed perspective, which undergirds this ministry project. In particular, Calvin’s teachings on Christian freedom and the lawful use of God’s gifts are particularly relevant to the project, as this topic addresses proper stewardship of God’s resources—a key theological tenet of the proposed ministry. Calvin also contributes to the understanding and practical usage of several key spiritual practices, mainly prayer and study of the Scriptures. Book Three of Calvin’s *Institutes* presents the basics of a Reformed theology of the spiritual life that is foundational to this project.

There are some limitations to Calvin’s work in reference to this ministry project. One limitation is Calvin’s minimal treatment of the topic of gluttony. He mentions

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<sup>3</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 727.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 798.

gluttony, along with several other sins, in his section on the proper use of God's gifts, but he does not go into nearly as much detail on the subject as other writers have done. Also, Calvin's view of the human body in reference to the spiritual life is problematic. Calvin falls into same trap of many of his contemporaries in that he views the human body as something that is, by nature, a hindrance to spiritual development. He writes, "No one in this earthly prison of the body has sufficient strength to press on with due eagerness, and weakness so weighs down the greater number, that, with wavering and limping and even creeping along the ground, they move at a feeble rate."<sup>5</sup> Calvin's view of the body runs counter to that of this project, which presents the human body as beneficial and even necessary for progressing in the spiritual life. Another limitation is that Calvin addresses several doctrinal questions that related to specific sixteenth century theological issues, especially ones that pertained to Catholicism. For instance, Calvin spends a great deal of time refuting Catholic doctrines such as penance, purgatory, and indulgences—matters specific to Calvin's era that are not directly applicable to the project at hand. Lastly, Calvin's doctrine of predestination, perhaps his most controversial doctrine, presents another limitation to the development of the proposed ministry. Though subject of predestination undoubtedly raises a great deal of inquiry, discussion, and debate, Calvin's treatment of this subject goes well beyond the scope of this project.

Dallas Willard: *Spirit of the Disciplines*

In this work, the author proposes a pragmatic theology for Christlike inner transformation through the practice of classic spiritual disciplines. Willard believes that

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<sup>5</sup> Calvin, Institutes, vol. 1, 689.

human beings are created in God’s image and are designed to live under the auspices of God’s Kingdom. Willard asserts that “a person is a ‘spiritual person’ to the degree that his or her life is correctly integrated into and dominated by God’s spiritual Kingdom.”<sup>6</sup> Willard defines the spiritual life as “that range of activities in which people cooperatively interact with God—and with the spiritual order deriving from God’s personality and action.”<sup>7</sup> Willard believes that an active spiritual life results in “a new overall quality of human existence with corresponding new powers”—mainly, the power to live one’s life as God intended.<sup>8</sup> To develop this kind of transformative spiritual life, Willard proposes the practice of time-honored spiritual disciplines, which he defines as activities “undertaken to bring us into more effective cooperation with Christ and his Kingdom.”<sup>9</sup> Willard believes that these spiritual disciplines, “when we engage in them conscientiously and creatively and adapt them to our individual needs, time, and place—will be more than adequate to receive the full Christ-life and become the kind of person that should emerge in the following of him.”<sup>10</sup> Willard’s teaching on the spiritual life, and in particular on the spiritual disciplines, contributes significantly to the theological foundation of this project. The proposed ministry will rely heavily on Willard’s theological understanding of the spiritual life, as well as on his instruction on the practice of spiritual disciplines themselves.

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<sup>6</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1988), 67.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

Another significant contribution of Willard's work is his understanding of the human body as related to spiritual growth. Willard affirms the necessity and worth of the human body in spiritual development. He discounts the fallacy that the body is a lower, baser entity that is somehow separated from the spiritual life. Instead, Willard asserts that the human body is the primary means through which we live the spiritual life. His theology of the body greatly enhances the project's focus of "stewardship of the body"—the practice of good physical habits along with spiritual disciplines to honor God and achieve wellness of the whole person—body and spirit.

The major limitation with Willard's work is that it does not specifically address the issue of relating spiritual disciplines to one's health and well-being as an act of honoring God. He makes a brief mention of using spiritual disciplines to combat "the seven deadly sins," including gluttony, but he does not provide specific guidance on how to practice the disciplines to address these serious spiritual issues.<sup>11</sup> It proved to be somewhat challenging to apply Willard's theology of the disciplines and their practice to this specific ministry project and its unique context, however his insights proved both useful and applicable.

### **Gluttony, Its Cause, Effects, and Spiritual Remedy**

To address the spiritual condition of gluttony, several significant works on this subject were surveyed. The first source on topic of gluttony reviewed is *The Institutes*, an ancient work from the Catholic tradition written by St. John Cassian (360-430? CE). The second source reviewed is a contemporary source on addiction by Dr. Gabor Maté

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<sup>11</sup> Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 191.

entitled, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction*. The third source reviewed is Stephanie Paulsell’s work, *Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice*. The final source reviewed in this section is a work by contemporary theologian Mary Louise Bringle entitled, *The God of Thinness: Gluttony and Other Weighty Matters*. These sources provide key insights on the subject of gluttony from both ancient wisdom and modern-day voices.

#### St. John Cassian: *The Institutes*

John Cassian’s *The Institutes* was composed against the backdrop of early monasticism as a guide for monks’ spiritual practice in their orders. The author’s purpose in this twelve-book work is to help monks achieve spiritual perfection by overcoming eight principle vices through spiritual practices and monastic order.<sup>12</sup> In the first two books, Cassian lays out an order for monastic life including regulations regarding community life, such as clothing and forms for prayers times. In the remaining nine books, Cassian describes the eight principle vices—gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, sadness, acedia (sloth), vainglory, and pride.

Cassian believes that in order for a monk “to be able to ascend even to the loftiest heights of perfection,” he must be taught how “to conquer his desires.”<sup>13</sup> For Cassian, conquering these desires means rooting out the eight principle vices through the communal practice of strict disciplines. Cassian believes that the vices are hierarchical in nature. To successfully conquer them, one must first root out the fleshy, baser vices of

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<sup>12</sup> John Cassian, *The Institutes*, in *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, vol. 58, trans. Boniface Ramsey (New York: Newman Press, 1997), 13.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

gluttony and fornication before attaining the strength of will to overcome the more spiritual, internal vices, such as pride. Once a monk has successfully conquered the vices, he will achieve spiritual perfection.

Cassian's work makes several contributions to the proposed ministry project. First, Cassian's discussion of gluttony contributes to the theological and historical understanding of this spiritual condition in reference to this project. Cassian's view of gluttony is one of the first teachings on record regarding this subject, forming the basis of the topic's later exposition by Catholic writers such as St. Gregory the Great and Thomas Aquinas. Cassian also contributes some wise teaching on the subject of fasting as a potential remedy to the spiritual condition of gluttony. Though presented in the context of early Christian monastic life, Cassian's instruction on fasting has some contemporary application. As fasting is one of the spiritual practices that will be incorporated into the proposed ministry project, Cassian's teaching is useful in guiding participants in utilizing this ancient practice.

Cassian's work presents some limitations to the development of the ministry project. First, his instructions are intended to be carried out within the unique context of fourth and fifth century monastic life—a setting far from applicable to today's modern lifestyle. In particular, Cassian's descriptions of monks' clothing and communal prayer practices would not be applicable to this project. Secondly, Cassian's belief in the hierarchical nature of the principle vices is rooted in a dualistic understanding of human beings that separates the soul from the body. This understanding leads Cassian to conclude that even the normal bodily need and desire for food is of the flesh, and is therefore not profitable for moving toward spiritual perfection. This dualistic

understanding of the body runs contrary to the biblical portrait of human beings as a unified whole—body and spirit—both playing a crucial role in the spiritual development of the person. This ministry project aims to restore a proper understanding of the body in relation to the spiritual life—an understanding that recognizes that God created the human body, food, and normal bodily desires. Although human beings are fallen creatures, they still maintain God’s imprint on their lives, and are created to live in their physical bodies. Cassian’s view of the human body, though beneficial from a historical perspective, does not accurately depict the theological stance of the ministry project.

Gabor Maté: *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction*

The second source reviewed in this section is a contemporary survey of addiction written by Gabor Maté. Dr. Maté is a medical doctor who treats patients with severe substance abuse issues in an inner city clinic in Vancouver, British Columbia. This comprehensive work shares the detailed, personal accounts of several of his patients with drug addictions while exploring the biological, physiological, and psychological causes of addiction. Despite his patients’ desperate circumstances and the strong hold addiction has on their lives, Maté believes that there is hope of recovery. Maté writes, “The discoveries of science, the teachings of the heart, and the revelations of the soul all assure us that no human being is ever beyond redemption. The possibility of renewal exists so long as life exists. How to support that possibility in others and in ourselves is the ultimate question.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Maté, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, 3.

This work makes a number of contributions to the proposed ministry project. First, Maté's description of the biology and physiology of addiction provides a better understanding the nature of addictions. Although Maté's book primarily deals with drug addiction, Maté offers some helpful insights in comprehending compulsive overeating. Maté understands that food and weight issues run much deeper than a person's outward eating habits. Maté recalls his encounters with overweight patients from early in his practice:

As a novice family doctor I used to believe that all people needed was basic information. So all I had to do was teach overweight individuals how excess body fat would overburden the heart, plug the arteries, and raise the blood pressure, demonstrating my insights with naïve pencil drawings scratched on prescription pads, and they would leave the office grateful and transformed, ready for a new, healthier lifestyle. I soon found out that they left the office asking for their files to be transferred to some other physician less pedagogically zealous and more understanding about the ways of human beings."<sup>15</sup>

These early experiences taught Maté to appreciate the deeper factors at work within an individual who struggles with weight issues. He learned, "that preaching at people about behaviors, even self-destructive ones, did little good when I didn't or couldn't help them with the emotional dynamics driving those behaviors."<sup>16</sup> As he became more involved in addiction treatment, Maté realized, "Invariably, people who eat too much have not only suffered emotional loss in the past but are also psychically deprived or highly stressed in the present . . . Emotional energy expended without perceived reward is compensated for by calories consumed."<sup>17</sup> Maté came to understand that the root of food issues come from unmet psychological and spiritual needs, not lack

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<sup>15</sup> Maté, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, 244.

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

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

of dietary information. He believes, “The obesity epidemic demonstrates a psychological and spiritual emptiness at the core of consumer society . . . food is the universal soother, and many are driven to eat themselves into psychological oblivion.”<sup>18</sup> Although the overconsumption of food can temporarily provide emotional relief from stress and pain, Maté points out, “Addictions can never truly replace the life needs they temporarily displace. The false needs they serve, no matter how often they are gratified, cannot leave us fulfilled . . . It’s as if after a full meal you were left starving and had to immediately turn your efforts to procuring food again.”<sup>19</sup> Although Maté does not use the term *gluttony*, he clearly understands the concept. Maté’s experiences with those who struggle with food addictions provide insight and sensitivity that will assist in the development of the ministry project.

The practical techniques Maté discusses in the latter chapters of the book are also a useful contribution to this project. Maté recommends meditation, cognitive-behavioral techniques to challenge addictive thoughts, reframing one’s environment to reduce stressors that trigger addictive behavior, and participation in a support group to reduce isolation. All of these techniques will help participants develop the internal reserves necessary to make long-term lifestyle changes. These practices will also foster healing at both a spiritual and physical level. Maté observes, “Spiritual awakening is no more and no less than a human being claiming his or her own full humanity. People who find

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<sup>18</sup> Maté, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, 245.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

themselves have no need to turn to addiction, or to stay with it.”<sup>20</sup> This is the kind of spiritual awakening desired for the participants of this ministry project.

Despite its contributions, Maté’s work has several limitations in terms of its relevance to the proposed ministry project. For one, Maté’s comprehensive and detailed study of addiction goes well beyond the scope of this weight loss ministry. This project is not designed to treat people with severe addictions, such as eating disorders, which would require medical treatment from qualified professionals. The book also delves into the topic of public policy regarding substance abuse issues. This discussion, although interesting, goes beyond the scope of the ministry project.

Stephanie Paulsell: *Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice*

In this work, Paulsell presents readers with a Christian foundation and practical guidance for developing a unique, sustainable practice of honoring the body in everyday life so that they can better respect their own bodies and the bodies of others. In the opening chapters of the book, Paulsell lays a theological foundation for the practice of honoring the body from a biblical and church historical perspective, paying particular attention to the tensions that have arisen over the proper understanding of the body. Paulsell writes, “The body is a friend or a traitor. A gift or a task. Something precious knit together by God’s own hands or the prison house of the soul, which, according to Plato, is trapped in the body like an oyster in a shell.”<sup>21</sup> Paulsell rejects the dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual—the body and the soul. Instead, she affirms, “In

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<sup>20</sup> Maté, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, 421.

<sup>21</sup> Stephanie Paulsell, *Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 16.

the Hebrew Bible, the human person is never described as made up of separable parts like ‘body’ and ‘soul’. Rather, the whole human person is both soul and body.”<sup>22</sup> Paulsell presents a holistic view of human beings, whose value is grounded in their creation by God. Paulsell affirms, “God judged creation good, and so everything God created, including bodies of all sorts, is good . . . God created human beings, male and female, in God’s image . . . the body reflects God’s own goodness.”<sup>23</sup> This theological understanding of human beings’ creation in God’s image as whole, integrated persons leads people to honor their bodies in their everyday lives—both in the physical care of their bodies and the spiritual nurture of their souls. Paulsell’s well-developed theology of the body complemented by specific care practices provides readers with a valuable resource for developing a body-honoring self-care process for daily living.

Paulsell’s theological foundation for the practice of honoring the body is a significant contribution to the proposed ministry project. Her argument that people should honor their bodies because they are God’s good creation is a central theological message of this ministry project. Her instruction on bodily practices regarding food and eating habits is also of particular relevance to this project. She discusses honestly the struggles individuals have in today’s culture regarding food and eating—struggles that many participants in this weight loss ministry will likely have. Her theology of eating will give participants a new way to view their relationship with food and help them develop eating habits that honor God and their bodies. Paulsell’s material on exerting

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<sup>22</sup> Paulsell, *Honoring the Body*, 17.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

and resting the body will also contribute to this project, as this material will be integrated into participants' own holistic wellness rhythms.

Paulsell's work presents certain limitations in terms of its contribution to the proposed ministry. Her chapters on bathing and clothing the body, as well as her chapters on honoring the sexual and the suffering body are not directly relevant to this project. She also does not directly address the topic of gluttony, though her guidance on food and eating practices provide helpful insights on developing eating patterns that glorify God and honor the body.

Mary Louise Bringle: *The God of Thinness: Gluttony and Other Weighty Matters*

In this work, the author confronts the idol, "The god of thinness"—what she believes is the primary spiritual force behind the compulsive overeater/dieter's obsession with food. In contrast, Bringle offers a solid theology of food and eating that is grounded in the knowledge and service of God. Drawing from biblical and scholarly research, along with her own experience with food obsession, Bringle explores the subject of gluttony with a particular emphasis on its relevance and application to contemporary culture. Bringle believes the culture has bowed the knee to "the god of thinness"—an obsession with body image that has created an unholy distortion of food. Bringle describes her own food obsession and its deleterious effects: "I do recognize in my own experience that habits of compulsive eating (and of compulsive not-eating) stand as signs of a fundamental brokenness and alienation. I recognize that feeding myself with frantic mouthfuls of food can be a way of swallowing down emotions and seeking to flee some uncomfortable truth about myself. I recognize that obsessing about calories consumed or

expended can be a way of worshipping the cultural ‘god of thinness,’ deflecting my devotion from the One True God.”<sup>24</sup> Bringle also describes the cultural obsession with bodies: “We either oversacralize or undersacralize (desacralize, desecrate) the flesh. We make it into an idol—the perfect body, the sacred icon toward which we all aspire and in the religious pursuit of which we expend vast amounts of money and energy and attention. Or else we make it into a demon—the obstinate body which refuses perfection, and which we therefore must exorcize (and exercise) into submission.”<sup>25</sup> Bringle proposes a spiritual remedy to this idolatrous obsession. She writes, “Jesus taught us to pray that we should be given our daily bread; he also taught us that we do not live by bread alone . . . in these dialectical teachings lie the essential ingredients for ‘cooking up’ a Christian theology of eating.”<sup>26</sup> Such a theology involves eating to God’s glory while honoring the body size and shape God has given the individual.

To develop this kind of theology, Bringle urges readers to reorient their aspirations: “Rather than prizing thinness at all costs . . . we must learn to prize not thinness, but health: healthful patterns of eating and exercising, healthful practices of attending to the bodies which have been constituted to our care.”<sup>27</sup> Bringle paints a picture of what such a theology looks like in practical terms: “If we are savoring and not devouring the goods of the earth; if we are stewarding and not subjugating our bodies; if

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<sup>24</sup> Mary Louise Bringle, *The God of Thinness: Gluttony and Other Weighty Matters* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 15.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

we are cherishing and not despising the variety of shapes in which human beings come to be configured, then we are in harmony with the deeper ideals and aspirations of Christianity.”<sup>28</sup> Bringle acknowledges that this type of thinking develops over time as the result of a process of “maturing out” problematic eating patterns—a spiritual process requiring a balance of “personal effort, communal support, and divinely empowered grace.”<sup>29</sup> She recommends the “reaping and repeating of “daily graces”—healthy habits and spiritual practices that foster a new way of thinking and relating to food.<sup>30</sup> In this way, Bringle believes, “Every meal, every mouthful becomes a blessed opportunity to practice bodily and spiritual attunement.”<sup>31</sup>

Bringle’s work makes many useful contributions to this ministry project. Bringle’s most significant contribution is her definition of the spiritual condition of gluttony, along with a survey of its biblical and historical development. Her understanding of gluttony and its contemporary relevance greatly enlightens the theological foundation of this project. Bringle’s theology of food and eating as related to good bodily stewardship also strengthens the practical application of this proposed program. Lastly, Bringle’s recommendation of developing daily practices for healthy living and spiritual enrichment is very much in keeping with the goals and objectives of the proposed ministry project.

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<sup>28</sup> Bringle, *The God of Thinness*, 126.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

Despite its many contributions, Bringle's work presents certain limitations in developing the proposed ministry project. Bringle's discussion of "weight-ism" and body image issues in America, though important to her overall argument, is not directly applicable to this project. Also, although Bringle suggests adopting daily practices to improve one's relationship with food, eating, and the body, she does not give many examples of specific practices to adopt, nor instruction on their implementation in daily living.

### **Survey of Two Contemporary Spiritual Weight Loss Approaches**

There are literally hundreds of weight loss books on the market, all coming from different perspectives. Even within the Christian tradition, there are so many weight loss books available that to survey them all would require its own dissertation. For the theological purposes of this ministry project, two contemporary works were selected for review that describe spiritual weight loss approaches, both of which are a representation of what is currently available in the realm of spirituality and weight loss.

The first source surveyed in this section is the book, *First Place 4 Health: Discover a New Way to Healthy Living* by Carole Lewis and Marcus Brotherton. This book lays the foundation for the popular and widely utilized Christian weight loss program *First Place 4 Health*. The second source surveyed in this section is *Women, Food, and God: An Unexpected Path to Almost Everything*, by self-help writer and retreat leader Geneen Roth. Roth's philosophy is that women can confront their long-standing issues with food through a journey of self-discovery and spiritual awakening.

Lewis and Brotherton: *First Place 4 Health: Discover a New Way to Healthy Living*

In this book, the author proposes a path to permanent weight loss and wellness that is focused upon bringing proper balance to four key areas—mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual—by putting God first in one’s life. This book lays out the premise, structure, and components of the *First Place 4 Health* weight loss program that teaches participants how to bring balance to their lives in order to successfully lose weight. Lewis explains, “Losing weight is not the real answer to our problems. But being overweight is often the warning sign that we are not where we need to be in life. The real answer is that we need to live a balanced life . . . God wants to deal with all aspects of your life—the mental, the emotional, the spiritual and the physical. He wants to bring all four areas into balance.”<sup>32</sup> The author shares her personal experience with weight loss and with creating this program in order to illustrate the program’s key structure and components, as well as motivate participants to achieve successful lifestyle balance.

