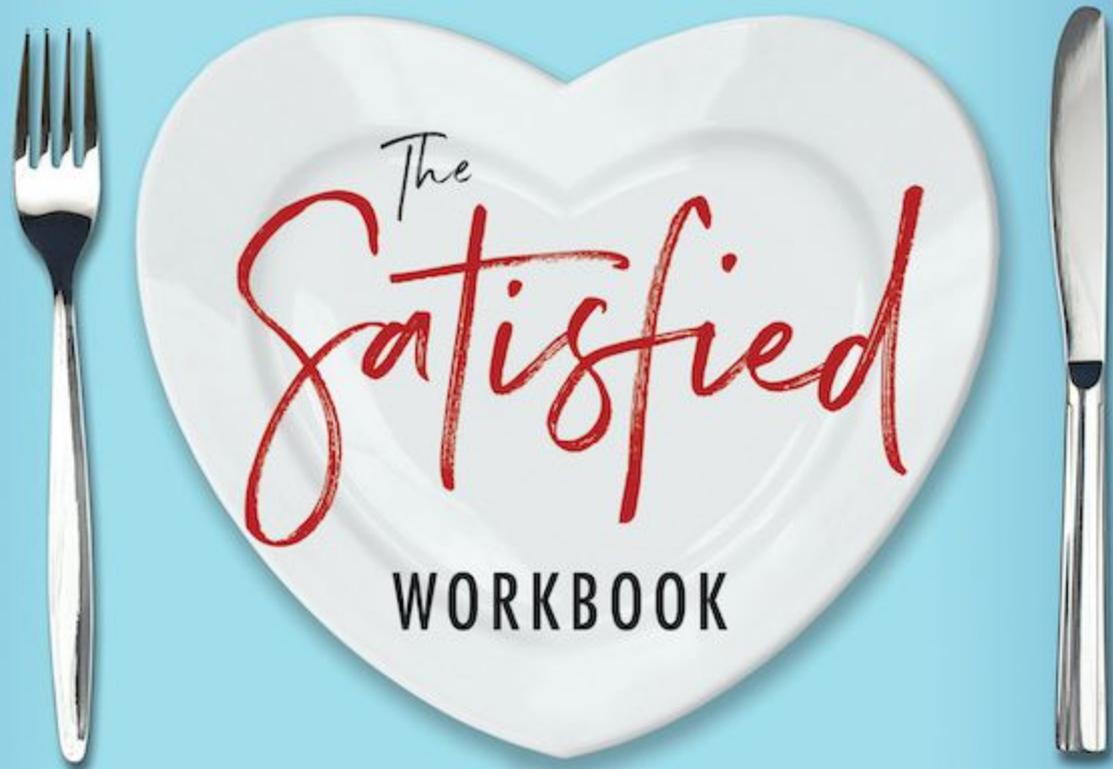


"Dr. Rhona is one of the few professionals to speak to the tantamount role of spirituality and faith in sustained recovery."

—MARTY LERNER, PhD, CEO, Milestones Eating Disorders Program



A SPIRITUAL GUIDE TO
Recovery and Food Freedom

DR. RHONA EPSTEIN, PSY.D

The
Satisfied
WORKBOOK

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A SPIRITUAL GUIDE TO
Recovery and Food Freedom

DR. RHONA EPSTEIN, PSY.D



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604 Magnolia Lane
Nashville, TN 37211

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Printed in the United States of America.

First edition: 2021

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN: 978-1-947297-19-7 (trade paper)

ISBN: 978-1-947297-20-3 (eBook)

Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Epstein, Rhona, author.

Title: The satisfied workbook : a spiritual guide to recovery and food freedom / Dr. Rhona Epstein, PSY.D.

Description: Includes bibliographical references. | Nashville, TN: Dexterity, LLC, 2021.

Identifiers: ISBN: 9781947297197 (pbk.) | 9781947297203 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH Weight loss—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Twelve-step programs—Religious aspects—Christianity.

| Compulsive eating. | Food habits. | Eating disorders. | Weight loss—Psychological aspects. | Self-esteem. | Self-acceptance. | BISAC SELF-HELP / Eating Disorders & Body Image | RELIGION / Christian Living / Personal Growth

Classification: LCC RC552.C65 E7 2020 | DDC 616.85/26--dc23

Book design by Sarah Siegand. Cover design by Bruce Gore and Sarah Siegand.

*To anyone willing to go to any length to experience freedom from an unhealthy relationship with food—
blessings as you take your steps to peace with food and your body.*

ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE WITH GOD.

The Twelve Steps

Step One

We admitted we were powerless over food—that our lives had become unmanageable.

Step Two

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Step Three

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

Step Four

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Step Five

Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Step Six

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

Step Seven

Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

Step Eight

Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

Step Nine

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible,
except when to do so would injure them or others.