In the first part of the book, Lewis discusses several key components of the program, including commitment, attendance at group meetings, and encouraging other group members, all of which are intended to strengthen participants’ self-discipline. In the second part, Lewis describes the spiritual aspects of the program, specifically the practice of prayer and daily Bible reading as a means of focusing upon God for inner transformation. In the third part, the author discusses how to bring about mental balance by confronting negative thought patterns with scriptural truths. In the fourth part, Lewis provides guidance on the physical aspects of the program, including a healthy diet and

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<sup>32</sup> Lewis and Brotherton, *First Place 4 Health*, 15-16.

regular exercise. Interspersed throughout the book are motivating personal testimonies of people who worked the program and found success.

There are a number of contributions this book that lent to the development of this ministry project. First, surveying the structure of an existing Christian weight loss program provided guidance on developing this weight loss ministry. Even though this project will be structured very differently, it was helpful to see *First Place 4 Health's* theological premise, ministry components, and impact on participants. Second, the book's sections on prayer and Bible reading are helpful, informing how these spiritual disciplines can be integrated into this ministry. Third, the personal testimonies in the book were very inspiring. Personal testimonies are an important component to the ministry project, providing motivation and encouragement to participants.

There were several significant limitations to this resource. Overall, the theology of the book was very light and not very cohesive. While *First Place 4 Health* included some helpful insights, the program did not provide a solid, cohesive, integrated theology for wellness of the whole person. Its treatment of specific spiritual practices was also limited and superficial. The book only discussed prayer and Bible reading as spiritual disciplines, ignoring a wide range of other helpful disciplines. Overall, the book described a program that seemed much like other weight loss programs, but with a few spiritual insights added in—like a Christian “Weight Watchers” program with a Bible study and prayer component.

Geneen Roth: *Women, Food, and God: An Unexpected Path to Almost Everything*

In this work, the author postulates that an individual may end the struggle with overeating by exploring one's beliefs about God, about oneself, and about one's relationship with food. Roth shares her personal struggle with overeating, along with the spiritual insights she has gleaned from helping others overcome their struggles with food. She argues that a woman's struggle with food stems from her beliefs about God. She writes, "If we are interested in finding out what we actually believe—not what we think, not what we say, but what our souls are convinced is the bottom-line truth about life and afterlife—we need go no further than the food on our plates. God is not just in the details; God is also in the muffins, the fried sweet potatoes and the tomato vegetable soup. God—however we define him or her—in on our plates."<sup>33</sup> Roth believes that, rather than trying to outwardly fix one's overeating problem, one should use one's struggle with food as a door through which to see what root causes lie beyond one's obsession. Roth's experience has taught her that compulsive eating is a way to mask inner pain, emptiness, and feelings of inadequacy—trying to filling the body with what the spirit lacks. Roth asserts, "No matter what we weigh, those of us who are compulsive eaters have anorexia of the soul."<sup>34</sup> To overcome this compulsion, Roth believes that women need to reconnect with their bodies—to learn to be present in their bodies in everyday living. Women also need to develop a greater acceptance and love of themselves. Through this increased attunement and self-acceptance, women will be able to care for their bodies in healthy ways, rather than self-medicating with food. Living in

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<sup>33</sup> Roth, *Women, Food and God*, 2.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

this manner will bring about a spiritual awakening, empowering women to live in their bodies in peace and harmony—as God had intended all along.

Roth’s work makes several significant contributions to this project. First, Roth understands the struggle many have with compulsive overeating. She recognizes the deeper spiritual and emotional issues that undergird most dysfunctional eating—insights to which many of the program’s participants will relate. Although Roth does not use the term “gluttony” in her assessment, she accurately articulates the concept. Roth acknowledges that compulsive overeating is ultimately a spiritual rather than merely physical problem. She recommends the use of spiritual practices, such as meditation, to bring about inner spiritual transformation—practices that are utilized in this ministry program.

Roth’s work presents several significant limitations to the proposed project. First, Roth’s book is focused specifically on women and women’s issues with food and body image. Although some of Roth’s insights and principles may be helpful to both genders, men may find it difficult to relate to the majority of her presentation. Also, Roth’s treatment of spiritual practices is limited to meditation and eating guidelines, providing little insight into the other practices this project proposes.

Roth’s most significant limitation is her theology, which represents a significant departure from the traditional Christian theology upon which this ministry is based.

Roth’s concept of God is vague at best:

I don’t believe in the God with long white hair and X-ray vision that favors some people, some countries, some religions and not others . . . I do believe in the world beyond appearances and that there is so much we can’t see or touch or know just by looking . . . And I believe in love. And beauty . . . I believe that if you follow this love all the way to its end, if you start with the thing you find

most beautiful and trace its perfume back to its essence, you will perceive an intangible presence, a swath of stillness that allows the thing you love to be visible like the openness of the sky reveals the presence of the moon.<sup>35</sup>

This impersonal, intangible universal presence is far from the personal God whom scripture portrays as the creator, redeemer, and sustainer of all things. Roth's theology seems to lead individuals to a form of self-actualization as ultimate spiritual enlightenment. She writes, "If you want to use your relationship with food as the unexpected path, you will discover that God has been here all along . . . In each moment of kindness you lavish upon your breaking heart or the size of your thighs . . . God has been here. She is you."<sup>36</sup> Roth's self-actualization theology runs counter to Christian theology, which views human beings as a creation of God, not gods themselves. The Christian understanding of transformation is not self-actualization but spiritual transformation where a person increasingly takes on the nature and attributes of Jesus Christ through faith, trust, and spiritual training. Though Roth has a sound understanding of compulsive overeating, her theology is problematic for the purposes of this project.

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<sup>35</sup> Roth, *Women, Food and God*, 24-25.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

## CHAPTER 4

### THEOLOGY OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND WELLNESS FROM THREE TRADITIONS

In order to develop a theological foundation for the proposed weight loss ministry, it is first necessary to explore the larger theological background of Westminster Presbyterian Church and the WROC. As Presbyterians draw their theology from the Reformed tradition, this chapter will present the basic tenets of the Reformed tradition as they relate to the topics of spiritual growth and wellness in the Christian life. Next, this chapter will discuss the Catholic tradition's teaching on gluttony, followed by an exploration of contemporary spiritual formation theology.

#### **Reformed Theology of the Christian Life**

The Reformed tradition draws its major tenets from the Word of God. Reformed scholar Sinclair Ferguson asserts, "Reformed means reformed according to Scripture."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Sinclair J. Ferguson, "The Reformed View," in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, ed. Donald L. Alexander (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1988), 48.

Scripture states that God created the universe and everything within it. The Bible's inaugural passage, Genesis 1:1, declares, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This scriptural truth is affirmed in The Second Helvetic Confession, an important exposition of Reformed theology: "This good and almighty God created all things, both visible and invisible, by his co-eternal Word, and preserves them by his co-eternal Spirit."<sup>38</sup> God nurtures and governs all creation by his providence.<sup>39</sup>

### Human Beings Created By God and Redeemed in Christ

God created human beings in his own image and gave them charge over the created world. Genesis 1:26 states, "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the earth'" (NRSV). Human beings occupy a special place in God's creation. Of human beings, Psalm 8:5 affirms that God made them, "a little lower than the heavenly beings," and he crowned them "with glory and honor." David exults in Psalm 139:14, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

At the time of creation, human beings were without sin and enjoyed unbroken fellowship with God and one another. Unfortunately, human beings chose to rebel against God, disobeying his command. In this act, the whole human race was plunged into sin, causing separation from God, and ultimately death. Romans 5:12 reveals, "Sin

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<sup>38</sup> The Office of the General Assembly, *The Second Helvetic Confession*, in *The Book of Confessions: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA)*, Part 1, 5.032 (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 2004), 61.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all . . . because all sinned.” John Calvin calls Adam’s sin “a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul, which first makes us liable to God’s wrath, then also brings forth in us those works which Scripture calls ‘works of the flesh’ . . . this perversity never ceases in us, but continually bears new fruits.”<sup>40</sup>

Fortunately, God expressed his great love for human beings by sending his own Son, Jesus Christ to redeem them from sin and death. Jesus was without sin, living a sinless life on earth. On the cross, Christ bore the sin of humanity, paying its penalty, and satisfying God’s justice. Christ’s action enables human beings to be declared righteous before God through believing in him. Romans 3:22,25 states, “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe . . . God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.” Calvin declares, “This is our acquittal: the guilt that held us liable for punishment has been transferred to the head of the Son of God.”<sup>41</sup> Calvin further asserts, “Christ’s shed blood served, not only as a satisfaction, but also as a laver to wash away corruption.”<sup>42</sup> Christ’s death also conquered death itself, once for all. Calvin explains, “Death held us captive under its yoke; Christ, in our stead, gave himself over to its power to deliver us from it . . . he let himself be swallowed up by death . . . not to be engulfed in its abyss, but rather to engulf it that must soon have engulfed us.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 251.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 509-510.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 511.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 512.

Scripture testifies that Christ not only died, he rose again from the grave. And because Christ lives, those who live in him will also experience everlasting life. Romans 6:8-9 reasons, “Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead . . . death no longer has mastery over him.” Calvin explains, “Through his death, sin was wiped out and death extinguished; through his resurrection, righteousness was restored and life raised up, so that—thanks to his resurrection—his death manifested its power and efficacy in us.”<sup>44</sup> This power and efficacy not only removes the original guilt and corruption of our sinful nature, it opens the door to a new way of life in Christ. Romans 6:4 states, “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

This new life in Christ benefits individuals not only in this life, but also in the life to come. Scripture promises that those in Christ will experience full and complete redemption—their bodies and their souls will be raised to everlasting life. 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 reveals, “We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed . . . the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.” Calvin asserts that Christ “will come on the Last Day as judge to conform our lowly, inglorious body to his glorious body.”<sup>45</sup> Those in Christ look forward, not just to the redemption of their souls but their bodies as

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<sup>44</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 521.

<sup>45</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2, in *The Library of Christian Classics*, vol. 21, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 991.

well. Redemption in Christ affects the whole person. Body and soul will be transformed into Christ's image.

### Christ Grace Applied by Faith through the Holy Spirit

The Reformed tradition affirms that redemption is an act of God's grace that individuals receive by faith in Jesus Christ, not through human action. Ephesians 2:6-8 instructs, "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift of God." Calvin believes God's gracious gift of redemption is applied through the Holy Spirit, whom he describes as "the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself."<sup>46</sup> Of the Holy Spirit's work, Calvin says, "He not only quickens and nourishes us by a general power that is visible both in the human race and in the rest of the living creatures, but he is also the root and seed of heavenly life in us."<sup>47</sup> Calvin further explains, "By his secret watering the Spirit makes us fruitful to bring forth the buds of righteousness . . . on the other hand, persistently boiling away and burning up our vicious and inordinate desires, he enflames our hearts with the love of God and with zealous devotion."<sup>48</sup> Through faith, the Spirit unites us to Christ, thus enabling us to enjoy the benefits of new life in Him. Ferguson explains, "We believe into faith . . . into union with him [Christ]. Faith

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<sup>46</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 558.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 538.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 540.

involves trusting in and resting on the resources of Christ as though they were our own.”<sup>49</sup> Calvin summarizes, “Christ, when he illumines us into faith by the power of his Spirit, at the same time, so engrafts us into his body that we become partakers of every good.”<sup>50</sup> In the Reformed tradition, faith enables those in Christ to experience both justification and sanctification. Calvin asserts, “By faith we grasp Christ’s righteousness, by which alone we are reconciled to God. Yet you could not grasp this without at the same time grasping sanctification also.”<sup>51</sup> This union with Christ by faith through the Holy Spirit produces sanctification—transformation into Christlikeness.

#### True Repentance: Mortification of the Flesh and Vivification of the Spirit

Although both justification and sanctification are gifts of God enjoyed through faith, the Reformed tradition understands sanctification as a process whereby one slowly takes on the new nature of Christ. According to theologian Howard J. Rice, Calvin believed, “A Christian was a person who was engaged in a lifelong process of growth toward the fullness of Christ.”<sup>52</sup> Justification was merely the initial entry point into a lifelong journey of conforming to Christ’s image. Calvin believed this process of sanctification involved true repentance, of which he instructs “departing from ourselves, we turn to God, and having taken off our former mind, we put on a new.”<sup>53</sup> Calvin

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<sup>49</sup> Ferguson, “The Reformed View,” 51.

<sup>50</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 583.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 798.

<sup>52</sup> Howard L. Rice, *Reformed Spirituality: An Introduction for Believers* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 25.

<sup>53</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 597.

further defines repentance as “the true turning of our life to God . . . and it consists in the mortification of our flesh and of the old man, and in the vivification of the Spirit.”<sup>54</sup>

Such repentance is necessary according to Calvin, for he asserts, “only when it puts off its old nature does it bring forth the fruits of works in harmony with its renewal.”<sup>55</sup> The Apostle Paul instructs followers of Christ in this life of repentance. He states in Romans 6:11-13, “Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus . . . do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.” Paul contrasts living according to the flesh with living according to the Spirit in Romans 8:5-9:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of the sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit.

By mortifying the flesh, those in Christ are free to live in the life of the Spirit. In Romans 8:13, Paul explains, “If you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you will put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”

In Galatians 5:19-24, Paul lays out the specific works of the flesh verses the fruit of the Spirit. Paul says the works of the flesh are obvious: “sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness and orgies, and the like.” (vv. 19-

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<sup>54</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 597.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 598.

21). Paul contrasts these with the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (vv. 22-23). Paul teaches, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.” (v. 24). Therefore, Paul urges those in Christ to “live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” (Gal 5:16).

The Reformed tradition articulates that this life in the Spirit does not occur instantaneously, nor without struggle and effort on the part of the individual in Christ. Although Christ’s followers are freed from sin’s bondage, Calvin argues, “They do not obtain full possession of freedom so as to feel no more annoyance from their flesh, but there still remains in them a continuing occasion for struggle whereby they must be exercised.”<sup>56</sup> Calvin affirms, “The Spirit dispenses a power whereby they may gain the upper hand and become victors in the struggle. But sin ceases only to reign; it does not cease to dwell in them.”<sup>57</sup> Progress in the Christian life occurs as Christ’s followers steadily learn to live according to the Spirit’s power and direction. Sanctification is a gift of God, but it requires human effort to become a reality in one’s life. In Philippians 2:12, Paul urges Christ’s followers to “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and act according to his good purpose.” This process of working out one’s salvation through the grace and power of God produces an ever-increasing godliness in one’s life, gradually conforming an individual ever more into Christ’s image.

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<sup>56</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 602.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 603.

Despite its emphasis on progressive growth into godliness, the Reformed tradition does not believe that spiritual perfection can be achieved fully in this life. Calvin attests that no Christian has attained perfection in this world.<sup>58</sup> However, he encourages, “Let us not despair at the slightness of our success; for even though attainment may not correspond to desire, when today outstrips yesterday the effort is not lost.”<sup>59</sup> Calvin boldly proclaims ultimate victory for the Christian in eternity. He declares, “If believers’ eyes are turned to the power of the resurrection, in their hearts the cross of Christ will at last triumph over the devil, flesh, sin, and wicked men,”<sup>60</sup> for Calvin affirms, “whatever God mercifully promises, he also faithfully performs.”<sup>61</sup>

#### Christian Freedom and the Lawful Use of God’s Gifts

Another important aspect of Reformed spirituality is its emphasis upon Christian freedom and the lawful use of God’s gifts. God gave human beings the material things of this world as gifts to use and enjoy responsibly—to meet their physical needs, to serve one another, and to honor God. 1 Timothy 4:4 states, “For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.” Calvin argues, “We should use God’s gifts for the purpose for which he gave them to us, with no scruple of conscience, no trouble of mind.”<sup>62</sup> The Reformed tradition acknowledges that God created the things of this world, not just for human necessity, but also for human delight.

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<sup>58</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 688.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 689.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 719.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 766.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 840.

Summarizing the ideas of Robert Farrar Capon, Bringle states, “God creates the earth not because it is useful or necessary, but because it is desirable. Consequently, human beings—acting in *imago dei*—are called to relish the creation, not for its utility, but for its intrinsic pleasingness.”<sup>63</sup>

In particular, food is a divine gift. Calvin believes God created food “not only to provide for necessity but also for delight and good cheer.”<sup>64</sup> Human beings are to enjoy the varieties of food and drink God has provided them. However, human beings are to use the gift of food responsibly, remembering with thanksgiving that it is God who provides such good gifts. When used in excess or without recognition of God, the gifts of creation can become a spiritual snare. Calvin warns, “Many so enslave all their senses to delights that the mind lies overwhelmed.”<sup>65</sup> Therefore, Calvin urges Christ’s followers to, “resist the lust of the flesh, which, unless it is kept in order, overflows without measure.”<sup>66</sup>

In the Reformed tradition, God created the world and the things therein, willing that human beings use and enjoy these gifts freely, yet responsibly. Food and drink are God’s good gifts to human beings for their nourishment and pleasure. However, human beings must be careful not to abuse God’s gifts through overindulgence, nor value the pursuit of gifts above the Giver. Calvin cautions, “Where there is plenty, to wallow in delights, to gorge oneself, to intoxicate mind and heart with present pleasures and be

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<sup>63</sup> Bringle, *The God of Thinness*, 32.

<sup>64</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 720-721.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 722.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 721.

always panting after new ones—such are very far removed from a lawful use of God’s gifts.”<sup>67</sup> Of human freedom and the use of God’s gifts, Calvin says, “If they keep . . . moderation, they will make considerable progress in the Lord’s school.”<sup>68</sup>

### The Centrality of Scripture and Prayer

Another key feature of the Reformed spirituality is its emphasis on Scripture and prayer. Of God’s Word, The Westminster Confession states, “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.”<sup>69</sup> Calvin states, “Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God.”<sup>70</sup> Calvin further asserts, “By his Word, God rendered faith unambiguous forever, a faith that should be superior to all opinion.”<sup>71</sup> Scripture protects human beings against heresy and idolatry. Scripture also provides Christ’s followers with a reliable guide for faith and practice. Psalm 119:103-105 declares, “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! I gain understanding from your precepts . . . Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17 affirms, “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof,

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<sup>67</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 841.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 723.

<sup>69</sup> The Office of the General Assembly, *The Westminster Confession*, in *The Book of Confessions: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA)*, Part 1, 6.006 (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 2004), 123.

<sup>70</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 70.

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

for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (NRSV).

Calvin believes that Scripture is inextricably linked to the work of the Holy Spirit. He states, “For by a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of his Word and of his Spirit so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our minds when the Spirit, who causes us to contemplate God’s face, shines; and that we in turn may embrace the Spirit with no fear of being deceived when we recognize him in his own image, namely in the Word.”<sup>72</sup> The Holy Spirit helps people interpret God’s Word and empowers them to follow its teachings.

Prayer is also a central practice in the Reformed tradition. Of prayer, Calvin says, “To know God as the master and bestower of all good things, who invites us to request them of him, and still not to go to him and not ask of him—this would be of as little profit as for a man to neglect a treasure, buried and hidden in the earth, after it had been pointed out to him.”<sup>73</sup> For Calvin, “Words fail to explain how necessary prayer is, and in how many ways the exercise of prayer is profitable.”<sup>74</sup> An important aspect of prayer is making requests of God. However, in the Reformed tradition, prayer involves more than merely asking God for things. Prayer is a means of personal transformation. Rice explains, “Prayer is something that makes a difference in us. We pray in order to stimulate, deepen, and strengthen our faith.”<sup>75</sup> Prayer changes our attitude and beliefs

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<sup>72</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 95.

<sup>73</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 2, 850.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 851.

<sup>75</sup> Rice, *Reformed Spirituality*, 75.

about God from indifference and unbelief to hope and expectation. Rice instructs, “Prayer prepares us to expect God’s answers and receive them in gratitude.”<sup>76</sup> Prayer also changes our inner nature, affecting our wants and desires. Rice states, “Prayer requires that we think clearly about our wants and needs . . . Prayer changes our wanting as we hold our wants before God.”<sup>77</sup> As individuals yield their desires to God in prayer, God will transform those desires, conforming them to his own will.

As with understanding Scripture, the Holy Spirit assists individuals in prayer. Romans 8:26-27 teaches, “We do not know what we ought to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.” Calvin informs, “God gives us the Spirit as our teacher in prayer, to tell us what is right and temper our emotions.”<sup>78</sup> With the Spirit’s guidance and empowerment, individuals grow in effectiveness in prayer. Prayer, in cooperation with God’s Word, increasingly molds the individual into the image of Christ.

### Role of the Christian Community in Sanctification

The importance of Christian community in an individual’s sanctification is another hallmark of the Reformed tradition. The Westminster Confession describes the Christian community as “being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other’s gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public

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<sup>76</sup> Rice, *Reformed Spirituality*, 79.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>78</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 2, 855.

and private, as to conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.”<sup>79</sup>

The Christian community is a place of spiritual nurture and growth. Calvin likens the church to a devoted mother who would “conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and . . . keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels.”<sup>80</sup> Ferguson asserts, “The fellowship of the church is the context in which sanctification matures, and . . . a means for its development.”<sup>81</sup> The Reformed tradition also understands the Christian community as “a fellowship of pastoral care,” in which individuals comfort, encourage, challenge, rebuke, support, and pray for one another.<sup>82</sup> German pastor and Reformed theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer states, “The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer.”<sup>83</sup>

Sustaining spiritual practice and healthy lifestyle changes requires support and accountability from a fellowship of pilgrims following the same path. New habits need nurturing, while old habits need confronting. While on a spiritual wellness journey, individuals will likely experience both highs and lows, joys and frustrations, victories and challenges. Having fellow travelers for support and accountability along the way makes the journey much more successful than traveling alone.

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<sup>79</sup> The Office of the General Assembly, *The Westminster Confession*, 6.146, 153.

<sup>80</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 2, 1016.

<sup>81</sup> Ferguson, “The Reformed View,” 71-72.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), 19.

## Limitations of Reformed Theology

Although much of the Reformed tradition's teachings on the spiritual life are beneficial, there are several limitations to Reformed theology in regards to this ministry project. The first major limitation is that the Reformed tradition does not address the subject of gluttony as extensively as other theological traditions. In *The Institutes*, Calvin addresses the subject of gluttony indirectly as part of his overall teachings on the proper use of God's gifts in Book Three. Perhaps this omission was Calvin's reaction to the Catholic Church's extensive teaching on gluttony. Gluttony is not explicitly addressed in the major Reformed confessions, nor do many Reformed theologians address the topic. Outside of Puritan writers, such as Richard Baxter, the Reformed tradition does not provide as much direct teaching on gluttony as do other Christian traditions such as Roman Catholicism.

A second limitation to Reformed theology in the development of this ministry project is the limited teaching and practice of certain spiritual disciplines. Practices such as silence, solitude, fasting, and the contemplative reading of scripture are not utilized in many Reformed churches today. Theologian Marcus Borg hypothesizes, "A major reason that Protestantism has paid little attention to traditional Christian practices goes back to the Reformation, which sharply contrasted 'faith' and 'works.' We are saved by 'faith,' not 'works.' To many Protestants, practices seem like 'works.'"<sup>84</sup> Many Reformed Protestants misunderstand the purpose of spiritual disciplines, thinking they

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<sup>84</sup> Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2003), 188.

are a way of earning God's favor rather than a means of opening themselves to God's grace for transformation.

Another reason offered as to why certain spiritual disciplines are lacking in the Reformed tradition is that such practices are associated with Catholicism. Some in the Reformed tradition are skeptical of practices that might seem "too Catholic" for their sensibilities. Some regard Catholic spirituality as too legalistic and too focused upon rituals, leading some to reject certain disciplines out of fear that their faith practice will become too rigid. Rice believes that many Reformed Christians reject certain spiritual practices out of ignorance of their own tradition. He argues, "Because Reformed Protestants do not recognize and are not taught that there is a spiritual tradition within their own heritage, they frequently had no basis to integrate their own experience into their faith or church life."<sup>85</sup> Rice argues that many Reformed Christians practiced spiritual disciplines such as fasting, meditation, and contemplative reflection upon scripture. This ministry project will mine the riches of the Reformed spiritual tradition, introducing participants to a wide variety of its spiritual practices. Despite its limitations, the Reformed tradition offers a great deal of theological insight to this project.

### **Alternative Theological Traditions**

In order to fully develop the project's theological framework, it is necessary to draw from alternative theological traditions in addition to the Reformed tradition. The first alternative theological tradition to be examined is Roman Catholicism, which speaks a great deal on the subject of gluttony. Following this, the paper will explore

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<sup>85</sup> Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, 10.

contemporary spiritual formation theology and its relevance to the development of the project's spiritual practice component.

### Catholic Resources Addressing Gluttony

The Catholic tradition has spoken at length on the subject of gluttony in relationship to the spiritual life, particularly in the writings of the early church fathers. The three main church fathers who first expounded on the topic of gluttony in detail were Evagrius of Pontus, St. John Cassian, and St. Gregory the Great. These desert fathers defined what they considered to be the principle vices of the Christian life—what later came to be known as the “seven deadly sins” within the Catholic tradition—gluttony, lust, avarice, melancholy, envy, vainglory, and pride.<sup>86</sup> These desert fathers believed that each principle vice led to the next in succession, with pride being the source of the other vices, and the deadliest of all. The desert fathers believed gluttony, which was first on the list of vices, was a “gateway” sin that gave rise to the other vices, particularly lust. St. Gregory writes, “Lust springs from gluttony, when in the very distribution of the members, the genitals appear placed beneath the belly. And hence when the one is inordinately pampered, the other is doubtless excited to wantonness.”<sup>87</sup>

John Cassian defined gluttony as “voraciousness of the belly,”<sup>88</sup> and “the desire to gormandize.”<sup>89</sup> Gregory went further in defining the vice. He believed gluttony

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<sup>86</sup> St. Gregory Thaumaturgas, *Morals on the Book of Job* in *A Library of the Holy Catholic Church Anterior to the Division of the East and West*. vol. IV, trans. Members of the English Church (Oxford: John Henry Parker and London: F & J Rivington, 1850), 490.

<sup>87</sup> Gregory, *Morals on the Book of Job*, 491.

<sup>88</sup> John Cassian, *The Conferences*, in *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, Vol. 57, trans. Boniface Ramsey (New York: Newman Press, 1997), 183.

consisted of eating too soon (before prescribed meal times), too expensively, too much, too eagerly, and with too much attention.<sup>90</sup> In gluttony, an individual's appetite controls the whole person, causing one to obsess over food to the detriment of one's spiritual life. The desert fathers believed that gluttony was an evil desire, or "passion"—a work of the flesh that had to be conquered in order to make progress in the spiritual life. Evagrius of Pontus writes, "The one who enslaves his flesh, passionless shall he be; the one who feeds it, by it will he be pained."<sup>91</sup> Cassian compared the battle with gluttony to an athletic competition. He writes, "This is our first contest . . . our first trial in the Olympic Games—the extinguishing of the belly's desire to gormandize out of a yearning for perfection . . . When the desire of the belly and of gormandizing has been overcome . . . we ourselves shall be judged worthy to compete in the higher contests."<sup>92</sup> Strict discipline was required to overcome gluttony. Those desiring to conquer gluttony were encouraged to fast regularly and to adopt temperate eating habits, so as not to overindulge in food. These practices were intended to mortify the flesh with its passions, thus paving the way for greater spiritual progress.

Thomas Aquinas refined the Catholic Church's theological understanding of gluttony during the Scholastic period. Aquinas defined gluttony as "an immoderate appetite in eating and drinking . . . when it departs from the reasonable order of life in

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<sup>89</sup> John Cassian, *The Institutes*, 117.

<sup>90</sup> Gregory in *Morals on the Book of Job*, 405.

<sup>91</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, *Ad Monachos* in *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, vol. 59, ed. Dennis D. McManus, trans. Jeremy Driscoll (New York: Newman Press, 2003), 42.

<sup>92</sup> John Cassian, *The Institutes*, 125.

which moral good in found.”<sup>93</sup> For Aquinas, gluttony is “inordinate concupiscence.”<sup>94</sup> He explains, “The vice of gluttony does not lie in the foodstuff itself, but in lust for it unregulated by reason.”<sup>95</sup> Aquinas differentiates between overeating due to ignorance or natural hunger and true gluttony. He asserts, “Eating is gluttonous when he knowingly exceeds his measure from desire for pleasure.”<sup>96</sup> A man of considerable girth himself, Aquinas took a softer stance on gluttony than did his predecessors.<sup>97</sup> Though certainly not virtuous behavior, Aquinas did not regard gluttony as having the dire spiritual consequences that the early church fathers did. In discussing the gravity of gluttony’s spiritual effect upon an individual, Aquinas argues, “The fault in gluttony is mitigated rather than aggravated, both because of our need to take food and because of the difficulty of applying proper discretion and moderation in the matter.”<sup>98</sup> Aquinas regarded gluttony as a venial sin—less serious in nature and effect than other sins.<sup>99</sup> He further departed from the early church fathers in believing that gluttony was not the essential cause of the other principle vices. Gluttony was harmful mainly because of the physical damage it caused to the human body, not its birthing of other vices.<sup>100</sup> Aquinas

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<sup>93</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Vol. 43, Translated by Thomas Gilby (London: Blackfriars, 1968), 119.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>96</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 121.

<sup>97</sup> Francine Prose, *Gluttony: The Seven Deadly Sins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 38-39.

<sup>98</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 125.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

did affirm that gluttony became more spiritually harmful when it takes people away from their true vocation of honoring God and putting God first in their lives. He writes, “It is as abandoning our true destiny that gluttony is contrary to the love of God, who should be our final and chosen love above all else.”<sup>101</sup>

The surveyed resources from the Catholic tradition provide important insights that are relevant to the development this ministry project. The early church fathers’ understanding of gluttony, though originally applied to fifth-century monastic living, offer modern individuals a spiritual lens through which to view the daily practice of consuming food. The Catholic understanding of gluttony challenges individuals to consider how their eating habits not only affect their physical health, but also their spiritual well-being. Specifically, Gregory’s categories of gluttony—eating too soon, too expensively, too much, too eagerly, and with too much attention—can be contextualized and applied in today’s culture, helping today’s generations to develop eating habits that honor their bodies and glorify God their Creator. The spiritual practices of fasting and temperate eating recommended by Catholic theologians to address gluttony can also bear spiritual fruit in today’s culture with appropriate contextualization to people’s daily living habits. Aquinas’ gentler understanding of gluttony is scriptural and more applicable to today’s culture than the stricter interpretations of gluttony from the early church fathers, though these possess some relevance. The Catholic tradition’s teachings on the subject of gluttony contribute greatly to this ministry project.

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<sup>101</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 123.

## Contemporary Spiritual Formation Theology and Practices

Another theological tradition consulted in the development of this ministry project is contemporary spiritual formation theology and practice. Two of the main theologians of this tradition are Dallas Willard and Richard Foster. They espouse a theology of the spiritual life that emphasizes the personal transformation of the individual to Christlikeness through the practice of spiritual disciplines. Foster asserts, “God has given us the Disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.”<sup>102</sup> These disciplines train people to become more like Christ, just as physical exercise trains an athlete to compete effectively in a sport. Paul commands Christ’s followers in 1 Timothy 4:7-8, “Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.” The practice of spiritual disciplines replaces “old destructive habits of thought with new life-giving habits,” leading to “the total transformation of the person,” Foster explains.<sup>103</sup>

Willard, in particular, emphasizes the role of the human body in spiritual transformation. For Willard, the spiritual life is an embodied life—the human body plays a crucial role in this process of transformation. Willard argues, “If salvation is to affect our lives, it can do so only by affecting our bodies . . . our actions are physical—we live only in the processes of our bodies. Our life is a bodily life.”<sup>104</sup> Willard believes that it

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<sup>102</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 7.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>104</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 31.

is in an embodied spirituality that we find “the positive role of the body in the process of redemption . . . as we choose those uses of our body that advance the spiritual life.”<sup>105</sup>

This ministry project draws heavily on this theology of embodied personal transformation through the practice of spiritual disciplines with the goal of transforming both the inner and outer person in greater health and godliness. Although Foster and Willard do not explicitly apply their theology to the concept of bodily stewardship, Willard indicates that such application would be a crucial part of an individual’s personal transformation. He writes,

Much more could be said of the role of spiritual disciplines on behalf of the spiritual formation of the body. A full discussion of disciplines focused on the body would have to deal with how exercise and diet can contribute to easing the influence of the ‘sin that is in our members.’ As finite, bodily creatures we cannot ignore such things. In particular, specific disciplines go far in retraining particular parts of our body away from the specific tendencies to sin that are localized in them. They enable us to stop the practice and remove the tendency in question by entering special contrary practices and circumstances, and thereby breaking the force of habit that has us in bondage.<sup>106</sup>

Gluttony is just such a tendency, requiring spiritual training to alleviate. This ministry program helps participants practice specific spiritual disciplines in order to become better stewards of the bodies God has given them, helping them discover the source, as Willard describes, “of where genuine beauty, health, and strength of the body come from and of what incredible grace lies in the spiritual transformation of the body.”<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 40.

<sup>106</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2002), 176.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

## CHAPTER 5

### THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY: GLUTTONY AND STEWARDSHIP OF THE BODY

After describing the tenets of Reformed theology, the specific theological foundation for the proposed weight loss ministry addressing gluttony will now be established. This chapter will first examine the spiritual concept of gluttony from a biblical and theological perspective. Following this, the chapter will establish a theological rationale for stewardship of the body that addresses gluttony through spiritual practices combined with healthy physical habits. Lastly, eight particular spiritual practices and their role in cultivating stewardship of the body will be explored.

Before launching into the topic of gluttony, some words of caution are warranted. Because matters of weight and body image are such sensitive subjects in our culture, great care must be taken in presenting the spiritual condition of gluttony. The goal for both this paper and the ministry project is to address this issue both honestly and sensitively. The intention of this discussion on gluttony is not to label anyone or make

anyone feel inferior in any way, but instead to present a well-rounded, theologically sound treatment of a serious spiritual matter that predominates the culture and adversely affects many people. Pastor Randy Rowland believes that guilt and shame are poor methods of convicting people and motivating them to change. Instead, he argues, “What we need is love . . . love is absolute spiritual and moral rocket fuel.”<sup>1</sup> Love walks hand-in-hand with grace to bring about powerful personal transformation from sin’s ill effects. Rowland asserts, “Any contemplation of one’s sin problem, as grotesque and painful as it may be, is a simultaneous invitation to a quality of divine grace that brings the joy, simplicity, and peace of virtue. We are designed for beautiful lives such as these.”<sup>2</sup> With these things in mind, the discussion of gluttony begins.

### **Spiritual Condition of Gluttony**

Gluttony is a spiritual condition involving the obsessive fixation upon and consumption of otherwise good and beneficial things. Though gluttony is most commonly associated with food, Rowland expands the definition of gluttony to include all forms of overconsumption, including drinking, shopping and collecting.<sup>3</sup> Rowland believes that gluttony shares many similar characteristics of the other Seven Deadly Sins, most notably, a distortion of love and goodness. Specifically, Rowland believes that an “excessive love of things in this world leads to greed, gluttony, and lust.”<sup>4</sup> Like its sister

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<sup>1</sup> Randy L. Rowland, *The Sins We Love: Embracing Brokenness, Hoping for Wholeness* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

sins, gluttony distorts a healthy love and appreciation for the gifts of creation into an inordinate, all-consuming desire that eventually takes over an individual. Writer Henry Fairlie explains that gluttony is “the result of taking something in our lives, which has its appropriate place and value, and then lifting it out of place and exaggerating its importance to us. In the end, it is no longer a part of our lives but take the place of our lives.”<sup>5</sup> Rowland describes gluttony as “a misuse of God-given gifts.”<sup>6</sup> He explains, “Gluttony in all its forms places our trust in things we consume rather than God.”<sup>7</sup> Rowland believes gluttony is also a “carelessness of beauty.”<sup>8</sup> He states, “Sins like gluttony corrupt and defile love and all that is lovely. Our internal eye for God becomes clouded and dull. Our receptivity to pure love from God is sublimated to the love of pure consumption.”<sup>9</sup> The spiritual consequences of gluttony are severe. Theologian Cornelius Plantinga Jr. explains, “Self-indulgence tends to suppress gratitude . . . a person’s appetites are linked: full stomachs and jaded palates take the edge from our hunger and thirst for justice. And they spoil our appetite for God.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Henry Fairlie, *The Seven Deadly Sins Today* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 155.

<sup>6</sup> Rowland, *The Sins We Love*, 159.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>10</sup> Cornelius Plantinga Jr. *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 35.

When related specifically to food, gluttony is marked by an unhealthy obsession with food consumption that manifests itself in disordered patterns of eating.<sup>11</sup> Such disordered eating patterns not only involve overindulging in food but also obsessive food restriction often associated with fad dieting. Whether in compulsive overeating or overly fastidious dieting, Fairlie points out, “There is gluttony in all of them . . . each of them shows an inordinate interest in eating . . . Whether they are eating or not, their minds are on their food.”<sup>12</sup> Any measure of food obsession, either in too little or too much, falls under the umbrella of gluttony.

In defining gluttony with reference to food consumption, it is important to make several important distinctions. First, while gluttony is marked by disordered eating patterns, it is not the same thing as an eating disorder. An eating disorder is a serious medical condition requiring specialized treatment by trained professionals. Second, caution must be taken against labeling all overweight individuals as gluttons. As Bringle so aptly puts it, “Girth is not the same as gluttony (and vice versa).”<sup>13</sup> There are many medical and physiological factors that contribute to one’s body composition. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that an overweight individual is automatically a glutton, nor can it be assumed that a person of healthy weight does not struggle with gluttony. Gluttony is more about one’s attitude and behavior toward food than one’s body composition. Bringle states, “Gluttony . . . has nothing to do with girth, with matters of body shape or

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<sup>11</sup> Despite its broader definition, the theological treatment of gluttony will focus upon food and eating for the purposes of this ministry project.

<sup>12</sup> Fairlie, *The Seven Deadly Sins Today*, 162-163.

<sup>13</sup> Bringle, *The God of Thinness*, 56.

size. Rather, it concerns patterns of consumption—particularly, patterns of eating and drinking which put acquisitiveness and ingestion above all other values.”<sup>14</sup> The spiritual condition of gluttony can affect anyone of any size or shape. Therefore, although it is important to address the spiritual condition of gluttony honestly, great care must be taken so as not to label certain individuals as gluttons, nor stigmatize those who struggle with weight issues.

At its root, gluttony is caused by a distorted view of the proper role of food and eating in one’s life. Writer Rebecca DeYoung explains, “Eating is meant to be pleasurable, and so is feeling filled after being hungry. These pleasures, the food itself, and the act of eating are all good . . . Gluttony creeps in and corrupts these pleasures when our desires for them run out of control.”<sup>15</sup> Instead of being a source of nourishment, food becomes a form of self-medication to ease stress, dull pain, quell boredom and overcome loneliness. Indulging one’s cravings through food provides temporary relief to one’s negative feelings. However, such relief does not last. In the end, Rowland observes, “The object of our gluttony does not bring us happiness. We don’t enjoy the object of our gluttony. We merely consume it. And then we are bloated with what we have consumed but not one inch closer to happiness than when we started out.”<sup>16</sup> In short, gluttony does not deliver its promised relief. What is worse, gluttony creates a vicious cycle in which the appetite seeks ever-increasing indulgence, while at

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<sup>14</sup> Bringle, *The God of Thinness*, 85.

<sup>15</sup> Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 140-141.

<sup>16</sup> Rowland, *The Sins We Love*, 152.

the same time it becomes more controlled by the object of that indulgence. In the end, Frailie concludes, “It is the appetites in themselves, and their need for gratification, that take over one’s life, and the object of each appetite, which might in itself by pleasing, is submerged in the inordinate desire for it.”<sup>17</sup> At its heart, the spiritual condition of gluttony puts human appetite above spiritual priorities. Bringle argues, “If I have made the food I eat or the body I indwell into a focus for my relentless attention, I have created an idol, have elevated a part of the creation to the role which only the Creator should occupy.”<sup>18</sup>

### Biblical Survey of Gluttony

Although gluttony is a spiritual concept that has been explored at length in a variety of Christian traditions, the Bible has little to say on the topic. There are only a few scriptural references in both the Old and New Testaments that refer specifically to gluttony. Despite its few mentions in the Bible, gluttony is clearly portrayed as a destructive spiritual condition with negative spiritual consequences.