Step Ten

Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

Step Eleven

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

Step Twelve

Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to other overeaters and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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INTRODUCTION

Food addiction, eating disorders, and body dysmorphia are daunting problems to overcome. For those who don't struggle with these issues, it may seem that food and weight shouldn't wreak such havoc, yet so many of us are in bondage and unable to free ourselves!

Maybe that is where you find yourself today? I've been there too.

The diets just aren't working, your therapy isn't enough, medication hasn't fixed you, the fancy brand-name programs aren't doing it, and even prayer and Bible study don't seem to be cutting it.

Regardless of our efforts to change, our problem still feels insurmountable.

Back in the 1930s, a group of alcoholics faced the same challenges we face. They just couldn't get sober until they formed Alcoholics Anonymous and began to practice what is now known as the 12 Steps. (Now, these steps were originally derived from a Christian program, but the language of the steps was secularized for the sake of reaching all people.)

Since that time, the 12 Steps have been used by countless groups to overcome addictions, compulsions, or other behavioral problems that have not responded to other methods.

If this is your first introduction to them, you're probably wondering what is special about these 12 Steps? What do these steps have to do with your eating and weight issues? And these are excellent questions. At first glance, this workbook will seem to talk less about food and weight than other workbooks you may have tried.

You may even wonder, *Where are the dieting instructions located?*

Or, *Where is the chart that will tell me how many calories and fat grams I'm supposed to eat?*

Or, *What in the world does "making amends" have to do with the fact that I want to lose weight?*

It may not make sense right now, but stick with me. I promise, you will be glad you took the journey.

We are going to set out for something bigger than changing your calorie count. Working through these 12 Steps is a path of true change—inside-out change—and it is aimed at ending overeating. It isn't another quick-fix diet and exercise formula where you lose weight and gain it back (plus some).

This is an opportunity to focus on the transformation of your body, mind, and spirit. The process is aimed at eradicating the reasons you overeat, removing the baggage that fuels addiction and obsessive thinking. This experience will provide new ways of thinking and help you cultivate tools for taking control of your life so that you no longer use food as the drug to calm, strengthen, or manage your life.

The 12-Step process will help equip you to end addictive eating once and for all.

If you genuinely commit to this journey, you will recover and heal. You will find peace with food and your body. You will be in the right mindset about what you eat and how you look. Here's the caveat: The price tag for your freedom and peace is your total commitment to a painstaking process of **honesty** and **openness**. You need to be willing to seek God with all of your heart. You need to let go of self-destructive thinking, attitudes, habits, and relational patterns.

Remember this path is different. We are going for lasting lifelong change—ending the battle for good, learning to live free of the merry-go-round of diets and binges. If you're ready, I am here with you to lead the way. With God's help, your support system, and this guide, you will be directed step-by-step out of bondage into a life of peace and health with food and your body.

A few important matters we must address before we begin!

First, if you do not have a support system for food recovery, it is incredibly important that you get one. There are recovery groups for food addiction that are accessible either in person, online, or by phone. (Look up *Overeaters Anonymous* or *Full of Faith* to begin). Make sure to try different meetings and see what works best for you. You need people with whom you can connect as you go. Some of the steps will bring up difficult emotions, and you'll need other people to walk through them with you. Once your relationship with food is in good shape, use your support primarily for the emotional and spiritual aspects of your journey, and check in about food if a struggle arises.

Second, if you need help with food planning and accountability, it is essential to find the right person (or people) to assist you with finding the best plan for you. Everyone has different needs.

Third, be careful when you reach the more complicated steps that you stay the course. The steps will change your life for the better, but only if you do them. Remain steady and be patient with the experience, even though you will likely start to pull back at certain points. Try to do some

work on your steps each week until you finish and try not to drag it out. Freedom comes later in the process, so you need to remember your goal: true freedom!

Throughout this workbook I have chosen to use the “we” pronoun at times as my inclusive calls to action. Why? Because, I have been right there in your shoes battling food addiction too (every day since 1981). I want to remind you that we are in this fight together. And no one can do this on their own! We recover with the help of others—often a team of support people. Never alone! Get used to that idea.

Finally, as you work through the issues that each step tackles, you will ultimately become adept at pinpointing what is fueling food thoughts and feelings, and you’ll be equipped with better tools for handling each matter that arises. This process won’t be easy at first... so be patient, and use your support!

Now, let’s get started!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. Rhona". The script is fluid and cursive, with the "D" being particularly large and the "Rhona" part written in a more connected, flowing style.

STEP
One

ADMITTING DEFEAT

STEP ONE

Admitting Defeat

We admitted we were powerless over food—that our lives had become unmanageable.

*For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.
For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.*

ROMANS 7:18

OVERVIEW

Admitting and accepting powerlessness may sound easy enough. We can recognize the ways we've been unable to stop overeating on our own, that our problems with bingeing and weight keep getting worse regardless of repeated attempts to fix them. We must take an honest look at our relationship with food.