In the Old Testament, the term gluttony is derived from the Hebrew verb *zalal*, which literally means “to make light,” “to render worthless,” or “to squander.”<sup>19</sup> It has the sense of treating something as worthless through wanton overconsumption. To be

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<sup>17</sup> Frailie, *The Seven Deadly Sins Today*, 156.

<sup>18</sup> Bringle, *The God of Thinness*, 70.

<sup>19</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 272-273.

gluttonous is to be frivolous, riotous or greedy.<sup>20</sup> There are a few Old Testament references to gluttony. Proverbs 23:20-21 warns, “Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags.” Likewise, Proverbs 28:7 instructs, “Those who keep the law are wise children, but companions of gluttons shame their parents” (NRSV). In Deuteronomy 21:20, parents of a rebellious son can have him stoned, pronouncing the judgment, “This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard” (NRSV). Gluttony is often experienced in tandem with its sister vice, “drunkenness.” Gluttons overindulge in food and drink, rendering them senseless, lazy, rebellious, and lacking good moral judgment.

In the New Testament, gluttony comes from the Greek noun *gaster*, which literally means “belly.” The term has a pejorative nuance, referring to an insatiable desire that must be mastered.<sup>21</sup> As in the Old Testament, gluttony is often seen where other sins are also present. For instance, Titus 1:12 describes the Cretans as “liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.” Gluttony in the New Testament has the sense of one’s physical appetite taking over all other faculties, causing irrational behavior and a lapse in moral judgment. For this reason, gluttons were viewed in a negative light ethically. The Pharisees falsely accused Jesus of being a glutton because of his habit of dining with morally dubious characters, such as tax collectors and “sinners” (Mt 11:19; Lk 7:34).

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<sup>20</sup> W. I. Walker, “Glutton; Gluttonous,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: Illustrated in Four Volumes*, vol. 2, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 483.

<sup>21</sup> Ceslas Spiq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, vol. 1, trans. and ed. James D. Ernest (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 295.

In the New Testament, gluttony is also considered a form of idolatry—a placing of a desired object for consumption above one’s devotion to God. In extreme cases, gluttony can cause people to question God’s goodness and fail to trust in His provision for their needs. The Apostle Paul says of such individuals, “Their destiny is destruction; their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame; their mind is on earthly things” (Phil 3:19).

The Bible presents several examples of such gluttony. One such example is Esau in Genesis 25:29-34. In this account, Esau came home from a day in the fields to his brother, Jacob, who was cooking stew. Esau was famished, and asked Jacob for some stew. Jacob demanded that Esau sell his birthright in exchange for the stew. Instead of holding on to his birthright, which was of much greater value than a bowl of stew, Esau allowed his physical appetite to overrule both his moral judgment and his common sense. He forfeited the long-term value of his birthright for the immediate pleasure of a bowl of stew. In so doing, Scripture says, “Esau despised his birthright” (Gn 25:34).

Another scriptural example of gluttony comes from Exodus 16, where the Israelites, having just been led out of slavery in Egypt by God, now found themselves wandering in the desert. They complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.” (Ex 16:3). The Israelites quickly forgot God’s faithfulness in delivering them from the Egyptians. They allowed their immediate hunger to cloud their trust in God’s provision and cry out against Him. In response, God graciously provided manna for the Israelites to eat during their journey through the desert. However, later on

some of the “rabble” among them developed a “strong craving,” thus instigating the Israelites to complain again about their food situation. They lamented, “If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now . . . there is nothing at all but this manna to look at” (Nm 11:4-6 NRSV). The Israelites allowed those with the strong craving to influence their trust in God, leading them to prefer their life of slavery and oppression in Egypt to a life of freedom under God’s loving provision. In response to their complaining, the Lord provided quail for the Israelites, but his anger was provoked because of their lack of faith and gratitude. The Lord sent a great plague as a punishment, and the Israelites buried those who possessed the strong craving (Nm 11:31-34).

Some argue that the account in Genesis 3 of Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden depicts gluttony. Christian writer, Lauren Winner states, “Humanity’s first sin was disobedience manifested in a choice about eating.”<sup>22</sup> Although there was clearly a much broader motivation behind Adam and Eve’s sin in the Garden than merely satisfying their physical appetite, Bringle points out, “The detail remains that the violated prohibition involves a forbidden food. It could have been otherwise.”<sup>23</sup> God chose to test the faithfulness and obedience of the first human beings by means of their physical appetite. Perhaps God wished to see which they would value more—the Garden’s gifts or its Giver. Both food and the physical appetite are gifts God gave to

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<sup>22</sup> Lauren F. Winner, *Mudhouse Sabbath: An Invitation to Spiritual Discipline* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2003), 20.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

human beings, but these gifts must not be put above God Himself. The serpent's temptation planted a seed of doubt in the minds of the first humans regarding God's goodness. They began to see God's prohibition, not as a loving parent's boundary for their good, but as an act of withholding something good from them. In partaking of the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve allowed their physical appetite override their belief in God's goodness. They chose to put their trust in food rather than God. Richard Baxter warns, "O sin not as your first parents sinned by pleasing of your appetite . . . It is a graceless, disobedient, senseless heart that maketh men so boldly obey their appetite; when the fear of God is not in their hearts."<sup>24</sup>

#### Jesus as a Model for Overcoming Gluttony

Jesus' example serves as a model for those who desire to put the human appetite in its proper place. In his words and actions, Jesus demonstrated true obedience to his Father's will and ultimate trust in his Father's provision. Matthew 4:1-11 describes an encounter between Jesus and Satan in which Satan attempts to lure Jesus away from his Father's mission through a series of temptations. This event occurred after Jesus' baptism when the Holy Spirit led him into the wilderness where he fasted for forty days and nights. After his time of fasting, Scripture reveals that Jesus was hungry—the original Greek suggests that Jesus was extremely hungry.<sup>25</sup> The NRSV translates the verb as "famished" (v. 2). It was at this time that Satan approached Jesus with three

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Baxter, *Christian Directory in The Practical Works of Richard Baxter: With a Preface, Giving Some Account of the Author, and of This Edition of His Practical Works: An Essay on His Genius, Works, and Times; and a Portrait*, vol. 1 (1838; repr., Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990), 314.

<sup>25</sup> William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 792.

successive temptations. The Greek verb meaning, “to tempt,” has the dual meaning of both endeavoring to discover one’s true character and attempting to entrap or entice one to improper behavior.<sup>26</sup> In this confrontation, God was using the situation to test Jesus’ character for his good and the good of his mission. At the same time, Satan was using the opportunity for evil—an attempt to bring down Jesus through disobedience to his Father’s will. Satan first tempted Jesus to supernaturally satisfy his hunger by turning stones into bread (v. 3). Next, Satan tempted Jesus to throw himself off the pinnacle of the temple so that God would send angels to rescue him (vv. 5-6). Finally, Satan promised Jesus all the kingdoms of the earth if Jesus would worship him (vv. 8-9). Each time, Jesus refused to give into Satan’s trickery, citing Scripture to refute each of Satan’s temptations. Ultimately, Jesus commanded, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him’” (v. 10). This last scriptural statement summed up Jesus’ attitude and action toward his Father—he would trust and obey his Father’s will alone. After Satan leaves, Scripture states that angels immediately came and waited upon Jesus. Commentator R. T. France points out that the perfect tense of the verb in verse 11 conveys a sense of “settled continuing care in place of the rapid succession of testing and response.”<sup>27</sup> Scripture’s statement of Jesus being waited upon

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<sup>26</sup> Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 792-793.

<sup>27</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, vol. 1, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 125.

by the angels has the connotation of being served food by them.<sup>28</sup> Thus, God rewarded Jesus' obedience and fidelity by providing for his physical needs.

As with the first humans, Satan attempted to use food as a means of tempting Jesus to deviate from his Father's will. Jesus' hunger was not evil, nor was food in-and-of-itself evil. The means in which Jesus was being tempted to satisfy his hunger was wrong. Instead of relying upon God for provision, Satan was trying to tempt Jesus into taking matters into his own hands. Commentator Robert Smith argues that Satan was tempting Jesus to "direct his powers to meeting his physical needs, that he devoted his energy to satisfying his personal hunger, that he practice magic."<sup>29</sup> Satan desired to make Jesus "groundlessly anxious about his physical needs . . . The devil's aim is to break Jesus' perfect trust in his Father's good care . . . and thereby alter the course of salvation history."<sup>30</sup> Jesus, however, did not succumb to Satan's temptation. Jesus rebuked Satan's attack with the words from Scripture, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4; Dt 8:3 NRSV). For Jesus, "Obedience to God's will takes priority over self-gratification, even over the apparently essential provision of food."<sup>31</sup> Commentator Donald A. Hagner explains, "The things offered to Jesus . . . are rightfully his by virtue of his sonship and messianic identity.

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<sup>28</sup> Eugene M. Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: General Articles on the New Testament, The Gospel of Matthew, The Gospel of Mark*. Vol. VIII, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 164.

<sup>29</sup> Robert H. Smith, *Matthew*, in *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 64.

<sup>30</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, in *International Critical Commentary*, vol. 1, ed. J. A. Emerton, C. E. B. Cranfield, and G. N. Stanton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 362.

<sup>31</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 131.

Yet . . . Jesus is called to be obedient not only as Son but also as Servant. He thereby is called to exemplify obedience to the will of the Father under the pressure of severe testing and at the cost of self-denial.”<sup>32</sup> Although Jesus could have opted to exercise his divinity and messianic authority to satisfy his hunger, Jesus chose to remain in his Father’s will, obeying his Father’s wishes and trusting in his Father’s means of provision.

In overcoming Satan’s temptations, Jesus serves as an example to humanity in placing God’s will above material provision. Jesus’ example instructs individuals to put God’s word and God’s will above their own appetites. Jesus’ example stands in stark contrast to that of gluttony, which seeks to place food at the highest level of importance. It is God alone, and not the food He provides, that ultimately sustains human beings. Calvin reminds us, “Though we live on bread, we must not ascribe the support of life to the power of bread, but to the secret kindness, by which God imparts to bread the quality of nourishing our bodies.”<sup>33</sup> Unlike Adam and Israel before him, Jesus understood that God was in control of the universe, and that God would ultimately provide the nourishment he needed for his mission. Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness serves as a model to human beings on keeping food and bodily hunger in proper relationship to God’s will. Bringle states, “Food itself is good—but food is not a supreme good. We are to pray for our daily bread, but we must also know that we do not live by bread alone.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33A, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 69.

<sup>33</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. XVI, trans. and eds. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 215.

<sup>34</sup> Bringle, *The God of Thinness*, 58.

Jesus also models spiritual practice as a means of overcoming temptation in this narrative. Although the duration and intensity of Jesus' practice of certain disciplines is clearly unique to his divinity and messianic mission, the general practice of such disciplines is beneficial to those who desire to overcome the devil's temptations. Jesus practiced silence and solitude in the wilderness. Jesus demonstrated a strong knowledge of Scripture, which presumably came from the practice of study and meditation. Though not specifically indicated, Jesus likely spent a good deal of time in prayer over his forty days and nights in the desert. Fasting, in particular, seemed especially crucial to Jesus' spiritual training prior to his confrontation with Satan. Smith argues, "Jesus' fasting signifies total reliance upon God and sovereign freedom from every earthly security including the ordinary necessities of life."<sup>35</sup> Through his forty days and nights of fasting, Jesus placed his complete dependence upon his heavenly Father. Winner suggests, "Though perhaps physically weakened from His fast, Jesus was spiritually much stronger for it, and, indeed, the fast helped give Him the moxie to renounce the devil."<sup>36</sup> Jesus demonstrates the spiritual benefit of the practice of fasting in overcoming temptation, particularly the temptation to make food into idol. By denying his body food, Jesus put his complete trust in God's provision. Jesus' followers can learn as he learned during his fasting, "By the Word, not bread alone, we are fed for life with God."<sup>37</sup> Through the practice of spiritual disciplines, disciples can experience spiritual strengthening that provides inner resolve that empowers them to withstand the devil's assaults.

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<sup>35</sup> Smith, *Matthew*, 64.

<sup>36</sup> Winner, *Mudhouse Sabbath*, 84.

<sup>37</sup> Jerome, *New Testament: Matthew 1-13*, in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, vol. 1a, ed. Manlio Simonetti and Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 56.

## Gluttony's Remedy: Stewardship of the Body

Gluttony is a difficult spiritual issue to overcome. One of the major challenges of addressing gluttony is learning to properly utilize and enjoy food without overindulgence and obsessive attachment. Rowland explains, "One of the things that is tough about gluttony is that it often deals with objects with which we must interact to survive . . . We need to eat and drink. It can be very difficult to consume what we need, while holding these things at arm's length lest they come to own us."<sup>38</sup> Human beings cannot simply go without food altogether. Complicating matters further is the surrounding culture of excess that sends constant messages encouraging the instant gratification of every human desire. Therefore, one must develop deep internal spiritual reserves of both wisdom and self-control to have any hope of successfully addressing the condition of gluttony. Plantinga calls such inner reserves "good spiritual hygiene," which he defines as "a practiced ability to assess goods . . . plus the power of will to pursue them with appropriate degrees of interest and to enjoy them with a fitting level of pleasure."<sup>39</sup> However, such knowledge and practice does not come instantaneously. One cannot simply decide to stop being a glutton. Rowland explains that effectively treating gluttony is more "than just stopping bad habits; it's a matter of developing good habits that nourish the soul."<sup>40</sup> Stewardship of the body is the concept of developing these good and nourishing habits through life-long lifestyle change and spiritual practice.

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<sup>38</sup> Rowland, *The Sins We Love*, 157.

<sup>39</sup> Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, 41.

<sup>40</sup> Rowland, *The Sins We Love*, 156.

Stewardship of the body in addressing gluttony first involves a radical reorientation to food and eating. To overcome gluttony, individuals must learn to reorient their view of food, physical appetite and the human body to God’s perspective and purpose. God created human beings with bodies and spirits—both are intended to work together to glorify God. Human beings are called to be stewards over the creation, and this includes being good stewards of their physical bodies. Developing stewardship of the body puts food and physical appetite in their proper perspective. Food becomes a means of nurturing one’s God-given body, not a means of self-gratification. The physical appetite becomes a servant to God’s greater purposes, not a master of one’s own desires. Stewardship of the body involves both good physical care of one’s body along with the nurture and strengthening of one’s spiritual life. Baxter exhorts, “Have a due care of your bodies, that no distemper be cherished in them which causeth distemper of the soul. Passions have a very dependence on the temperament of the body; and much of the cure of them lieth . . . in the body’s emendation.”<sup>41</sup> Good bodily stewardship involves cultivating a lifestyle of commitment to honoring God in and through the body that the whole person may be transformed, both inside and outside. Stewardship of the body is the value, nurture, and respect of the body as God’s creation, redeemed by Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit for health, holiness, and glorifying God.

#### Theological Foundation in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

The Apostle Paul discussed the importance of bodily stewardship in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. This section of text is part of Paul’s broader letter to the church at Corinth, a

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<sup>41</sup> Baxter, *Christian Directory*, 275.

wealthy, cosmopolitan seaport city with a large gentile population that lived a rather decadent lifestyle. Commentator Gordon Fee describes Corinth as “at once the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world.”<sup>42</sup> In this letter, Paul attempts to correct doctrinal inaccuracies and inappropriate behavior. In this particular passage, Paul intends to clear up misconceptions regarding the body that has led some of the Corinthian Christians to engage in sexual immorality. The Corinthian view of spirituality had been greatly influenced by a Greek philosophy that sought a wholly spiritual salvation apart from the physical body. Fee contends, “Lying behind this form of spirituality is a Greek view of the world that placed little or no value on the material order. Out of such a view developed the idea of ‘immortality of the soul,’ that is, that the spirit is somehow immortal, but the body, along with the rest of the material order is destined for destruction.”<sup>43</sup> Many Corinthians believed that the physical body, and what was done with it, had no bearing on their spiritual lives. Thus, they engaged in all sorts of immoral behavior, particularly sexual in nature, believing it was ultimately of no eternal consequence.

It is this false belief that Paul aims to refute in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. He begins his argument by citing a well-known cultural maxim, “Everything is permissible for me.” Maxims were often used in Greco-Roman culture in philosophical debates. Commentator Paul Sampley describes such maxims as “epitomes of truth, of commonly shared convictions or perceptions . . . they typically function as a ‘given’ from which one argues

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<sup>42</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

or builds a case.”<sup>44</sup> Paul corrects the conventional wisdom, “Everything is permissible for me” with the caveats “but not everything is beneficial,” and “I will not be mastered by anything” (v. 12). Although Corinthians had the freedom to do what they pleased with their bodies, not all of the things in which they indulged were beneficial. Though they possessed bodily liberty, they were not to become slaves to their desires.

Paul continues his argument by citing another common maxim, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food,” again inserting a crucial caveat, “but God will destroy them both” (v. 13). God ultimately controlled the fate of both the material world and the body. Paul then adds, “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.” (vv. 13b-14). Here Paul refutes the Corinthian understanding of body by affirming the truth of bodily resurrection. Just as God resurrected Jesus bodily from the grave, so shall he also bodily resurrect all human beings. Thus, the body has eternal significance—it matters how one treats the body, both in this world and the next. Paul’s instruction goes against the common Corinthian understanding that, “in seeing the body as transient and trivial, have concluded that it makes no difference what we do with our bodies. If we are hungry, we should eat; if we are desirous of sexual gratification, we should seek it. None of this makes any difference, they say, because it concerns only external physical matters, which are of no lasting significance.”<sup>45</sup> Since the body will be resurrected and experience immortality, how one treats the body is of crucial importance

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<sup>44</sup> Paul J. Sampley, *The First Letter to the Corinthians: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: The Acts of the Apostles, Introduction to Epistolary Literature, The Letter to the Romans, The First Letter to the Corinthians*, vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 860.

<sup>45</sup> Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians in Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 103.

to one's spiritual life. Commentator Richard Hays declares, "The body is not simply a husk to be cast off in the next life: the gospel of Jesus Christ proclaims that we are to be redeemed body, soul, and spirit."<sup>46</sup> For this reason, commentator Leon Morris asserts, "The body cannot be dismissed as unimportant; the body is for the Lord. It is the instrument wherein we serve God. It is the means whereby we glorify God."<sup>47</sup> Paul uses the term *soma*, which Morris defines as "the whole personality, man as a person meant for God," as opposed to *sarx*, which refers to flesh, weakness, and the sinful state of humanity.<sup>48</sup> Morris concludes, "Bodily life enshrines permanent values. The resurrection forbids us to take the body lightly."<sup>49</sup> Because the body will be resurrected to eternal life, what human beings do in the body here and now matters to God. In light of the body's resurrection, Paul argues, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, 'The two will become one flesh.' But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit" (vv. 15-17). Here Paul argues that Christians have been united to Christ through the bond of the Spirit. Paul uses the term *kollao*, a word describing close bonds of various kinds, both literal and metaphorical. It literally means "to glue."<sup>50</sup> Paul asserts that because Christians are "glued" to Christ bodily

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<sup>46</sup> Hays, *First Corinthians in Interpretation*, 104.

<sup>47</sup> Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary in Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, (1958; repr., Leicester, England: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 96.

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

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

through the Spirit, they cannot then join their bodies to works of unrighteousness. The implication is clear. Paul commands, “Flee from sexual immorality” (v. 18). Fornication that dishonors the physical body has no place in the life of a Christian who is bound to Christ.