We may feel hopeless; maybe every previous attempt has created a feeling of utter failure. Maybe we are trapped in the cycle of performing the same destructive behaviors repeatedly: overeating, grazing all day, obsessing about food and weight, bingeing, hiding, sneaking, lying, pretending, dieting, exercising, hoping and losing hope, spending endless money on new programs, surgery, pills, gimmicks.

It's easy to say the words "I'm powerless. I know my strength has failed. I can't stop! I need help!" The challenge is to believe those words and allow that belief to change our actions. A person with a peanut allergy knows beyond a shadow of a doubt they are powerless over peanuts. They must go to great lengths to make sure they don't end up eating anything that has peanuts in it because it could be deadly. True awareness of powerlessness understands when something is deadly and what

REAL TALK

with Dr. Rhona

Wendy was eager to resolve her problem with food and weight. She was on a weight loss journey and had hit a plateau when she started therapy. She was following a diet, and it was probably the tenth time she'd started a weight loss program. She was also once again at a place of losing control after losing a good amount of weight. When we examined her history, we found there was primarily a problem with sugary foods, especially chocolate. Bread and white flour products seemed to be the other area that got her into trouble. It took over a year for Wendy to face her addiction—to move from admitting her problem to accepting her powerlessness over it. Yes, she stayed current with food addiction literature, listened at meetings, and talked through the binges. But every time she was tempted, she had an excuse about why she thought it would be okay to just have one sweet at the church event, or the kid's birthday party, or the Christmas gathering. Each time was devastating and led to more and more trouble. Cravings, obsession, guilt, shame. It was never worth it, but it took some time to understand that sugar and white flour to Wendy were like alcohol to the alcoholic or drug to a drug addict.

Once she finally faced that she needed to be totally off all sugar and white flour, all cravings subsided and the fight with food ended. She was at peace with food. Leaving it alone was so much easier than trying to manage it. The power of addiction was too strong to fight. Freedom came for Wendy with *acceptance*, *surrender*, and *abstinence* from her addictive foods.

Wendy's story is so common. For me personally, it took 2.5 years of hard-core trying to quit overeating until I finally got it myself. I did everything right—I just could not understand the power of food addiction and the first bite until I did. Once I surrendered, the fight was over.

It's easy to believe we have taken step one because we can admit we have a problem. But most don't really accept powerlessness, and consequently, they never truly recover. Every time a person decides to have that first bite of whatever food takes them down the slippery slope of addictive eating, it's an indication they haven't yet faced powerlessness. When you understand the first bite will lead to the inability to stop, then you know there is no "I'll just have one" or "Tomorrow, I'll start my diet." A person who knows they are powerless knows one bite is never one bite—it is always the beginning of a loss of control that may take months or years to correct. If you are still sliding on the slippery slope of addictive eating, you still need to take the first step.

Focusing on You: EXAMINING YOUR HISTORY OF FOOD ADDICTION

YOUR PERSONAL FOOD STORY

Consider writing a thorough account of your relationship with food from the time you were young until today. This is an important project, and I don't want you to rush through it. You may choose to use a timeline format in chronological order of seasons of your life to help organize your thoughts and tell the story. (I have personally found writing your story as a timeline the most helpful way to see how the problem has manifested throughout your life. It helps to see similar patterns and themes in different situations and relationships).

You must go into the specific details, behaviors, and feelings about your eating, weight, and dieting. Discuss every area of your life that was impacted by your abnormal eating and obsession. Did you avoid people and activities because of your weight or because you were too hung over from binges? Did you create ways to get alone so you could eat without anyone knowing?

How were your relationships affected? Were you irritable or withdrawn? Did your shame cause you to pull away from important loved ones? Did you miss important aspects of your life because your head was so wrapped up in obsession that you missed what was going on? Did you hide, sneak, or lie? Did you steal? Did you act like everything was okay in front of people when you felt like dying inside from shame?

Be specific about what you were eating. How much? Did you eat in secret? What did you do to cover your tracks? Write about the diets. What did you do to try to control your eating and weight? How did it go? Were you obsessed with the scale? Did you ever experience freedom from cravings? Peace with food? What specific life events do you believe fueled your eating? Death? Loss? Certain stresses? What are your triggers? Who are your triggers?

Use the space on the following pages to reflect on these questions and write out your personal food story.

RECOVERY QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe you can control your eating without help? Why?

2. Do you believe you are addicted to certain foods (meaning, every time you start eating certain foods you can't stop)? Discuss.

3. Do you think you can have just one bite? One cookie? One small dish of ice cream? Explain.

4. How do diets and weight control methods contribute to your overeating problem? Do you eat because of restriction? Do you reward yourself or overeat because you are hungry from missing meals? Discuss.

5. Do you recognize your life has become unmanageable? How?

6. Can you see how food abuse is robbing you of health, peace, sane thinking, clear thinking? Explain.

7. Do you believe that your food addiction will get better on its own? Why?

8. Addiction is a progressive illness—it's a problem that typically worsens if it is not treated. Has this been true for you? Do you see an increase of symptoms over time and a growing inability to get into control? Explain.

YOUR STEP ONE CHALLENGE

Denial is the inability to see a problem clearly. Usually when a food addict is in denial, they are still trying to control their eating despite repeated failures. They have not come to a place of accepting the truth that when it comes to food, something is gravely wrong and intervention is needed. Throwing a little effort at fixing an addiction is like throwing a stone in the ocean. It makes no real impact. When a person realizes this is a real addiction that needs to be treated, they will then be willing to go to the lengths necessary to change and heal. That said, are you ready to face your food problem head-on?

What do you believe you need at this time to help make the changes to a life of sobriety with food?

- Food plan
- Nutritionist
- Counselor
- Treatment
- 12 step group
- Sponsor

What are you willing to do to get started?

STEP ONE

Scripture Meditations

Write out how each verse applies to you. What does it mean to you? How does it relate to your situation?

Matthew 26:41

The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

John 5:6

When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?”

Romans 5:6

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

1 Corinthians 8:2

If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.

Romans 7:18-20

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” . . . For when I am weak, then I am strong.

STEP
Two

BUILDING FAITH

STEP TWO

Building Faith

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

“All things are possible for one who believes.”

MARK 9:23

OVERVIEW

You have now come to understand that you are powerless over food, which presents a new question: Where does the power to overcome your addiction come from? The answer to that question is the foundation of your whole recovery journey and will finally relieve you of trying to make this problem go away on your own. There is a Power greater than you—this is good news! And He is the only way to restore your sanity. Are you ready to know God like you’ve never known Him before?

Before you answer that question, consider this one: Do you really trust that God is good? Plenty of people have trouble embracing God at all. I know I did before I started my recovery journey; God seemed remote and untouchable to me. In a world filled with suffering, injustice, and painful experiences, the idea of God can feel anywhere from insufficient to unfair. How can a good God not end suffering and pain? Why would He allow horrible things to happen to people, often leading them to food abuse in the first place? On the other hand, it is easy to feel guilty asking God for help with food abuse in the midst of war and famine. What place do I have asking God for help when people are dying from hunger? I should be able to take care of this myself!

Doubt can be a hindrance to faith building and, thus, recovery. Years of failures, sickness, losses, and trauma. Some things we can’t explain or understand, but believing requires putting doubt

REAL TALK

with Dr. Rhona

Jordan was raised with religion and attended church regularly. She had no problem with the idea of believing in God for help, but it wasn't until her sponsor gave her the assignment to pray each day for her recovery and to read and write about a couple of spiritual readings related to recovery that she began to see change in her ability to achieve sustainable recovery. She told me the lights came on, and suddenly, she was able to see how the spiritual connection worked to heal her food problem. In my own recovery, I have personally prayed for another day of freedom each and every day since my first steps in 1981, and I continue to acknowledge the truth that my new life is the Lord's work in me. When I first started, I had no faith at all. At that time, I tried prayer and faith because nothing else worked, and I had nothing to lose. I believe with all my heart that my recovery is a miracle. This is my prayer each morning before breakfast: "Lord, thank You for this day and for the freedom I have in You. Please keep me free today from compulsive overeating and obsessive thinking about food and my body size. Amen."

So many people are believers who love and know the Lord, but don't really believe He will help them in this area of food and weight. I want to encourage you no matter where you are in your spiritual journey to put all your experiences aside and come to God with an open heart and mind. My experience as a counselor has taught me that our hearts and misconceptions about God can often keep us from having the spiritual experience we need and desire. Sometimes these hurts and misconceptions are passed to us from the people who are supposed to love us, like our family.

It is important to start fresh with God around your recovery, but don't be afraid to take your grief, doubt, or confusion with you—He can handle it. You can never really know the heart of God or the freedom He offers without first being honest with Him. Identify the hurts and experiences that may keep you from trusting the Lord to be a force of love, power, healing, and strength, and give those feelings to Him. Spend time looking up the hundreds of verses in Scripture about God's love and favor. Read and re-read the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) or the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). Think about the nature of a God who has that kind of unconditional love and mercy for you. You are His child. Can you believe in that kind of grace and love?

RECOVERY QUESTIONS

1. Do you often feel out of control when it comes to food and weight? How so?

2. In what ways has your life been insane? Describe.

3. Can you acknowledge that you need help from a power greater than yourself? Discuss.

4. What do you believe about who God is?

5. What parental or authority figure projections might you be making on to God that limit your ability to see His grace and love? Do you assume He is like authority figures from your childhood rather than who you read about in Scripture? Are there other people you have experienced as hypocrites, or otherwise spiritually “off”, who have affected your own ability to believe?