Paul takes the argument a step further in verses 19-20, “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.” Here Paul uses the imagery of the human body being the temple, or dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Paul uses the term *naos*, which refers to a sacred shrine or place in which a deity dwells.<sup>51</sup> Temples and shrines to various deities would have been a common sight in Corinth—an image to which the Corinthian Christians could relate. Fee explains the significance of this imagery: “The church through the Spirit is God’s temple in Corinth, in contrast to all the pagan temples and shrines. Through the phenomenon of the indwelling Spirit, Paul now images the body as the Spirit’s temple, emphasizing that it is the ‘place’ of the Spirit’s dwelling in the individual believers’ lives. In the same way that the temple in Jerusalem ‘housed’ the presence of the living God, so the Spirit of God is ‘housed’ in the believer’s body.”<sup>52</sup> As bearers of the indwelling Holy Spirit, Christians are to conduct their lives in a way that honors God’s presence within them. Morris states, “This rules out all such conduct as is not appropriate to the temple of God.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 99.

<sup>52</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 264.

<sup>53</sup> Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 99.

In addition to being a temple of the indwelling Holy Spirit, Paul states that the Christian's body was purchased at a great price—the body is no longer the individual's to do with as he or she pleases. 1 Peter 1:18-19 asserts, “You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish” (NRSV). Human beings were purchased with Christ's very own shed blood, not just for spiritual, but also bodily redemption. Fee explains, “Christ purchased us for God . . . even the body is included in that purchase.”<sup>54</sup> Morris believes that Paul is using imagery of “sacral manumission,” a process whereby a slave would save up the price of his freedom and then pay it to the temple treasury of a local deity, thus selling himself to that deity. In the eyes of society, the slave was free, however, he was now the slave of the deity to whom he was purchased.<sup>55</sup> In this context, Christians, in accepting Christ's work on the cross as payment for their sins, became the possession of Christ who purchased them. Commentator Anthony Thiselton explains, “The imagery stresses primarily the new ownership, and secondly a costly act on the part of the new owner which makes the believer legitimately and contractually the one to whom the believer now belongs.”<sup>56</sup> Once Christians have been purchased by Christ and are bound to him through the indwelling Holy Spirit, they are required to live a life in the body that honors

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<sup>54</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 265.

<sup>55</sup> Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 100.

<sup>56</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 477.

God. Paul exhorts Christians to “glorify God in your body”—the verb here is in the aorist imperative, indicating the need for urgent action without delay.<sup>57</sup>

Sampley believes that the Christian life requires the practice of regular “temple maintenance” befitting the new tenant, the Holy Spirit.<sup>58</sup> This involves exercising proper stewardship of the physical body—caring for it, nurturing it, and not abusing it through harmful behaviors. Failing to exercise proper bodily stewardship is an abuse “not just to the container that we live in but of our very selves, the selves that God has made us to be.”<sup>59</sup> Christ purchased human beings, body and soul, for complete redemption—the mortal body will be resurrected to eternal life. Hays argues, “We should therefore use our bodies in ways that point towards the wholeness for which we hope in the resurrection.”<sup>60</sup>

There are many implications of Paul’s discussion in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 for this ministry project addressing gluttony. In this passage, Paul establishes the clear connection between the physical body and the spiritual life. Paul rejects the view that the body is merely a material substance that will eventually come to nothing. Christ’s resurrection gives his followers the promise of full redemption, including resurrection of the human body. Therefore, what human beings do in their bodies is of great importance to their spiritual lives. Christians are called to honor God in their bodies. They are to be good stewards of their bodies, caring for them and refraining from any behaviors that

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<sup>57</sup> Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 101.

<sup>58</sup> Sampley, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 865.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 866.

<sup>60</sup> Hays, *First Corinthians in Interpretation*, 108.

may cause their bodies harm. Although Paul is speaking specifically to the issue of sexual immorality in the immediate context, Paul's instruction can be applied more broadly to all areas of bodily life, including areas involving food and eating. Just as Paul warned the Corinthians not to use their freedom in Christ to mistreat their bodies through sexual sin, so Christians today should not use their Christian liberty to abuse their bodies through gluttony. Like the Corinthians, Christians today should practice what is beneficial to their bodies, and not allow anything to master them, including food and eating. Scripture makes it clear that what Christians do with their bodies affects their spiritual lives. When human beings indulge their bodily passions in excess, or outside of God's appointed boundaries, it adversely affects their spiritual growth. Food, drink, and sex are not wrong in and of themselves, but they can have a deleterious effect on one's spiritual life if they are misused or used in excess. The bottom line is that Christians cannot mistreat the body and grow spiritually. When Christ redeemed humankind, he intended that redemption to be of the whole person—body, mind, and spirit. The process of sanctification must involve the whole person, including proper stewardship of the body. Fee asserts, "God made us whole people; and in Christ he has redeemed us wholly . . . both the physical and spiritual orders are good because God created them . . . the whole fallen order, including the body, has been redeemed in Christ and awaits final redemption."<sup>61</sup> As Christians develop a healthy stewardship of the body, they participate in God's redemptive purposes, drawing themselves, soul and body, ever closer to consummate wholeness in Christ.

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<sup>61</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 266.

## Cultivating Stewardship of the Body through the Practice of Spiritual Disciplines

Like all spiritual growth, cultivating good stewardship of the body requires planning, effort, and proper training. Fortunately, individuals are not left to their own devices. God has provided time-tested tools to assist believers in their spiritual training. Spiritual disciplines have been utilized throughout Christian history to empower men and women of the faith to grow in greater health and holiness. Scholar Dennis Olkholm describes the disciplines as “a spiritual angioplasty that keeps a person open to God’s life-transforming grace.”<sup>62</sup> Spiritual disciplines keep our spiritual arteries open and free from barriers that might hinder our growth or our connection with God. Through the practice of spiritual disciplines, individuals gradually replace destructive habits with healthier, life-giving habits. The goal of practicing spiritual disciplines is to achieve a complete transformation of the whole person, both body and spirit.<sup>63</sup>

Spiritual disciplines are tools for training in becoming better stewards of the body. Such disciplines must be incorporated meaningfully into one’s daily life in order to bear fruit. This kind of lifestyle is what ancient spiritual practitioners referred to as asceticism, or “a program of training, making the whole self ‘fit’ for God’s service.”<sup>64</sup> An ascetic lifestyle does not seek to punish the body, but rather “trades on the holistic connection of the body and the spirit; the training of one inseparably enhances the health of the other; the proper ordering of bodily impulses provides energy for the pursuit of

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<sup>62</sup> Dennis Olkholm, “Rx for Gluttony,” *Christianity Today* (September 2000): 66.

<sup>63</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 62.

<sup>64</sup> Bringle, *The God of Thinness*, 43.

ultimate desires.”<sup>65</sup> An effective ascetic regimen should be tailored to the individual’s spiritual and physical needs and growth areas. Writer Mark Hollingsworth, Jr. advises, “We should seek practices that stretch and strengthen us . . . we should see them not as restrictive, but as exercises that develop us physically, spiritually, emotionally, and vocationally—calisthenics that expand our capacity for transformation.”<sup>66</sup>

In confronting the spiritual issue of gluttony, the practice of spiritual disciplines is particularly crucial. Spiritual conditions require spiritual remedies. An individual with a longstanding obsession with food inevitably have deeper issues than the mere dissemination of health information can alleviate. A program of spiritual training is necessary to give an individual the inner resolve to say “no” to gluttony’s inordinate demands and put the physical appetite in proper perspective. Spiritual training is also necessary to feed the deep, unresolved inner desires that are often masked by the consumption of food. Spiritual practice feeds the individual true spiritual food that can satisfy their deepest longings in a way mere food cannot. Marcus Borg states, “We are fed by practice.”<sup>67</sup> In learning to overcome spiritual issues surrounding food, Richard Baxter encourages the individual to “live faithfully to God, and upon spiritual, durable delights. And then you will fetch the measure of your eating and drinking from their tendency to that higher end.”<sup>68</sup> To overcome the spiritual problem of gluttony and

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<sup>65</sup> Bringle, *The God of Thinness*, 43.

<sup>66</sup> Mark Hollingsworth, Jr., “Fitness for God’s Mission,” in *All Shall Be Well: An Approach to Wellness*, ed. William S. Craddock, Jr. (New York: Morehouse, 2009), 158.

<sup>67</sup> Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, 193.

<sup>68</sup> Baxter, *Christian Directory*, 314.

develop a healthy stewardship of the body, Bringle believes individuals require “a set of everyday rituals and practices that will teach us how to deal more wisely with our hungers and our pleasures.”<sup>69</sup> These “daily graces,” as she calls them, “empowers the long journey out of addiction into health—the trial and error, the gradual growth in consciousness and in confidence, the forgiveness that embraces failure and enables starting over again.”<sup>70</sup>

Such a process of spiritual training is not easy, and does not produce results instantaneously. Such a journey requires God’s active presence in one’s life pouring out guidance, assistance, and love. Rice admits, “The fruit of the spiritual life is not easily attained. The process of growing in grace is sometimes difficult. It requires persistence which never comes easy for any of us. The old part of us, the part that wants to go it alone and maintain control, keeps asserting itself.”<sup>71</sup> Spiritual training requires continual death to self that new life may reign over the whole person. Such training cannot be done by sheer human effort. Writer William Watson explains, “We need God’s help if we are to put into practice healthy behavior. We are nothing if not experts in our own resistance to change. Yet, God cares for us and God desires our wholeness.”<sup>72</sup> Christians should trust that God’s grace is active in their lives, bringing about the results He desires, even as they struggle and put forth effort in spiritual practice. The Apostle Paul exhorts Christ’s followers to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God

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<sup>69</sup> Bringle, *The God of Thinness*, 40.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>71</sup> Rice, *Reformed Spirituality*, 198.

<sup>72</sup> William J. Watson, III, “Wellness Begins with a Walk,” in *All Shall Be Well: An Approach to Wellness*, ed. William S. Craddock, Jr. (New York: Morehouse, 2009), 109.

who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12b-13). Though a struggle, spiritual training to develop bodily stewardship will not only reap the reward of better health, it will also produce the sweet fruit of spiritual transformation. The path of spiritual training is undoubtedly hard work. However, as Rice explains, “the testimony of the ages is that the goal of the adventure is well worth the struggle. The hungry heart of the pilgrim is fed along the way.”<sup>73</sup>

### **Cultivating Stewardship of the Body through Specific Spiritual Disciplines**

The cultivation of bodily stewardship requires an organized plan—a program of specific spiritual practices that will enable an individual to overcome the spiritual problem of gluttony and develop a lifestyle that honors God in body, mind, and spirit. To encourage stewardship of the whole person, the proposed ministry program will include healthy living practices such as rest, good nutrition, and exercise. However, the focus of the ministry will be on the practice of spiritual disciplines as a means of developing good stewardship of the body. Eight specific have been selected both for their general benefit to the spiritual life, as well as their specific application to the spiritual condition of gluttony.<sup>74</sup> The final section of this chapter will define these disciplines and discuss their relevance to the proposed ministry project.

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<sup>73</sup> Rice, *Reformed Spirituality*, 199.

<sup>74</sup> Because of their similarities and overlap with each other, certain disciplines will be considered together as one discipline. These include silence/solitude, confession/journaling, study/meditation, and worship/celebration.

## Silence/Solitude: Unplugging from Excess

Silence and solitude are formative disciplines that enable individuals to tune out the noise of the world to attune more fully to God's presence and will. Silence and solitude are intended to be practiced in tandem. Willard explains, "Silence and solitude go hand in hand. Just as silence is vital to make solitude real, so is solitude needed to make the discipline of silence complete."<sup>75</sup> In silence, one abstains from engaging with sounds, including artificial noises, music, or conversation.<sup>76</sup> Spiritual writer Adele Calhoun states, "Silence challenges our cultural addiction to amusement, words, music, advertising, noise, alarms and voices. Silence asks for patience and waiting."<sup>77</sup> Calhoun describes the work of silence upon an individual: "Like a can opener the silence opens up the contents of our heart, allowing us deeper access to God than we experience at other times. As we remain in the silence, the inner noise and chaos will begin to settle."<sup>78</sup>

Solitude complements silence. In solitude, the individual purposefully refrains from interaction with others in order to be completely alone with oneself and God.<sup>79</sup> Of this discipline, Dallas Willard says, "Nothing but solitude can allow the development of a freedom from the ingrained behaviors that hinder our integration into God's order."<sup>80</sup> Calhoun states, "Solitude is a formative place because it gives God's Spirit time and

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<sup>75</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 163.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 108.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>79</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 160.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

space to do deep work. When no one else is there to watch, judge, and interpret what we say, the Spirit often brings us face to face with hidden motives and compulsions.”<sup>81</sup> With regular practice, solitude becomes a safe place where an individual can retreat from the chaos of a demanding world and simply “be.” Calhoun explains, “Solitude opens a space where we can bring our empty and compulsive selves to God . . . God is there to accept, receive and love us. God longs for us to be our true self in Christ. He wants us to be who we are meant to be.”<sup>82</sup>

Silence and solitude are key disciplines in restoring balance and intentionality in one’s life. Engaging in silence and solitude is a countercultural act. Today’s culture values speed, efficiency, multitasking—being constantly “plugged in” to technology through cell phones, laptops, I Pads, and social media. Society has lost any sense of the value of “down time” to the human psyche. The culture entices people to cram more and more activities into the short span of the day. As a result, many have come to believe that taking time to cultivate a spiritual life or become a better steward of their bodies is a luxury rather than a necessity. Over time, the practice of silence and solitude mutes the noise of the world, giving an individual the time and space to pursue matters of eternal importance—nurturing one’s relationship with God and caring for the spiritual temple in which dwells.

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<sup>81</sup> Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 112.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

## Fellowship: Communities of Spiritual Training

Where silence and solitude form the individual apart from others, fellowship is a discipline that works through others corporately to bring about personal transformation. Fellowship complements silence and solitude. As time alone is necessary for an individual's growth, so also is time spent interacting with others in close relationships. Fellowship occurs when followers of Christ gather together and engage in spiritual practice.<sup>83</sup> God created individuals to be relational beings. Author Reggie McNeal asserts, "People do not exist apart from relationships. They come to be who they are in relation to others."<sup>84</sup> In a culture where individuals are becoming more isolated and relationships increasingly fragmented, human beings need communities where they can develop authentic relationships based upon mutual acceptance, trust, and accountability. Thus, the spiritual practice of fellowship is crucial to the individual's well-being, now more than ever.

Fellowship is necessary for spiritual growth and development. Calhoun states, "Spiritual transformation is not a solo event. God works in us through others."<sup>85</sup> As individuals experience the love, commitment, and challenge of others, they experience a greater sense of who they are called to be in Christ. Also, the reciprocal nature of relationships, practicing fellowship enables individuals to achieve and sustain a level of

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<sup>83</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 186.

<sup>84</sup> Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 110.

<sup>85</sup> Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 149.

spiritual growth and commitment that would not be possible on their own. In fellowship, Willard explains, “we receive the ministry of all the graces of the Spirit to the church.”<sup>86</sup>

The practice of fellowship is particularly important to individuals combating gluttony and cultivating a healthy stewardship of the body. Behavioral changes are difficult to initially implement, and even more challenging to sustain long-term. Without ongoing fellowship through a supportive community, both spiritual growth and physical wellness are extremely difficult to maintain. However, when individuals engage in fellowship in a community where they receive support and accountability, they find that long-term changes become easier and more ingrained into their everyday life. Watson attests, “Such support helps us, affirms us, and motivates us.”<sup>87</sup> Such ongoing fellowship may prove to be the critical element that keeps individuals consistently on a path of wellness and spiritual growth. Through fellowship, individuals can learn to overcome unhealthy obsessions and live a lifestyle that honors God in body and spirit. In so doing, they participate in God’s redemptive process both individually and corporately, which molds them more into the people God desires them to be.

#### Confession/Journaling: Accountability, Forgiveness, and Documenting Progress

Confession and journaling are spiritual disciplines that provide practitioners with forgiveness, accountability, and a means of recording progress on the journey toward holistic wellness. In the practice of confession, Willard says, “we let trusted others know our deepest weaknesses and failures. This will nourish our faith in God’s provision of

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<sup>86</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 187.

<sup>87</sup> Watson, “Wellness Begins with a Walk,” 111.

our needs through his people, our sense of being loved, and our humility before our brothers and sisters.”<sup>88</sup> The practice of confession is rooted in God’s love for humanity. Richard Foster affirms, “At the heart of God is the desire to give and to forgive. Because of this, he set into motion the entire redemptive process that culminated in the cross and was confirmed in the resurrection.”<sup>89</sup> God loved human beings so dearly that He provided a means whereby they could be forgiven and set free from sin’s power. Through God’s Son, Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection, the debt of sin was paid in full and death was defeated, opening the door of eternal life to humankind. Foster explains that God’s action in Jesus Christ “is the ground upon which we can know that confession and forgiveness are realities that transform us. Without the cross the Discipline of confession would be only psychologically therapeutic. But it is so much more. It involves an objective change in our relationship with God and a subjective change in us. It is a means of healing and transforming the inner spirit.”<sup>90</sup> Calhoun declares, “Through confession and forgiveness we live into the truth of being God’s new creation! The old is gone. The new has come.”<sup>91</sup>

Confession is a discipline that is practiced both privately and corporately. Corporate confession reinforces its private practice in one’s life. Foster explains, “It is through the voice of our brothers and sisters that the word of forgiveness is heard and

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<sup>88</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 187.

<sup>89</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 143.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>91</sup> Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 93.

takes root in our lives.”<sup>92</sup> Though corporate confession may make some people uncomfortable and embarrassed, healthy confession in a group can strengthen the individual’s faith as well as the group’s overall sense of community. Foster encourages, “If we know that the people of God are first a fellowship of sinners, we are freed to hear the unconditional call of God’s love and to confess our needs openly before our brothers and sisters. We know we are not alone in our sin. The fear and pride that cling to us like barnacles cling to others also. We are sinners together. In acts of mutual confession we release the power that heals. Our humanity is no longer denied, but transformed.”<sup>93</sup> Obviously, confession of this kind relies on the healthy practice of fellowship, whereby the community models love, forgiveness, and true commitment to one another. Honest confession should also lead to honest repentance—a turning from harmful behavior to healthy, God-honoring behavior. Corporate confession should ideally lead to support and accountability that empowers individuals to release old, self-defeating behaviors and replace them with new, life-affirming behaviors.

The practice of confession is critical to recovering from gluttony. In overcoming a deeply-rooted obsession with food, one must first be willing to face the problem squarely and honestly. Because humans are prone to self-deception, the community can help an individual see their issues clearly, while providing the support and accountability to help the individual develop healthier patterns of caring for their body. The path of recovering from gluttony and cultivating healthy bodily stewardship can be daunting and discouraging at times. Failures often seem to outweigh successes. Individuals can easily

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<sup>92</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 147-148.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-146.

become consumed with guilt and self-condemnation that can sabotage their journey toward holistic wellness. Confession in a healthy community is crucial to helping people face struggles honestly, let go of past failures, and journey confidently on the path toward wholeness.

Journaling is a discipline that enhances confession and provides a tangible record measuring one's progress in cultivating good bodily stewardship. Calhoun describes journaling as "a way of paying attention to our lives—a way of knitting the vast ball of our experiences into something with shape that attests to the state of our soul . . . the ongoing nature of a journal catalogues the journey of a soul into God."<sup>94</sup> A journal provides a record of one's spiritual experiences. It offers a place to relate honestly one's thoughts, fears, emotions, hopes, dreams, struggles, strengths, weaknesses, failures, and victories. Personal transformation takes time, and often happens incrementally without a conscious awareness of its occurring. Regular journaling helps an individual track the often subjective progress one is making in the spiritual life.