6. Do you believe God can help you? Why? Why not?

7. What faith practices have helped in the past?

8. What faith practices have been harmful or useless?

9. How has faith made a difference in your life?

10. How does it affect you when you are not experiencing connection to God?

YOUR STEP TWO CHALLENGE

Do you believe you can be free? If so, what do you imagine that would be like? Write about that. Use your imagination. If you were free . . .

Write five verses or phrases on which you can easily rely to help you remember to keep the faith and believe at all times.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

STEP TWO

Scripture Meditations

Write out how each verse applies to you. What does it mean to you? How does it relate to your situation?

Mark 9:24

I believe; help my unbelief.

Luke 8:43-48

And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased. And Jesus said, "Who was it that touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!" But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me." And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

John 8:32

And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

Hebrews 11:1-10

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken, he was commended as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

2 Corinthians 3:5

Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God.

Philippians 4:13

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Isaiah 41:10

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

STEP
Three

SURRENDERING TO GOD

STEP THREE

Surrendering to God

**Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over
to the care of God as we understood Him.**

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

ROMANS 12:1

OVERVIEW

Step 3 is about learning complete reliance and dependence on God. We may have a negative reaction to the idea of dependence on anyone. Maybe for good reason! Perhaps we have been hurt or let down, and trust is difficult. Or maybe it's simply a difficult concept to grasp. If we can't see or touch God, how do we depend on Him? Once we've considered God's character in Step 2, we understand He is a loving, unchangeable force; an unconditional safe haven; a refuge and a fortress; all-wise, all-loving, never-failing; and right there with you at all times.

Now let me challenge you that the lowercase "god" on whom you have been depending has failed you thus far. And if you don't think you've been dependent on anything or anyone, let's look a little closer at your relationship with food. Have you not turned to food for many of the things in life that God might have helped you with? Has food not been your comfort when God says He is the source of comfort? Have you not reached for food when you were stressed or frustrated instead of looking to Him for wisdom? Have you not eaten over relational conflicts instead of facing your troubles with His wisdom, strength, and courage? Now, it's time to challenge this unhealthy dependence and switch it out for a dependence that will work to bring health, sanity, and peace.

REAL TALK

with Dr. Rhona

My friend, Arielle, was an active member of her church. She was a great dieter who lost weight by closely following plans, but she could never seem to stay on track. She started therapy and a twelve-step group. Arielle attended meetings and found it all to be quite helpful. Unfortunately, the struggle continued until she started to work her steps. She learned some big lessons about surrender and depending on God in her step three readings. As she developed a new childlike dependence on God (that was less “works”-related and more faith-based), she began to experience the Lord’s power working in her, enabling her to let go of the food and unhealthy behaviors and attitudes so that she could live in God’s love in freedom.

In Step 2 we decided to truly believe in God, and now we take another big step to practice dependence on God. I personally found this step quite challenging. I didn’t understand how to depend on something I couldn’t see or touch. I spent a lot of time considering how to surrender. I still do. It’s perplexing. Isaiah 40:31 reads, “They shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” As I let myself imagine the concept of being on the wings of an eagle, I begin to understand what it means to be carried by the Lord’s power. Faith is believing in Someone I can’t see or comprehend. Trust is giving my life over. Faith and trust work—even if I don’t understand why!

Think of trusting God like electricity. Imagine that you have a super high-tech, high-capacity computer. Imagine all the possibilities of what you may be able to do with your computer. There is one small problem: It needs electricity to work. If you don’t plug it in, it really doesn’t matter how high the capacity is. We are the same way. When we are not plugged in to God, we don’t work well. Junk food and excess food are false forms of energy! When we look to the wrong thing for sustenance, it eventually turns our lives upside down. Trusting God means we are plugging into the Power source! He provides the energy we need to be healthy and functional in every area of our lives.

The more we choose to practice trust and allow our hearts and our spirits to be fed by God, the more equipped we will be to live the life we have always wanted. I can’t encourage you enough: Make the Lord first, and feed on His Word. Choose surrender; allow yourself to be surprised by what you didn’t think was possible: freedom.

RECOVERY QUESTIONS

1. What do you believe it means to turn your life and will over to the care of God?

2. What are you willing to turn over to God?

3. What are you holding back from Him? How does holding back areas of your life from God affect you?

4. What is holding you back from letting go and letting God have it all?

5. What are you afraid of?

6. How has your relationship with food been a form of dependence? How have you turned to food when you might have turned to the Lord? Write all the examples you can think of how food was a god.

YOUR STEP THREE CHALLENGE

How do you envision your life with God in control? Write out your mental picture: If I were trusting in the Lord and leaning on Him . . .

We have worn ourselves out trying to fix our problems with our own strength. We are exhausted from the obsession and the constant negotiations/food fights in our heads. Other areas of our lives have suffered as well. We don't have the strength to manage this on our own. But, God calls us to bring it all to Him. Write down examples of times you have depended on the Lord. How has that worked out?

Today, practice praying these words, "Dear God, I am trusting You with my life today."

STEP THREE

Scripture Meditations

Write out how each verse applies to you. What does it mean to you? How does it relate to your situation?

Philippians 1:6

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

Ephesians 5:18

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.

Psalms 46:1

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Matthew 11:28-30

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Isaiah 40:31

But they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

James 4:7-10

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Isaiah 54:4-8

“Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced . . . but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,” says the LORD, your Redeemer.

STEP
Four

SEARCHING OURSELVES

STEP FOUR

Searching Ourselves

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

PSALM 139:23-24

OVERVIEW

What does a moral inventory have to do with my food and weight issues? I've seen so many people glance at the steps, notice this one, and decide a twelve-step program isn't for them. There will probably be so many moments during this step at which point you'll ask yourself: Why do I have to do this? Just remember that this is an awesome opportunity for you to get rid of the underlying emotional and spiritual issues behind your eating. It is part of a process of true inside-out change.

Now isn't the time to quit! Just because this step may seem daunting, that doesn't make it something to run away from. The end of cravings, obsession, and insanity with food and weight depends in part on going through this self-exploration. Breathe, pray, stay close to your supports, and do it! Don't put it off.

In this step, we will discuss how to conduct a complete and thorough personal inventory of yourself. We will look at your character strengths and weaknesses, your secret shames and your gifts and blessings. It's necessary to be thorough and honest. Although this guide will give you plenty of questions as prompts, you may not identify with all of them (but don't be discouraged if you can). Take time to think about the questions.

REAL TALK

with Dr. Rhona

Jessie was a bit of a perfectionist. When she was presented with the different Step 4 methods, she became obsessed with picking “the right one,” so she would be sure to get it correct. She started one path that a friend suggested, but then thought she might not be doing it right. She then looked to another option. She was so concerned with the method and process and getting it perfect that she missed the point: Get the inventory done. Jessie needed permission to do an imperfect inventory. She needed to take a plunge, pick a path, be honest, and just go with it. By working through this tough step, she also learned to let others help her and to lighten up on herself. She completed the step by focusing on letting go of perfection!

Honestly, Step 4 is where I’ve seen more people crash on their recovery than any other. I’ve learned through many years of counseling how easy it is to get caught up in some form of perfectionism and just quit. In my Step 4, I had so much self-hate that I was eager to write all about my defects of character. I kept looking because I was sure I was the worst and there was no end to the defects. I had difficulty finding any strengths, and I had trouble moving on. Step 4 can be a daunting process, so it is important to take your time, be patient, and go easy with it. It can also be scary to bring up things that you may rather keep buried. So, I do not suggest going back into past issues you’ve already resolved. Only jump into the areas where you feel there is unfinished business. But also remember, just like house cleaning, some areas need more than one good solid scrub. Also, we have practiced avoidance for a good reason—these memories can be unpleasant. So, it’s necessary to trust God and your support people as you go through this process.

Remember: You are ridding the fuel for addictive eating from your house. This is a worthwhile project. You may not like it while you do it, but you will love it when it’s done. These agonizing old issues will no longer run your life.

Before we go any further, let's pause and pray!

Heavenly Father, please help me to take this next step with You. Help me to not be fearful and to take one section at a time holding Your hand, experiencing Your sweet Spirit close to me. Thank You, Lord, that I am not alone. Thank You ahead of time for the healing You are doing through this process. Thank You that there is no condemnation for those who trust in You. Thank You that You are happy to hear my confession and take away each and every one of my troubles. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Out of necessity, the arrangement of this chapter is much different than the first three steps. Some of the inventory questions will take some time to get through, so try not to approach too much in one sitting. There are Scriptures in this chapter that are paired with the longer inventory sections, and I have added some quotes that have meant something to me in my own journey to help you through those moments of reflection. Some of the inventories are short and will require only a couple answers! Take your time and be honest.

Now we can get down to work:

1. Is there anything keeping you from taking your fourth step and writing your searching and fearless moral inventory?
2. What do you need to help you successfully complete this challenging step?
3. What is the best plan for following through with making regular time to write out your inventory until it is complete?

ANGER

Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.

EPHESIANS 4:26

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.

JAMES 1:19

Internalizing anger will take away our joy and spirit; externalizing anger will make us less effective in our attempts to create change and forge connection. It's an emotion that we need to transform into something life-giving: courage, love, change, compassion, justice. Or sometimes anger can mask a far more difficult emotion like grief, regret, or shame, and we need to use it to dig into what we're really feeling. Either way, anger is a powerful catalyst but a life-sucking companion.

—BRENÉ BROWN¹

Anger is one of those often-challenging emotional experiences that can be so uncomfortable we become quick to shut it down. Whether we are afraid to explode and hurt someone or say the wrong thing and possibly cause upset, many of us have never learned to deal with these strong emotions appropriately. Sadly, food has been the way we have managed, and it has worked to shut down those intense feelings. We need to find another way. We need to learn to say what we mean without being mean. We need to learn to process our feelings with God's help and our supports.