#### Meditation/Study: Renewing the Mind through God's Word

The Apostle Paul exhorts Christ's followers, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom 12:2). The disciplines of study and meditation work together to transform the mind according to God's purposes. Foster defines study as "a specific kind of experience in which through

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<sup>94</sup> Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 57.

careful attention to reality the mind is enabled to move in a certain direction.”<sup>95</sup> Human behavior stems from thought patterns in the mind. Thus, in order to change behavior, one must change one’s thinking. Study and meditation changes one’s thinking. Foster explains, “The ingrained habits of thought that are formed will conform to the order of the thing being studied.”<sup>96</sup> To bring one’s thoughts in line with God’s purposes, one must study and meditate upon God’s Word. Study and meditation complement one another, yet are distinct disciplines. Foster explains, “Meditation is devotional; study is analytical.”<sup>97</sup> More specifically, “In the study of Scripture, a high priority is placed upon interpretation: what it means. In the devotional reading of Scripture a high priority is placed upon application: what it means for me.”<sup>98</sup>

In studying Scripture, one seeks to analyze its meaning and apply its truths to one’s life. Reading Scripture is a starting point for practicing the discipline of study. The repetition of Scriptural passages imbeds their truth more deeply into the mind. Foster asserts, “Ingrained habits of thought can be formed by repetition alone, thus changing behavior.”<sup>99</sup> Scripture memorization is also a fruitful means of study. Calhoun notes, “Memorization allows us to choose words and images that shape our minds and hearts . . . memorizing God’s Word allows us access to divinely inspired thought and

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<sup>95</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 63.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

wisdom . . . it works in us even when we are not conscious of its doing so.”<sup>100</sup>

Individuals are not left to themselves to interpret Scripture correctly that it may transform their minds. Richard Baxter attests, “The Holy Spirit assisteth us in our hearing, reading, and studying the Scripture, that we may come, by diligence, to the true understanding of it.”<sup>101</sup>

Meditating upon Scripture complements the work of study, but personalizes its message to the individual’s unique life circumstances. To meditate upon Scripture, Willard instructs, “we withdraw into silence where we prayerfully and steadily focus upon it. In this way its meaning for us can emerge and form us as God works in the depths of our heart, mind, and soul.”<sup>102</sup> Meditation in the Christian tradition differs significantly from Eastern and New Age forms of meditation. Foster explains, “Eastern meditation is an attempt to empty the mind; Christian meditation is an attempt to fill the mind.”<sup>103</sup> In Christian meditation, one specifically fills the mind with thoughts and images of scriptural truth. Through meditation upon scriptural truth, the individual experiences a change in thought patterns, and eventually behavior.

In seeking to overcome gluttony and develop a healthy stewardship of the body, study and meditation help individuals reframe negative thought patterns that result in self-destructive behaviors. Gluttony is fed by belief systems (sometimes not consciously recognized by the individual) that produce a cycle of behavior wherein an individual

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<sup>100</sup> Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 177.

<sup>101</sup> Baxter, *Christian Directory*, 41.

<sup>102</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 177.

<sup>103</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 20.

consumes food in an unhealthy manner. Such thought patterns make it difficult for the individual to break the cycle of destructive behavior. Studying and meditating upon scriptural truth, particularly regarding the body being a temple of the Holy Spirit, can change individuals' thought patterns and thus transforming their minds to God's purposes. Instead of overindulging the body with food, Baxter suggests feasting on God's Word as a means of developing healthier thought patterns and behaviors. Baxter teaches that the Scriptures "must be your bread and drink, your daily and substantial food . . . These will breed strength, and peace, and joy, and help you in your communion with God . . . There is more life and sweetness in these, than in things that are more remote from God and heaven."<sup>104</sup> Study and meditation upon Scripture reforms the mind to God's good purposes, thus diminishing unhealthy thought patterns that breed destructive behavior. Baxter instructs, "Look most to the holy constitution of your mind and life, and then sinful passions will fall off, like scabs from a healthful body when the blood is purified."<sup>105</sup>

#### Prayer: Engaging the Power of God

In the practice of prayer, the individual interacts directly with God and experiences God's power for personal transformation. Foster believes that, of all the spiritual disciplines, prayer is the most crucial, "because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father."<sup>106</sup> Foster declares, "Real prayer is life creating and life

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<sup>104</sup> Baxter, *Christian Directory*, 273.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>106</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 33

changing.”<sup>107</sup> Scripture instructs Christ’s followers to pray. Ephesians 6:18 urges, “Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” Philippians 4:6 encourages, “In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” 1 Thessalonians 5:17 simply says, “Pray continually.” Jesus declares to his disciples, “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Mt 7:11).

In its simplest form, prayer is communicating with God. Willard says, “When we pray we talk to God, aloud or within our thoughts.”<sup>108</sup> Through communion with God in prayer, one participates with God in God’s transforming work—this includes not only one’s own personal transformation, but also the transformation of the whole creation to renewed life and wholeness. One cannot engage in true prayer without experiencing God’s transformation. Foster explains, “To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us.”<sup>109</sup> Honest prayer involves a transformation of human passions. Foster asserts, “In prayer, real prayer, we begin to think God’s thoughts after him: to desire the things he desires, to love the things he loves, to will the things he wills.”<sup>110</sup> Rice explains, “Prayer requires that we think clearly about our wants and needs . . . Prayer changes our wanting as we hold our wants before God.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 33.

<sup>108</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 184.

<sup>109</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 33.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Rice, *Reformed Spirituality*, 76.

With regard to cultivating a healthy stewardship of the body, prayer reorients one's mindset toward the relationship between the body and the spiritual life. Prayer helps individuals see their bodies from God's point of view—precious temples that house the Holy Spirit, possessing eternal significance, deserving of nurture and care. Prayer is also a useful weapon to combat the spiritual problem of gluttony. In prayer, an individual can receive God's assistance and power in overcoming gluttony's obsessive nature and destructive effects.

Like all spiritual disciplines, prayer takes practice and perseverance. Prayer improves as one prays. Willard states, "Praying with frequency gives us the readiness to pray again as needed from moment to moment. The more we pray, the more we think to pray, and as we see the results of prayer—the responses of our Father to our requests—our confidence in God's power spills over into other areas of our life."<sup>112</sup> Prayer can be intimidating for some, as they believe prayer must be eloquent or take a specific form. At its heart, prayer relies upon God's nature and goodness, not human eloquence or worthiness. Jesus encouraged his disciples to pray to their Father in heaven, believing He would respond with gracious provision. In Matthew 7:11, Jesus declares, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" Individuals are to pray believing that God will hear and respond in grace. Willard attests, "God will meet us in love, and love will keep our minds directed toward him as the magnet pulls the needle of the compass. Habit will be confirmed in gracious interaction, and our whole lives will be bathed in the presence of God. Constant prayer will only 'burden' us as wings burden the

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<sup>112</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 185.

bird in flight.”<sup>113</sup> As individuals engage the power of God in prayer, they will find their mind enlightened, their will strengthened, their path clarified, and their whole person transformed.

### Fasting: Fostering Self-Denial and Self-Control

Fasting is a spiritual discipline that great saints throughout the ages have utilized to quell bodily passions and draw closer to God. The discipline of fasting consists primarily in abstaining from food for a set period of time for spiritual purposes.

Christians can practice fasting in a variety of ways—from the total abstention of food to abstention from particular foods for a season, such as Lent. Some even practice fasting through abstaining from things other than food, such as shopping, media consumption, or other activities. Spiritual writer Lynn Baab explains, “Using a broader definition of fasting—refraining from all or some foods or refraining from other forms of gratification—anyone can fast.”<sup>114</sup>

Fasting is not a means of punishing the body or of despising food. Graham Tomlin clarifies, “Christians do not fast because food is a necessary evil, as if the ideal state for human beings were not to eat at all . . . the practice of regularly denying ourselves food . . . is a way of keeping control, of reminding ourselves that food is good . . . but it is not the be-all-end-all of life.”<sup>115</sup> Tomlin further asserts, “Fasting serves as a means of keeping food in its proper place, ensuring that we retain control of our

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<sup>113</sup> Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 186.

<sup>114</sup> Lynn M. Baab, *Fasting: Spiritual Freedom beyond Our Appetites* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 28.

<sup>115</sup> Graham Tomlin, *The Seven Deadly Sins and How to Overcome Them* (Oxford, England: Lion, 2007), 118.

appetites rather than being controlled by them.”<sup>116</sup> Fasting is an act of self-denial that curbs the ravenous cravings of gluttony. As a result, one experiences greater self-control over one’s appetites.

Fasting is a challenging discipline to practice, especially at first. Fasting, Willard instructs, “teaches us a lot about ourselves very quickly. It will certainly prove humiliating to us, as it reveals to us how much our peace depends upon the pleasures of eating. It may also bring to mind how we are using food pleasure to assuage the discomforts caused in our bodies by faithless and unwise living and attitudes—lack of self-worth, meaningless work, purposeless existence, or lack of rest or exercise.”<sup>117</sup> Fasting counters one’s sense of self-sufficiency. Willard explains, “Fasting confirms our utter dependence upon God by finding in him a source of sustenance beyond food.”<sup>118</sup> Fasting will likely cause the practitioner both physical and spiritual discomfort. However, through the regular practice of fasting, individuals will gradually come to possess what Willard describes as “a clear and constant sense of their resources in God” enabling them to endure deprivation of all kinds.<sup>119</sup> Over time, fasting helps the individual discover “that life is so much more than meat . . . Our belly is not our god, as it is for others . . . rather it is his joyful servant and ours.”<sup>120</sup> Fasting not only teaches one moderation in consuming food, but also fosters temperance in all one’s bodily drives.

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<sup>116</sup> Tomlin, *The Seven Deadly Sins and How to Overcome Them*, 118.

<sup>117</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 166.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

Willard asserts, “Since food has the pervasive place it does in our lives, the effects of fasting will be diffused throughout our personality. In the midst of all our needs and wants, we experience the contentment of the child that has been weaned from its mother’s breast.”<sup>121</sup> Far from diminishing an individual’s joy in living, the practice of fasting reveals a richer, fuller life than mere food can provide. Through fasting, Calhoun invites the individual to “taste the difference between what truly nourishes the soul—the living bread and the life-giving water—and what is simply junk food.”<sup>122</sup> Through fasting, individuals learn to appreciate food, their bodies, and their appetites as God’s good creations.

#### Service: Putting Others Needs above One’s Own

Human beings have physical bodies not just to meet their own needs but also to meet the needs of others. Calhoun affirms, “God intends to bless the nations through us and our lives of service. Christians are the very presence of God to others. We become vehicles of blessing on planet earth.”<sup>123</sup> The great civil rights activist, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. declares, “Everybody can be great because anybody can serve . . . You don’t have to have a college degree to serve . . . You don’t have to make subject and verb agree to serve . . . You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love.”<sup>124</sup> “In service,” Willard explains, “we engage our goods and strength in the active promotion of

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<sup>121</sup> Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 168.

<sup>122</sup> Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 22.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>124</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Drum Major Instinct,” (sermon, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA, February 4, 1968), <http://www.karmatube.org/videos.php?id=2959> (accessed January 28, 2013).

the good of others and the causes of God in our world.”<sup>125</sup> Service is an effective antidote to self-indulgent, self-centered behavior, such as gluttony. Where gluttony beckons one to satisfy one’s own needs immediately and copiously, service invites one to put one’s needs aside in order to meet others’ needs. In performing acts of service, the individual is freed from the clamors of disordered appetites to focus on the good of others.

Service is an important part of one’s spiritual training in regards to cultivating a healthy stewardship of the body. Part of stewarding the body is using the body for the good of others—to minister to them and show God’s love to them in tangible ways. As individuals cultivate a healthy bodily stewardship, they will have more energy and ability to serve others. In this way, individuals glorify God by using their bodily members to serve others rather than to indulge their own desires. Spiritual transformation may begin with the individual, but it does not end with the individual. Writer Brian C. Taylor argues, “Transformation is not for our own enjoyment; it is so that we can more effectively participate in the redemption of all creation.”<sup>126</sup> He further explains, “As we are transformed . . . we affect others around us, helping the Spirit to build ‘the kingdom of God,’ as Jesus called it, so that this world might more resemble the character of Christ.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 182.

<sup>126</sup> Brian C. Taylor, “The Alchemy of Effort and Grace,” in *All Shall Be Well: An Approach to Wellness*, ed. William S. Craddock, Jr. (New York: Morehouse, 2009), 172.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

## Worship/Celebration: Restoring God’s Rightful Place and Celebrating Victory

“Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever”—so asserts the Westminster Shorter Catechism.<sup>128</sup> Human beings’ primary purpose on earth is to worship God and enjoy His presence for eternity. Worship and celebration are practices that bring individuals into right relationship with their Creator and foster within them greater gratitude and appreciation for His blessings to them. Willard states, “In worship we engage ourselves with, dwell upon, and express the greatness, beauty, and goodness of God through thought and the use of words, rituals, and symbols. We do this alone as well as in union with God’s people. To worship is to see God as worthy, to ascribe great worth to him.”<sup>129</sup> Humans worship at God’s initiative and invitation. Foster explains, “It is God who seeks, draws, persuades . . . Worship is our response to the overtures of love from the heart of the Father.”<sup>130</sup> Worship is both revelatory and transformative. Calhoun asserts, “Worship reveals the somethings or someones we value most. What we love and adore and focus on forms us into the people we become.”<sup>131</sup> Worship of the Living God reorients humans’ priorities. Calhoun believes, “True worship happens when we put God first in our lives . . . In the light of the Trinity’s beauty and loveliness everything else on the horizon of our attention takes its proper secondary place.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, in *The Book of Confessions: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA)*, Part 1, 7.001 (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 2004), 175.

<sup>129</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 177.

<sup>130</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Disciplines*, 158.

<sup>131</sup> Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 45.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46.

True worship naturally leads to celebration. Calhoun defines celebration as taking “joyful, passionate pleasure in God and the radically glorious nature of God’s people, Word, world, and purposes.”<sup>133</sup> Willard states, “We engage in celebration when we enjoy ourselves, our life, and our world in conjunction with our faith and confidence in God’s greatness, beauty and goodness.”<sup>134</sup> Celebration, Willard believes, “is the completion of worship, for it dwells on the greatness of God as shown in his goodness to us.”<sup>135</sup> In practicing celebration, human beings reflect upon God’s attributes and tangible gifts as particular blessings to their lives and circumstances.

Worship and celebration are key disciplines in confronting gluttony and cultivating a healthy stewardship of the body. Worship of the true, living God dethrones the idols of food and disordered eating, restoring God’s rightful place as ruler and benefactor of one’s life. As individuals worship God, they will experience true, sustained fulfillment in God’s abundance, rather than the dissatisfaction of fleeting, fickle passions of the flesh. As individuals celebrate their bodies as precious, eternal gifts from God, they will learn to take better care of their bodies—to become good stewards of their bodies as a means of glorifying God their Creator. The very practice of bodily stewardship becomes an act of worship and celebration. As individuals develop greater physical and spiritual wellness, they become living examples of God’s redemptive power and love. They fulfill the command of Romans 12:1 of offering their bodies as living sacrifices to God as a spiritual act of worship. Humans live as they were created to

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<sup>133</sup> Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 26.

<sup>134</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 179.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

live—in health and wholeness. In so doing, they both experience and participate in God’s redemption and transformation of the whole creation. If the previous seven spiritual disciplines comprise the diadem of good bodily stewardship, worship and celebration are the crown jewels. Their radiance encompasses and directs the practice of the other disciplines toward the great human end of glorifying God and enjoying Him forever.

PART THREE

MINISTRY PLAN, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

## CHAPTER 6

### *TAKE CARE OF THE TEMPLE* MINISTRY BLUEPRINT

With the theological foundation established, this chapter will describe the specific plan, implementation and evaluation of *Take Care of the Temple*—a spiritual formation-based weight loss ministry for South Hills residents.<sup>1</sup> This discussion will include an overview of the ministry project, its goals, content, leadership, and target population. The project’s specifics will be described, following a brief delineation of the theological implications for the proposed ministry derived from the theological foundation established in the previous section.

#### **Theological Implications and Ministry Overview**

The purpose of this ministry project is to overcome gluttony by cultivating a healthy stewardship of the body through the practice of spiritual disciplines resulting in weight loss and spiritual growth. The wealth of diet and fitness information available

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<sup>1</sup> I credit Dr. N. Graham Standish for suggesting the name for this ministry.

today largely does not address a person's spiritual relationship with food and the body, particularly regarding the true source of disordered eating patterns that can lead to excess weight and obesity. Gluttony is a spiritual issue requiring spiritual resources to overcome it. Spiritual disciplines were utilized to train individuals to develop a new way of interacting with food, their desires, and their bodies. Through theological education and the practice of specific spiritual disciplines, ministry participants learned to cultivate a healthy stewardship of the body—a way of life that values, nurtures, and respects the whole person—body and spirit—as God's creation, redeemed by Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit for health, holiness, and glorifying God. The specific ministry plan for cultivating stewardship of the body involved a structured program of spiritual formation through retreats and small group participation.

### **Ministry Goals**

This ministry aimed to achieve five main goals. The first goal was to articulate a theological understanding of gluttony, its causes and deleterious effects. The second ministry goal was to define the concept of bodily stewardship from 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, and demonstrate how its cultivation effectively remedies gluttony. The ministry's third goal was to explain the role of spiritual disciplines in cultivating a healthy stewardship of the body. The fourth goal was to define and facilitate the practice of specific spiritual disciplines in a supportive community to enable participants to cultivate healthy bodily stewardship. The fulfillment of the above four goals led participants to achieve the fifth ministry goal—weight loss, improved body composition and greater spiritual growth. At the program's completion, it was hoped that participants would have

the theological understanding, tools, and resources to implement a rhythm of bodily stewardship into their everyday lives.

### **Ministry Content**

This ministry project was comprised of several content components. The first component was an opening retreat at which theological education about gluttony, stewardship of the body, and spiritual practices were presented. The second content component was the cultivation of bodily stewardship through the practice of eight specific spiritual disciplines. The third ministry content component was the weekly small group meeting that provided support and accountability for facilitating spiritual practice and developing bodily stewardship. The fourth content component of this ministry was the closing retreat in which participants celebrated their success and mapped out their continuing wellness journey. These content components worked together to meet the ministry's goals.

### **The Opening Retreat**

The ministry pilot project consisted of three parts—an initial day-long retreat, weekly small group meetings, and a closing half-day retreat. The initial retreat presented theological education explaining the concept of stewardship of the body based upon theological insights drawn from the ministry's theme verses from 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. The retreat presented theological content emphasizing each individual's worth in God's eyes, the eternal nature and significance of the human body, the connection between the spiritual and physical life, and the importance being a good steward of the body as an act of honoring God whose spiritual presence dwells within. The retreat also introduced

some healthy living behaviors, as well as the spiritual disciplines to be practiced as a means of developing a healthy bodily stewardship over the next forty days. After laying the program's theological foundation, retreatants received an orientation to the program's structure, weekly meetings, activities and logistics. In addition to presenting key theological and logistical information, the opening retreat gave participants a chance to get to know one another and begin forming relationships to be nurtured over the next forty days. Retreatants were also divided into their small groups in which they will meet throughout next forty days. The opening retreat included presentations on the program's key theological concepts, small group interaction, a shared healthy meal, and a labyrinth prayer walk symbolizing participants' wellness journey ahead.

#### Eight Spiritual Disciplines for Cultivating Bodily Stewardship

Following the opening retreat, participants engaged in a forty-day spiritually-focused weight loss journey in which they learned how to incorporate healthy living habits with the practice of spiritual disciplines to achieve holistic wellness of the whole person. During this period, participants learned how to develop a proper stewardship of the body through the practice of the eight spiritual disciplines—silence/solitude, fellowship, confession/journaling, meditation/study, prayer, fasting, service, and worship/celebration. Participants followed a prepared written guide that outlined weekly teaching and practices, providing structure and focus for the journey. The spiritual disciplines were introduced incrementally, beginning with silence and solitude in week one and ending with worship and celebration in week six. Each week, new practices were added with instruction given as to their practice in reference cultivating bodily

stewardship. Each week's spiritual practice built on the previous weeks' material. In this way, participants were not overwhelmed by the prospect of practicing all the disciplines at once from day one.

Participants were encouraged to practice journaling over the course of the forty days, recording insights about their wellness journey along the way. The participant's guide provided weekly journaling prompts relevant to the week's theme. The journal served as both a reflection tool and a means of tracking progress. The journal was also a safe space where participants could share their deepest thoughts and feelings with candor. After regularly journaling over the course of forty days, participants possessed a written account of insights gleaned from their wellness journey that enabled them to see their progress and remember what God has revealed to them.