Let's talk about anger:

Make a list of all the people with whom you are angry and why.

How is your anger typically expressed?

Give examples of holding anger in or suppressing anger.

Give examples of inappropriate outward expression of anger.

How would you rate your ability to express anger appropriately?

Do you have awareness of misdirected anger, such as taking out your anger or frustration on people or animals? Have you ever been abusive?

How have you been angry at yourself? How does that play out in your thoughts? Actions?

ANXIETY

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6

Do not be anxious, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.

Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

MATTHEW 6:31-34

There’s a reason the Bible speaks so eloquently and frequently about confronting anxiety—even the strongest believers come up against it. It can be vague and a general state of being or set off by certain life factors. Ask for peace from the Lord as you work through your specific anxieties.

Let’s talk about anxiety:

Do you struggle with anxiety—social anxiety, performance anxiety, general anxiety, or a specific phobia? What are you anxious about? Describe.

How have you already tried to work on your anxiety issues?

How does food tie into your anxiety issues?

Has anxiety been a problem since childhood?

APPROVAL SEEKING

For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

GALATIANS 1:10

Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them.

MATTHEW 6:1

There is nothing wrong with wanting to be liked or behaving in a way that considers others before ourselves. But things get messy when we are acting out of fear of rejection and a desire for validation instead of selfless love and a desire to be like Jesus.

Let's talk about approval seeking:

Do you fear criticism or disapproval? Discuss.

Are you constantly seeking validation?

Have you lost your sense of your own wants and needs in living to be liked by others? Discuss.

Are you making up for validation you never received as a child by doing all you can to always be validated now?

What is the price you are paying for your life of approval seeking?

BITTERNESS AND RESENTMENT

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

HEBREWS 12:14

It is forgiveness alone that has the capacity to break the chains of injustice and give us the possibility of a new future—a future unchained from the past and free of bitterness.

The world of resentment and bitterness is a small, ever-shrinking world.

—BRIAN ZAHND²

Resentment is the number one offender—it kills more alcoholics than anything else.

—AA BIG BOOK³

Resentment is nursed anger. It's the refusal to let go and a hurt or offense remains unresolved, buried—when it grows and has roots and becomes almost a part of you. One of the earmarks of addiction is the tendency to blame others, the world, and circumstances for our troubles. We sit, eating out of control, complaining about how badly the world has treated us. We used to say in addiction treatment, “When you have one finger pointing out, there are three pointing back at you.” The 12 Step philosophy is meant to help you find a way to take your eyes off what is wrong with others and the world and do something about yourself. It's good to allow some grief over painful realities, but you aren't supposed to live there. To be able to recover, you need to find a way to heal the hurts—or even learn to live with them, but not have them in the driver's seat of your heart and mind.

Let's talk about bitterness and resentment:

Who do you resent? Make a list.

As you look at your list, what are the themes? What are your buttons? Your relational vulnerabilities? Have you tried to get others back? In what way?

What's the issue? What's your part? How are you hurt? What are the underlying issues? *Wounded self-esteem, fear of abandonment, selfish ambitions or desires, security, jealousy . . .*

Has bitterness impacted your mood? Your relationships with people?

How does your resentment tie into your dysfunctional use of food?

Can you see your part? What are you learning about yourself? Can you see how you've been hurt and what you might need besides food?

CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?

PSALM 56:8

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

REVELATION 21:4

Childhood trauma can include the byproducts of many things: alcoholism, anger, rage, divorce, sexual abuse, bullying, neglect, emotional abuse. We are all someone's child, and despite our parents' best efforts (or lack thereof) many of us do not reach adulthood without significant hurt that is sometimes so deep we fear it can never be healed.

Food is often the first source of comfort for these painful experiences, which explains why food abuse often begins at a young age. We cannot hope for true recovery and, therefore, freedom without first turning to our potentially painful pasts. Our deeper wounds may seem to be buried in the past, but if they are unhealed, they are likely still the source of current emotional and relational reactions. There is absolutely no need to minimize something incredibly painful that happened when you were a child simply because you are now an adult and "should be over it."

Sometimes without realizing it, we keep our pain buried with food, because that's what we've been doing since the wound was initially inflicted. If bingeing and food abuse have always been our source of comfort, removing them will naturally bring to the surface what we have done our best to forget. Have grace on yourself: You were simply trying to take care of yourself in a way that was accessible. But you don't need to embrace unhealthy behaviors anymore to numb the pain.

The Lord will carry you through the darkest valley into quiet places free of suffering. He wants you to be well, and He will never forsake you.

Let me reiterate: If your inventory is bringing to light unhealed trauma from your childhood, PLEASE don't feel you need to handle it on your own! Lean into your support team. Seek out a qualified therapist. Take as much time as you need to address this issue. You've probably been carrying it with you for the majority of your life, so give yourself the appropriate time and care to heal.

Let's talk about childhood trauma:

Are there any traumatic events or experiences from your childhood that you feel have not completely healed?

Are there any that you feel have not been addressed at all? Describe them.

If you did not have a major experience of abuse or abandonment in childhood, what was your experience of criticism or rejection?

What was your social experience as a child? Did you experience any rejection or bullying?

Were your parents emotionally neglectful, too demanding? What were your reactions at the time?

How have these patterns played out in your relationships with your parents as an adult? (Give as many examples and details as you can remember.)

Were you ever put into any inappropriate sexual situations as a child? Not necessarily abuse, but asked a question by an adult, accidentally saw something inappropriate, etc.? How did this affect you and your relationship to sexuality?

DENIAL

*Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses
and forsakes them will obtain mercy.*

PROVERBS 28:13

Pretending everything is okay while knowing you're a mess can be exhausting. It's difficult to tell the truth about food abuse. Shame and guilt over the loss of control can keep you hiding the problem so that no one ever knows the real story. There's just one issue: You know. Deep down inside is a place that desperately needs help and healing. We are only as sick as our secrets, and it is absolutely necessary to make a habit of truth telling if we are going to be free!

Let's talk about denial:

Give examples of how you have kept your food abuse a secret. Write honestly about what it feels like to pretend, live a double life, or act like all is well when in reality . . . it isn't.

How has that affected your relationship with God? With people? How does it affect the way you feel about yourself?

Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.

JOHN 18:27

In the Gospel story of Peter, when Jesus predicted he would deny Him three times, Peter didn't even seem to be aware of his own weakness. He thought his love for Jesus was strong enough that he would never deny Him, but the Lord knew he was weak.

This example of denial is *extremely* powerful.

Can you recognize in your life how you have not been able to see your own weakness? How have you overestimated your faith or strength and assumed you were stronger and more together than you actually were?

Denial occurs when you don't even know and can't even see yourself accurately. Write about this regarding your relationship with food.

Do you tend to minimize your problems and act like they aren't really so bad, making light of things or even joking around? How so?

Do you get angry when anyone catches you or comments on your eating, trying to get the attention off you and your behavior? Discuss.

Do you blame other people or circumstances for your eating rather than owning your problem? Why?

Do you avoid talking about subjects that might make you address the vulnerable truth about your eating and weight issues? Explain.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sincere thanks to the Dexterity team for believing in this work and putting endless effort into providing life-giving tools for people who can benefit from these books. To Matt West, thank you for your commitment to building Dexterity, providing support, friendship, faith, and diligence in every project. Your leadership is awesome, and I will always be grateful to you for understanding the significance of providing life-changing books to the world. Thank you to Kim West for keeping the business going behind the scenes and always being a blessing. Also big thanks to Kathryn Notestine for doing a great job managing many of the aspects of publishing. I am especially grateful to those involved in writing and editing—Matt Litton, you are such a great friend of this work and a blessing to know and work with. I am so grateful to have your help. To Rachel Ryan and Jessie Epstein, thank you both for doing an amazing job. Thank you to Stacey Owens and Lauren Bryan for putting the finishing touches on the manuscript. Also thank you, Marissa Begin, for your help with making sure the world finds out about this resource. You were all great to have on my team.

To my family, especially my precious daughters Danielle, Jessie, Arielle, and Jordan and my dear friends and colleagues (you all know who you are), thank you for being available to support me in so many ways. I would never be able to do anything good without your love and prayers.

Above all I give thanks to God, who gave the message of recovery to a bunch of alcoholics many years ago; by their efforts to pass it on, people with all kinds of troubles, like me, have found help.

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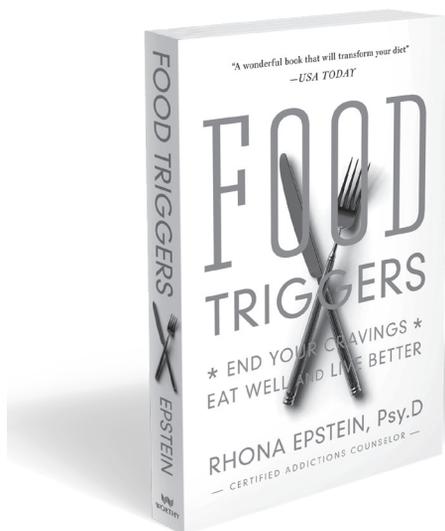
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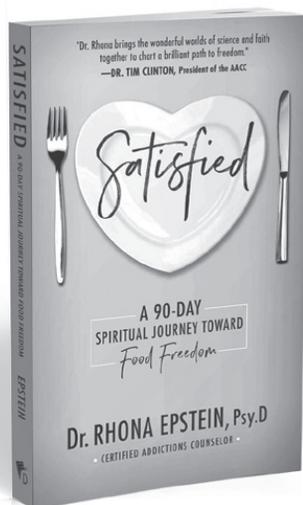
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