### Small Group Meetings

Throughout the forty day wellness journey, participants also gained support and accountability through weekly small group meetings. Program participants met weekly with their small group for around one hour per week for six weeks. Participants practiced the discipline of fellowship through this small group participation. The small groups provided a safe, confidential place for participants to process what they were learning and experiencing. In a small group setting, participants shared with one another their struggles, triumphs, questions, and insights. Participants encouraged one another, and challenged one another to persevere in their wellness journey. The small groups served as an incubator for cultivating greater bodily stewardship, enabling participants to

experience greater health and wellness while growing in their relationships with God and one another.

During the first week of the program, participants practiced silence and solitude for five to ten minutes each day, as a means of unplugging from the excess of their schedules and making space for the remainder of their wellness journey. In week two, participants practiced the discipline of study and meditation as they learned about the spiritual significance of their bodies from a study of the theme text from 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. In addition to memorizing this passage and studying its meaning, participants were also introduced to the practice of *lectio divina* as a means of meditating upon the text to discern its personal meaning for their lives. In addition to the theme passage, participants also practiced *lectio divina* on Psalm 139 as a means of understanding their value as whole persons—body and soul—created by God.

Weeks three and four tackled the issue of food and eating habits. Participants were introduced to the theological concept of gluttony. They were also instructed in the use of the disciplines of prayer and fasting as a means of combating gluttony. Participants were exposed to different forms of prayer, including breath prayers, “arrow” prayers (short prayer requests that go up to God) and contemplative (centering) prayer. Participants were also instructed in the practice of fasting, with important cautions given for those with medical conditions. Participants will be encouraged to fast in a manner that is appropriate to their health and spiritual ability. Participants with health concerns were encouraged to fast from something other than food, such as watching television or surfing the internet. Due to their evocative nature, the subjects of gluttony and fasting were approached sensitively with an emphasis upon God’s grace and acceptance.

In week five, participants reviewed the theology and practices they had learned over the past month. They were instructed in developing their own “wellness rhythm”—a structured plan outlining a daily practice of spiritual disciplines and healthy living habits based upon their unique lifestyle. Participants were guided in drawing together the various spiritual disciplines into a plan of everyday implementation for living a lifestyle of bodily stewardship. In developing their own wellness rhythm, participants had the resources as well as a plan of action for continuing their wellness journey after the formal program ends.

In week six, participants shared their wellness rhythms with their small group members. They also shared the insights they had gained from the program, paying particular attention to God’s activity in their lives over the forty day journey. Participants were introduced to the disciplines of service, worship and celebration. Participants were encouraged to reflect upon things for which they are thankful and for which they want to praise God. They were asked to identify two to three aspects of the program that they wanted to celebrate. Participants were also encouraged to perform an act of service for someone in need as an act of gratitude to God for their wellness journey. These disciplines prepared participants for the closing half-day retreat, which focused upon worshipping God, giving thanks to God, sharing with one another, and celebrating their wellness journey.

### The Closing Retreat

The program concluded with a half-day retreat where all program participants gathered together as a large group for a time of worship, thanksgiving, reflection, and

celebration. During the first part of the closing retreat, participants shared with each other the insights they learned over the past forty days. They were encouraged to celebrate successes they had made in the areas of weight loss, overall health, and spiritual growth. Participants were invited to affirm each other's successes and encourage each other to continue cultivating bodily stewardship. They were also encouraged to continue building the relationships they had forged with one another after the program's conclusion.

The second part of the closing retreat involved an experiential worship service in which participants were led in praising God for their wellness journey, meditating on God's word, spending time in silent reflection, and praying to God through word and movement. Participants engaged themselves fully in worship—body, mind, and spirit. Participants had the opportunity in prayer to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice, as Romans 12:1 directs. As an added act of service, a collection of non-perishable food donations was taken to support a local food bank. After this worship time, participants had time to fellowship with one another over healthy snacks while crafting a personal bookmark printed with the program's theme verse from 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 as a keepsake of their wellness journey.

#### Resources for Content Components

Several key resources were consulted in developing the program content. John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* provided much of the general theological background of the spiritual life from the Reformed tradition. Dallas Willard's writings, particularly *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, provided a theological foundation for personal

transformation through the practice of spiritual disciplines. Willard's works also defined the various spiritual disciplines and guide participants in their specific practice as they relate to developing bodily stewardship. Stephanie Paulsell's *Honoring the Body* offered a theological understanding of the relationship between the human body and the spiritual life according to scripture. Paulsell's work corrected misinformation participants may have had about their view of the human body. Her work also encouraged participants to see bodily stewardship as an important practice, not just for health and weigh loss, but for their spiritual growth. To address the spiritual condition of gluttony, two main sources were consulted. John Cassian's works, particularly *The Institutes*, presented a theological and historical understanding of gluttony, while Mary Louise Bringle's *The God of Thinness* explored gluttony in today's contemporary culture. Taken together, these works helped participants understand gluttony in a multifaceted way. All of the above listed works formed a solid theological foundation for the ministry project.

### **Leadership and Target Population**

I served as both architect and facilitator of the ministry project. I was the primary person responsible for compiling the theological research, creating the project's structure, developing its resources, and facilitating its various aspects. I also worked with the program staff of Westminster Church, particularly the WROC director, Lisa Boyd, in recruiting participants for the pilot project. These individuals were recruited through the WROC in conjunction with Westminster Church with the help of Boyd and the members of the ASD committee. The pilot program was offered jointly by both Westminster

Church and the WROC, with participation open to both church members and residents of the broader community.

#### Pilot Project Population and Program Expectations

The participants for this ministry project were overweight individuals from throughout the South Hills area who were motivated to lose weight and improve their health through a holistic, spiritually-focused wellness program. Participants for the pilot project were encouraged to be ready to make serious lifestyle changes and deepen their spiritual lives. Participants were cautioned not to expect the pilot to be a “quick-fix” approach to weight loss, nor were they to expect their wellness journey to be effortless. In recruiting participants for this program, attempts were made to clearly explain the program’s intent, content, and expectations so that participants would not experience frustration or disappointment with the program.

#### Potential Ministry Expansion

Once the pilot program was completed and its results analyzed, the possibility of expanding the ministry to additional groups and venues was explored. It is hoped that this project will form a prototype of a structured resource that could be executed in other congregations by their own leadership. Results were also studied to determine if the individual ministry components could be utilized in other formats, such as an extended retreat or seminary course. With the great need to integrate physical wellness and spiritual formation, it is hoped that this program will ultimately provide a practical resource for churches to minister to others in this arena.

## CHAPTER 7

### *TAKE CARE OF THE TEMPLE* IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

*Take Care of the Temple* is a forty-day spiritually-focused wellness ministry addressing the spiritual condition of gluttony by cultivating bodily stewardship through the practice of spiritual disciplines. This pilot program was offered to South Hills residents through the WROC under the auspices of Westminster Church. The pilot project consisted of three components—an opening retreat, six weekly small group meetings, and a closing retreat. The purpose of this program was to help participants integrate healthy living habits with the practice of spiritual disciplines to promote holistic health, weight loss, and spiritual growth.

#### **Project Timeline**

The pilot project's timeline from inception to execution to evaluation was approximately nine months. The project's budget and logistics (including scheduling,

meeting room confirmation, and equipment procurement) were coordinated in the late spring and early summer months of 2011. Promotional materials for the ministry were developed in the late spring, and were distributed throughout the summer and early fall of 2011. The theological research for the project was completed during the early summer while the ministry's name, mission statement, and resources were developed during the late summer and early fall. Ministry participants were recruited through the late summer and early fall. The pilot program launched on September 23, 2011 with the day-long opening retreat. The small groups began meeting the following week, and ran through the first week in November. The program concluded on November 5, 2011 with a half-day retreat. Program evaluations were tabulated and analyzed in November and December. Reflection upon future ministry projections commenced at the end of 2011, and continues to the present day.

### **Leadership Identification and Training**

To carry out the ministry's vision, I served as the program's chief architect and facilitator. I researched all the theological material, as well as developed the program's structure and resources. I also provided the hands-on education and retreat facilitation with the ministry participants. In addition to the leadership I provided, several leaders of Westminster Church also provided guidance and direction to the project. Senior Pastor, James Gilchrist, was a significant source of support for the project from its inception to its full execution. Gilchrist supported the project's theological premise involving the integration of physical wellness with spiritual practice. When I was seeking a ministry venue for this project, Gilchrist enthusiastically gave me the opportunity to launch the

pilot through the WROC as part of its programming. Gilchrist believed the project would complement other WROC programming, as well as serve as a creative means of outreach to the community.

Gilchrist expressed enthusiasm over the project's proposal, and encouraged me to work with WROC director Lisa Boyd to bring the pilot project from inception to execution. Boyd was also very enthusiastic about the project, and handled many of the scheduling logistics of the project. Additionally, the ASD committee, under the direction of staff liaison David Fetterman, agreed to partner with me on the project and provide assistance with project logistics and recruitment. The project was to be a team effort between Westminster and the WROC that would possibly germinate into a broader wellness outreach ministry to the community.

### **Ministry Resources**

A variety of resources were developed in order to successfully execute the ministry plan. These resources included theological research, the pilot project materials, evaluation surveys, and promotional materials. Additionally, the ministry required a recruitment plan and logistical coordination with other church programming. These resources enabled the pilot project to be successfully executed.

#### Theological Research, Ministry Name and Mission Statement

Theological research was conducted in the areas of Reformed theology, spiritual formation, the condition of gluttony, and the biblical understanding of the human body in relation to one's spiritual life. This theological research was integrated into the actual components of the ministry project. The ministry's name and mission statement came

from the project's theme verse from 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. The project's mission is to help participants develop stewardship of the body—a way of life that values, nurtures, and respects the whole person as God's creation, redeemed by Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit for health, holiness, and glorifying God. All of the ministry resources were derived from this mission and were designed to help participants experience holistic wellness in body and spirit.

### Pilot Project Resources

The resources developed for the pilot project comprised the retreat materials, participant's guide, promotional materials, and evaluation materials. The opening retreat materials included a power point presentation, a retreat guide for note-taking, Bibles, refreshments, a healthy lunch, and gift bags for participants. The weekly small group resources included participants' guides, blank journals, weekly supplemental handouts, and pens. The closing retreat materials included informational handouts, instructions for sharing personal testimonies, a roster of participants' contact information (for continuing fellowship), worship resources (Bible passages, responsive readings, hymn words, etc.), craft supplies for commemorative bookmarks, and healthy refreshments.

In addition to the actual project resources, I developed evaluation materials for the retreats, small group meetings, overall program structure, and program effectiveness. I also developed promotional materials to assist with recruitment. These included printed brochures, posters, and articles for various online and print publications. I further drafted various letters including a welcome letter to participants, a follow-up letter sent about one

month after the program's conclusion, and reports to the ASD committee updating them on the project's progress.

### Promotion and Recruitment

An effective promotion strategy was necessary for publicizing the project and recruiting participants. As this project was a joint effort between Westminster Church and the WROC, I benefitted from the use of a variety of promotional avenues from both organizations. I solicited promotional assistance from WROC director Lisa Boyd and Westminster's Communications Director, Anna Hiner. *Take Care of the Temple* was included as part of the WROC's fall programming. A program description appeared in the August WROC print program brochure, as well as on the WROC's website.

Interested participants registered through the WROC as they would for any other program. This kept the recruitment process simple and uniform. Additionally, the program was advertised through Westminster Church's publications, including the Sunday bulletins and *Spire* newsletter. Information about the program was also posted online on Westminster's website. Posters and brochures were also distributed throughout the church informing members about the program and encouraging them to participate.

The Communications' Director, Anna Hiner, spread the word about the program throughout the broader community by submitting informational articles in local newspapers and wellness journals. Program information was also posted on "Patch" – a local social networking bulletin board listing upcoming events in the South Hills area. Additionally, I sent information letters and brochures to various area pastors asking for their help in making the program known to their church members. The variety of

promotional sources coupled with the breadth of advertising yielded the necessary participants for the pilot project.

### Logistics

In addition to theological research, well-developed resources, and effective promotion, this project required the coordination of a myriad of details in order to run successfully. These logistics included reserving rooms for retreats and small groups, distributing promotional materials in a timely manor, and coordinating the registration process with existing WROC programming. Additionally, it was necessary to procure items such as a projector, screen, laptop, and printed materials for the various aspects of the program. Meals and refreshments also required coordination with a local caterer to ensure that the food provided to participants was fresh, healthy, and delivered on time. To make the experience special for participants, I also incorporated seasonally-themed tableware, centerpieces, and welcome gifts for participants. These items had to be purchased and assembled prior to the start of the program.

To finance the project, it was necessary to raise funds to cover the cost of materials. In consultation with the WROC Director and the ASD committee, I determined that participants would be charged a nominal fee of \$25 for the program. This fee would cover the cost of the food, project materials, and promotion. This fee would be substantial enough to cover program costs while also being reasonable for potential participants. The fee would also involve an investment on the part of registrants to encourage their full participation in the project.

In addition to project finances, it was also important to assess any potential legal or liability issues that might arise with the project. It was crucial to consult with Westminster staff and the WROC Director to ensure that the church's insurance adequately covered any potential liability. Fortunately, the WROC's insurance, policies, and procedures were deemed adequate to cope with potential liability issues. With the coordination of these various logistics, the pilot project was prepared to run smoothly.

### Support Personnel

In addition to the leadership and development I would be providing, other support personnel were needed in order to successfully execute the pilot project. The WROC Director, Lisa Boyd, shared Dr. Gilchrist's enthusiasm for the project and was happy to include it as part of the WROC's programming. Boyd coordinated the scheduling, room reservation and marketing through WROC brochure and website. She also managed the project's registration and fees, compiled a participants' roster, handled correspondence, and provided moral support to me throughout the program.

Other crucial support personnel included Communications Coordinator, Anna Hiner and Print and Graphics Coordinator, Mariela Antunes. Hiner coordinated the project's promotion, exploring diverse avenues for marketing the program, as well as utilizing connections she had with local publications for creative feature articles on the project. Several participants registered for the program as a direct result of Hiner's publicity. Antunes offered her graphic design expertise to designing visually attractive posters and brochures for marketing the program, as well as printed some of the project's materials. Her design skills gave the project's materials a professional look that attracted

participants to the program. Both Hiner and Antunes' work were indispensable to the project's success and smooth execution.

The ASD committee under the direction of staff liaison David Fetterman also offered support to the project. The committee offered to assist with various aspects of the project. Specific help was requested for recruiting and training small group leaders for the project. Since the committee members were actively involved in Westminster Church, it was thought that they would be very helpful in identifying and soliciting leadership for the project. With all of the above personnel in place, the project would have adequate support for its launch.

### **Assessment Plan**

The final piece of the project to be developed was a clear assessment plan that would evaluate the program's effectiveness. This plan would include the development of assessment tools, a plan for collecting data using those tools, and a means of tabulating and analyzing the results of the data. Two main aspects of the project were evaluated—the pilot's programmatic elements and the pilot's overall effectiveness in meeting the established wellness outcomes. The following tools and plan outlines the assessment process utilized to evaluate the various project components, as well as the program as a whole.

#### **Assessment Tools: Program Execution**

To assess the programmatic elements of the project, evaluation surveys were created for the opening retreat, closing retreat, participant's guide, and small group experience. The retreat surveys solicited the participant's feedback regarding various

aspects of the opening and closing retreats, including theological content, venue, timeframe, worship, refreshments, and their overall retreat experience on a scale of one to four.<sup>1</sup> The retreat surveys also asked for written feedback describing their overall experience, as well as identifying both the most and least helpful aspects of the retreat. Participants were further asked to suggest possible improvements for future retreats. The surveys also collected information about the participants' church affiliation (if any), how they heard about the program, and their thoughts on the program's cost. This data helped in assessing the effectiveness of the promotional strategy and the reasonableness of the program's cost. This data also allowed me to determine which participants came from Westminster Church and which came from the broader South Hills community.

Similar evaluation surveys were developed to evaluate the participant's guide and small group experience. These surveys asked participants to describe their experience with the various components of the guide and small group meetings using both a numeric scale and written portions. Participants were asked to rate the guide's material, weekly assignments, presentation, organization, and relevance to meeting their wellness goals. Participants were also asked to identify which lesson topics were most and least helpful, and which spiritual practices were most and least helpful to them. The small group experience survey asked participants to evaluate the meeting format, structure, content, length, venue, and balance between presentation and sharing time. This survey also asked participants to rate their overall program experience, including the forty-day timeframe, the structure with its three components (opening retreat, small group meetings, closing retreat), and the program's effectiveness in meeting participants'

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<sup>1</sup> One = poor, Two = average, Three = good, Four = excellent.

expectations. Participants were also encouraged to share any additional feedback that they wished regarding any aspect of the program, including suggestions for improvements.

#### Assessment Tools: Program Effectiveness

In addition to the programmatic aspects of the project, assessments were also made of project's effectiveness in meeting its stated goals. Originally, the program's effectiveness was to be evaluated based upon objective measurements—specifically a comparison of participants' weight and body measurements at the beginning and end of the pilot. The original plan was to run the pilot for twelve weeks—enough time to see noticeable improvements in body weight and girth measurements. However, some of the leadership at Westminster advised that twelve weeks for a pilot program would be a longer time period than many people would be willing to commit. The decision was made to shorten the program's time frame from twelve weeks to forty days (about six weeks) in order to encourage greater participation. Although this time period would be enough to see some modest weight loss, it would not be enough time to see a noticeable difference in girth measurements. Therefore, this item was eliminated as assessment tool. The act of weighing people at the beginning and end of the program was also under consideration as a potential assessment means. However, several potential participants expressed extreme discomfort with being weighed, even in the context of a weight loss program. It was feared that this assessment tool would repel potential participants, so alternative assessment tools to gauge the program's effectiveness were sought.

To assess the program's effectiveness in meeting its stated goals, surveys were developed that asked participants to share information regarding their lifestyle and spiritual habits. The surveys asked for basic information such as their age, gender, height, and weight. The survey then asked participants to indicate their current lifestyle habits, such as hours of sleep per night, the number of days of exercise per week, minutes per exercise session, stress level, and dietary habits. The survey also asked participants to rate on a scale of one to five (five being excellent) a variety of aspects of their current lifestyle, including closeness to God, spiritual growth, self-care, physical health, body image, and overall integration of their spiritual lives with their physical wellbeing. This survey was given to participants at both the beginning and end of the program, so that their results could be compared. Although these surveys collected more subjective rather than objective information, a comparison of the beginning and ending results would demonstrate changes in participants' behavior and lifestyle. The surveys were anonymous to protect participants' personal information. Surveys were coded with a unique sticker and distributed at random to participants at the beginning of the pilot. At the end of the pilot, participants were given the same survey, which was matched to their unique code. These results were then compared to those of the initial survey.

In addition to these various surveys, participants were encouraged to journal throughout the program as a means of recording their progress. At the closing retreat, participants were encouraged to share with one another their own personal success stories as a form of celebration and praise. These personal testimonies not only helped participants recognize their own growth throughout the program, but they also were a source of encouragement to one another on the journey to greater wellness. Through the

recording and sharing of personal testimonies, it was hoped that each participant would experience God's grace, redemption, and transformative power as they grew ever closer to becoming the holistically well people God intended them to be.

#### Distribution of Assessment Surveys

The opening and closing retreat surveys were distributed at the retreats' conclusion. Participants completed the surveys before leaving the retreat, so that their feedback would be fresh. The first coded effectiveness survey was distributed and completed during the first weekly small group meeting. The final coded effectiveness survey was distributed and completed during the last weekly small group meeting. The survey evaluating the small groups and the participant's guide was distributed during the last weekly small group meeting as well. Participants were encouraged to fill them out and return them at the closing retreat. This would enable participants to have time to think through their responses and record meaningful feedback. Personal testimonies were shared as part of the closing retreat. All the surveys were completed before participants left the closing retreat.

#### Tabulation and Analysis of Results

Once all the survey data had been collected, the results were tabulated and analyzed. Surveys were reviewed by type, beginning with the retreat surveys and concluding with the program effectiveness surveys. For survey items rated on a numeric scale, the sum was averaged into an overall score. Written comments were compiled, organized under relevant headings, and typed into a single document so that they could be conveniently assessed. Both the numeric data and the written comments were

integrated into a report summarizing the results for each component of the project. Once tabulated and organized, survey data was analyzed. This analysis determined the successes and challenges of each project component, as well as the overall program as a whole. This analysis identified the aspects of the project that ran smoothly and accomplished their stated goals. This analysis also determined which aspects of the project could be changed or improved upon in order to make the program more effective. Lastly, the analysis also assisted in making future projections for this ministry, suggesting ways that it could be adapted and executed in other contexts.

### **Report on Results**

The pilot of *Take Care of the Temple* launched on September 24, 2011. There were thirteen participants, all women, representing a variety of different denominational backgrounds. Two participants were members of Westminster Church, while the others were from the broader South Hills community. The pilot ran for six weeks, concluding on November 5, 2011. The following sections describe the results of the pilot project, including an analysis of the ministry's programmatic elements and its overall effectiveness in meeting its stated goals.

#### **Program Structure Results**

Overall, the *Take Care of the Temple* pilot program operated very smoothly. The ministry was successfully integrated programmatically into the WROC and its other program offerings. The program's results were very much in keeping with WROC's vision of integrating spirituality with physical wellness to improve the health of the whole person. The program was also a successful "doorway" leading people from the

broader community into Westminster Church. Although the vision of having this pilot serve as a springboard for the launch of a church-wide wellness ministry did not ultimately materialize, the results of the project's overall development and execution were very positive.

### **Opening Retreat Results**

Logistically, the opening retreat ran smoothly—the dates were properly scheduled, the rooms were reserved, the necessary equipment was present, and the meal and refreshments arrived on time. Participants engaged with the material and with one another. At the retreat's conclusion, participants completed the assessment survey rating their experience of the retreat and offering suggestions for improvement. Overall, participants indicated that they enjoyed the opening retreat, and were looking forward to the rest of the program. On a scale of one to four (four = excellent), participants gave most aspects of the retreat a rating of three or four. Participants commented that they found the retreat “enjoyable,” “organized,” and “nonthreatening.” Participants stated that they valued the retreat's spiritual content, particularly the reading and discussion of scripture in small groups. Many liked the retreat's venue—Westminster's Memorial Parlor, describing it as “comfortable,” “cozy,” and “like we were meeting in a home.” One participant liked “the positive approach . . . built into the program.” Another participant commented, “Hilary is not overpowering,” and that she felt “very comfortable with her as a leader.” Yet another participant described the retreat as “very well prepared and thought out.” Overall, participants seemed to respond well to the material and myself as the program facilitator.

Of the four informational presentations, participants responded more positively to the second and third presentation than the first and fourth. Several participants commented that they believed that it took too much time to flesh out the introductory material in the first session. One participant suggested the future use of more visuals and different voices, as the presentations became “hypnotic at times.”

In addition to finding the opening presentation a bit slow in pace, participants also struggled to stay focused during the last session, which took place after lunch. Participants indicated that by the end of the fourth session they were “getting sleepy” and were “ready for a nap.” Several participants suggested shortening the overall retreat, as well as pacing some of the sessions more effectively. Others suggested including a physical activity, such as a short walk after lunch, as a way of helping people stay alert in the afternoon. Overall, participants seemed to value the opening retreat as a positive prelude to the remaining program. As one participant concluded, “I had a positive experience. I felt very hopeful about the experience and for the small group time. I left feeling hopeful.”

### **Small Group Results**

After the opening retreat, the weekly small group component of the project commenced. This portion of the project proved to be much more labor-intensive than initially anticipated. The initial pilot program registration would accommodate up to twenty five participants. It turned out to be a blessing that only thirteen participants registered. My original intention was to facilitate the opening and closing retreats, while small group leaders recruited by the ASD committee facilitated the weekly small group

meetings. Unfortunately, the small group leadership did not materialize, leaving me to facilitate the small groups myself. A full roster of twenty five participants would have been more than I could have managed on my own. One positive aspect of facilitating the groups on my own was that it gave me the opportunity to experience how each component of the pilot project was executed. This helped me evaluate all aspects of the project, enabling me to discern which worked and which did not. Leading all aspects of the project also provided an overall synergy to the program.

The thirteen participants were divided into three small groups that met weekly for around an hour over the next six weeks.<sup>2</sup> The small group meeting time was divided between group sharing time and presentation of content. Each week, group members received the participant's guide materials which contained the theme, theological content, and wellness practices for the coming week. The meeting began with a brief review of the previous week's material, followed by discussion and sharing of member's experiences with the material and assigned practices. Following the sharing time was a brief presentation of the coming week's themes and assignments. Participants responded well to this format. In their written evaluations of the small groups, the majority of participants reported that the meetings were neither too structured nor too loose. Participants also reported that the blend between group sharing/interaction and presentation of material was just right. One participant stated, "The balance was great. Not only did I learn from you, I also learned from others in the group."

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<sup>2</sup> I wanted to divide the members into two small groups, but participants' schedules would not permit this.

While most groups had a good camaraderie amongst members, one group struggled at times to maintain cohesion and develop a strong sense of mutual trust and support. A few personality conflicts among certain members disrupted the overall flow of the group meetings. One group member in particular tended to dominate discussions, requiring an extra measure of patience and small group leadership to keep the meetings on track. Despite these interpersonal issues, the group members managed to complete the six weeks of small group meetings and achieve some benefit from their time together.

A majority of participants reported that they valued the small group meetings and enjoyed the relationships they made with others. One participant commented, “The fellowship and support from everyone is so helpful and positive.” Another participant shared, “I felt really comfortable in my group and eagerly anticipated the weekly sessions.” Participants generally responded well to one another, and the group dynamics were largely positive.

### **Participant’s Guide Results**

Another key component of the project to be assessed is the participant’s guide. Ministry participants found the weekly guide helpful and relevant to their wellness journeys. Most participants reported that the weekly content and assignments were just right, though a few reported that the guide presented too much material and introduced too many assignments. Participants appreciated the theological material presented each week, along with the corresponding spiritual practices. In their written evaluations, participants indicated that they particularly enjoyed the practices of prayer, fasting, and meditation. With other practices, participants’ feedback was mixed. Journaling seemed

to be a struggle for some, particularly week three's assignment of journaling one's food consumption. One participant commented, "I don't want to spend more time thinking about what I am eating. I need to take my mind off eating." However, other participants found food logging helpful. One participant said that logging food "opened my eyes as to when and why I binge eat." Another commented, "Journaling food choices gave an awareness of how much food was being consumed."

As the weeks progressed, many participants did not do their weekly assignments. They liked the theological content but seemed to resist doing the work. Many expressed that they struggled to fit in the weekly spiritual practices into their schedules. Many had good intentions, but could not seem to follow through with the weekly assignments. One participant shared, "I think the program is a good one and offers to participants the tools needed to 'Take care of the temple.' Unfortunately, I do not feel that I utilized these tools adequately during these forty days." I suspect that many participants were not used to being involved in a structured program that required weekly assignments. Also, much of the material was new to participants and took time to digest and implement. I strove to be extra affirming and encouraging to participants, appreciating their willingness to be involved in this project and retain what they could from it.

### **Closing Retreat Results**

The pilot project concluded with the closing half-day retreat, held once again in Westminster's Memorial Parlor. The majority of the retreat was spent with participants sharing their stories, insights, challenges, and successes of the past forty days. Participants found this sharing time very meaningful. One participant described the

group sharing as “warm and loving,” expressing that it was “nice to get together with all the members.” Another participant commented that it was “wonderful to get feedback from others.” Yet another participant stated, “The structure of the forty days created an atmosphere of openness and easy sharing. This [retreat] was a great way to wrap up the experience.” One participant shared a prayer she had written during the program:

My temple is crumbling with age. The foundations are weakening, the plumbing is faulty, and the outward beauty and shine is fading. The inside of my temple often feels dark and dusty. Help me, God, to open the windows, sweep out the dust and cobwebs, and shore up the walls with good choices. Help me remember that my body is **your** temple and should be well cared for. Despite its flaws I thank you for the temple you have chosen for me. Guide me as I endeavor to care for it and be responsible in a way that is pleasing to you. Amen.

Following the sharing time, participants discussed possibilities for continuing their wellness journeys, perhaps with a “part two” study that builds on themes raised in this program.<sup>3</sup> Participants were anxious to continue the relationships they forged throughout this program. Regarding the closing retreat, one participant expressed, “Closure is very important, but I felt it was a beginning too—that friendships will continue.” Participants were encouraged to keep in touch with one another in the hope that their relationships would indeed continue beyond this forty day program. Overall, the closing retreat received very positive feedback from participants. It was a fitting ending to the forty day wellness journey.

### **Overall Program Experience Results**

All the participants expressed positive feedback for the *Take Care of the Temple* program as a whole. On their written evaluations, all participants rated the overall

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<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, such a group did not materialize.

program experience as good or excellent. Participants also thought that the forty-day length of the program was just right. The majority of participants reported that the program adequately or more than adequately met their expectations. However, responses were mixed in describing the program's effectiveness in meeting participants' wellness goals. Most reported that the program was only somewhat effective in meeting their wellness goals, while a small minority rated the program as effective or very effective. The following is a report on the program's effectiveness.

### Program Effectiveness Assessment

In order to assess the program's effectiveness in meeting its stated goals, participants completed surveys at both the beginning and conclusion of the program. Participants self-reported their assessment of their weight, eating and exercise habits, physical health, and spiritual growth. The results of the surveys were compared to determine if participants indicated improvement in these areas after participating in the program. Out of thirteen participants, ten completed in full both the beginning and ending effectiveness surveys. A comparison of these surveys revealed the following results.

The group as a whole lost a total of twenty-six pounds by the program's conclusion. Six participants lost some weight, while the other four maintained their original weight. The most weight lost by a single participant was eight pounds. None of the participants reported a weight gain at the end of the program. The level of weight loss was modest, but this was not unexpected. Individuals were participating in a brand new, never-before offered program that was very different from traditional weight loss

programs in both structure and content. Participants were learning a lot of material and were asked to engage in spiritual practices that were likely new to them. Learning new spiritual disciplines and integrating them with healthy living habits, such as diet and exercise, take time to become a regular rhythm in individuals' daily lives. Though the actual weight loss results were modest, participants received a solid theological foundation and the necessary tools for becoming better stewards of their bodies that, with continued implementation, will eventually result in weight reduction.

In addition to weight loss, participants also reported improvement in healthy living practices, such as sleep, exercise, and eating habits. Participants indicated getting more sleep each night. The group averaged an increase of almost two hours of sleep per night. Participants also recorded a 20 to 40 percent improvement in their level of exercise. Participants reported an increase in both the frequency and duration of weekly exercise sessions. Participants increased the number of days per week they exercise by an average of almost three days. At the same time, participants increased the number of minutes of exercise per session by an average of nearly twenty minutes. Participants also indicated that they obtained a better balance between rest and physical activity as a result of the program.

In addition to sleep and exercise, participants reported improvement in their eating habits as well. A majority of participants either maintained or improved their consumption of a healthy diet. Several participants indicated that they not only made healthier food choices, but they also reduced the portion size of the food they consumed. A majority of participants reported having fewer occasions of emotional and stress-induced eating at the program's conclusion. Some reported that their diets were not as

healthy as they had reported at the start of the program. Perhaps this is due to the participants' greater focus and awareness of their dietary choices and their willingness to be more honest about what they are truly consuming.

In addition to better sleep, exercise, and dietary habits, a majority of participants reported an improvement in their overall health as a result of the program. Participants indicated that their overall health improved by between 20 to 40 percent. Specifically, participants reported improvements body image, body potential, and personal self-care. Nine out of ten stated that their overall health was good or very good, compared to only seven out of ten at the start of the program. Three out of ten participants reported that their overall health improved from average to good over the course of the program. A small number of participants reported a slight decrease in their overall health. This is possibly due to an increased awareness of their health that resulted in a more honest assessment of it.

In addition to improving their physical wellness, a majority of participants experienced spiritual growth. Participants reported an improved closeness to God, level of spiritual growth, depth of spiritual practice, and overall spiritual health as a result of the program. More than half reported an improved ability to integrate their physical and spiritual wellness. Some participants indicated decreases in their levels of spiritual growth. Again, this was possibly due to an increased awareness of their spiritual life. Perhaps they recognized a gap between where they currently are in contrast to where they would like to be spiritually.

After assessing these results of the project, it was concluded that the overall program was successful in meeting its established spiritual and physical wellness goals.

Though the group's weight loss was modest, participants demonstrated an understanding of the theological concept of stewardship of the body that integrates the spiritual and the physical to promote holistic wellness of the whole person. Participants also gained the necessary tools and resources to build their own wellness rhythm for the continued cultivation of bodily stewardship in their everyday life. As one participant concluded, "I feel very fortunate to have shared this unique experience with these beautiful people . . . I am hoping to grow spiritually and change my habits in regards to diet, exercise and rest. I thank God for leading us to *Take Care of the Temple.*"

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The goal of this paper was to present a blueprint for a weight loss ministry that would enable residents in the South Hills of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to address the spiritual condition of gluttony by cultivating stewardship of the body through the practice of spiritual disciplines leading to weight loss and spiritual growth. *Take Care of the Temple* was developed and executed through the WROC at Westminster Presbyterian Church with a view of reaching out to the broader community. After reviewing the results of this project, I determined that the project was successful in enabling participants to articulate an understanding of the spiritual condition of gluttony and its effects on one's health and spiritual wellbeing. The project also successfully defined the concept of bodily stewardship and its cultivation through the practice of spiritual disciplines coupled with healthy living habits. As a result, participants experienced weight loss, improved health, and spiritual growth. Participants also received the tools and guidance needed to develop their own wellness rhythm of bodily stewardship, which will enable them to live a lifestyle that values, nurtures, and respects the body as God's creation, redeemed by Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit for health, holiness, and glorifying God.

### **My Own Experience with *Take Care of the Temple***

I thoroughly enjoyed my experience with this project. It was very rewarding to take a vision, develop it into an organized program, and execute it. Working with all the participants was such a joy, and I deeply appreciate having had the opportunity to partner

with them on their wellness journey. This experience confirmed a sense of calling I have to this type of specialized ministry within the broader church.

This project proved to be much more work than I anticipated. Though a rewarding experience, the project was also a highly stressful experience. I was overwhelmed at times in developing and leading all aspects of the program. However, I take comfort knowing that subsequent offerings of the program will be easier now that the program structure and resources have been developed. Despite the extra work and stress, I am satisfied that I have developed a workable spiritually-focused wellness program that can be applied to other ministry contexts.

Another interesting result of this program for me was that I gained weight—ten pounds, in fact. The immense time commitment and emotional energy that this program required left me drained and overwhelmed. I fell out of my rhythm of healthy eating, exercise and spiritual nourishment. I turned to my previous form of comfort—food. And I paid the price in the form of gaining weight. I found this aspect of the project to be both humbling and disconcerting. Despite my experience both with losing weight and facilitating this program, I realize that food and eating are still issues for me. How quickly I still turn to that old idol of gluttony in times of stress or distress. Instead of berating myself and wallowing in self-pity, I resolved to stop my destructive behavior and return to the path of good bodily stewardship.

As I returned to my own rhythm of healthy living habits and spiritual practices, the scale slowly began to move in a positive direction. Through this experience, I developed a greater ability to have grace with myself and others. I realized that my struggle with food is, in a strange way, also one of my strengths. My struggle with food

gives me the unique ability to empathize with others who also struggle with this issue. Helping others who struggle helps me in my own continual struggle with gluttony. In my calling to help others lose weight and become holistically well, I never want to lose the ability to relate to those who struggle with food and eating. I have determined that if I ever cease to struggle with food, I should probably find another calling.

### **Future Plans for *Take Care of the Temple***

One of the great satisfactions of this project for me was creating and implementing an actual program with actual people from inception to completion. This project can be developed further into a resource that can be utilized in other ministry contexts. I am considering offering this program again through the WROC. Additionally, I am in conversation with several local pastors exploring the idea of facilitating *Take Care of the Temple* at their churches. I am further exploring the possibility of developing *Take Care of the Temple* into a week-long intensive format to be offered at a retreat center or resort.

Ultimately, my plan is to refine and develop *Take Care of the Temple* into a full curriculum resource to be utilized by other churches. This curriculum resource will include a revised participant's guide, guided journal, teaching DVDs, small group leadership training resources, and ministry suggestions for using material in different formats within churches or other organizations. I would also like to write a book geared toward pastors and laypersons integrating the themes and practices of *Take Care of the Temple* with stories of my own wellness journey along with insights.

As a result of this project, I am reevaluating my ministry calling. Up to this point, I have been a pastor of individual congregations. After my experience with *Take Care of the Temple*, I am sensing a call to specialize in spiritually focused wellness ministry to the larger Church. While working on this project, I became certified as a personal trainer and health coach. Ultimately, I wish to develop a wellness/life coaching practice to help others integrate physical wellness with spiritual growth. I would also like to provide wellness program consulting to churches. As part of this ministry, I hope to develop additional wellness ministry resources, facilitate retreats, lead workshops, teach courses, and become a motivational speaker on wellness topics.

### **Broader Ministry Implications of *Take Care of the Temple***

Excess weight and obesity are among the most significant health crises in our time. These conditions exact a huge cost physically, emotionally, spiritually, and financially both on individuals and the broader society. Our culture has provided its answer to this health epidemic in the form of a multi-billion-dollar diet industry offering “quick fix” solutions and promising miraculous results without the hard work of long-term lifestyle change. The result of these “quick fix” approaches speaks for itself in the ever-increasing number of Americans who are overweight or obese. Our culture holds up the unrealistic ideal of the perfectly thin, sculpted, muscular body, while at the same time saturating our food supply with large portions of cheap, nutrient-poor food filled with fat, salt, and sugar. Our culture promotes excess and overconsumption in which spiritual conditions like gluttony flourish. Our culture teaches us to indulge the body while starving the soul.

The Church needs to take more of a lead in confronting the culture on these issues. The Church can begin by addressing the spiritual aspects food, diet, and the body. The Church must teach people a biblical view of the eternal nature of their bodies, the right use and enjoyment of food, and the importance of being a good steward of their bodies. Churches must also provide the tools, training, and support to help people cultivate a lifestyle of bodily stewardship—one that values, nurtures, and respects the body as God’s creation, redeemed by Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit for health, holiness, and glorifying God. The Church has an important ministry of helping people understand health and wellness from a biblical perspective. Rather than compartmentalize the spiritual and physical aspects of the self, the Church can help people integrate spiritual growth with physical health for holistic wellness of the whole person. Churches can also expand spiritually focused wellness ministry beyond their own walls by promoting holistic health in the broader community. Part of this community outreach can focus upon the social justice aspects of health and wellness, such as working to give lower income neighborhoods greater access to healthier foods. Through this broad range of ministry, the Church can work toward fulfilling God’s vision of the fully redeeming human beings in Jesus Christ.

God desires to transform individuals into whole persons who are well in body, mind, and spirit. Such transformation requires the work of the entire local church community. The cultural forces promoting an unhealthy lifestyle are far too strong for individuals to overcome themselves. Obesity is a chronic illness that requires lifetime of gradual change and continual attention to one’s lifestyle. Local churches can provide an ongoing support system for people who struggle with gluttony and lifestyle-related health

issues. It is hoped that *Take Care of the Temple* can be a tool to help churches begin a wellness ministry to those in need. However, churches need to offer continual support and resources beyond any one church program. Churches naturally provide a place of fellowship where people feel safe and comfortable sharing their struggles with others. Cultivating this kind of fellowship is crucial to providing individuals with the ongoing support they need to live out a healthy lifestyle over the long-term.

An integrated wellness ministry is a way for a local church to embrace its missional calling. As people experience freedom from gluttony and become physically and spiritually well, they demonstrate Christ's healing power in their own bodies. An individual who lives a lifestyle of integrated bodily stewardship becomes a walking, living, breathing testimony of Christ's redemptive power in our world. In a culture that beckons people to bow at its altars of overconsumption and temporal bodily pleasure, the local church community can inspire a healthy hunger and thirst for the One True Living God. By encouraging and supporting a lifestyle of good bodily stewardship, local church congregations participate in God's restoration, not only of their own bodies, but of the whole of creation. There is no greater missional work than this.

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