

God's Miraculous Healing

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My eating disorder started very innocently a decade ago. It was the summer before I entered 8th grade. I decided to join the middle school cross country team in the fall. I started by following the training schedule to a T. I thought training was not enough, so I focused on maintaining a healthy diet as well. Training and eating a healthy diet did not seem enough to me either, so I began working out multiple times a day and losing weight. Ironically, this did not help me perform well on the cross-country team. I truly believed I was being healthy by exercising multiple times a day. I found a false sense of accomplishment in seeing the pounds go down on the scale. I quickly became so obsessed with starving myself, losing weight, and counting calories. What began with a harmless desire to perform well on the cross country spiraled into a full-blown eating disorder.

Because I was only 13 years old, I could only obsessively exercise and lose weight for so long before my parents began to notice. My mom brought me to the doctor in the fall and explained that I had lost nearly ten pounds when I was already thin. While most girls my age were hitting puberty and gaining weight, I was doing the opposite. My doctor broke the news to my mom and me that I had anorexia nervosa. Truthfully, I had no idea what anorexia was until that day and my parents knew very little about the disorder.

Not long after, I admitted to myself and my family that I had a problem. However, whenever anyone else approached me with concern about my weight, I denied having an eating disorder. I was so embarrassed that I struggled with an eating disorder that I did not want anyone to know except for my immediate family. Part of my embarrassment was due to

the stigma still existing around mental illnesses back in 2013. I also did not know anyone else struggling with an eating disorder. Looking back, I now realize that people were not judging as much as I thought they were. People were asking out of care and not out of judgement.

Along with my desire to train well for the cross-country season, I believe my eating disorder also started because I was searching for a sense of control over my life. I battled with anxiety my whole life and never felt in control. I found control in overexercising, counting calories, starving myself, and weighing myself. Ironically, I lost control while finding control. The dark world of anorexia was a sneaky force that quickly controlled my entire life. It became an addiction. Deep down I wanted to stop restricting calories and incessantly exercising but I could not stop the behaviors. I could not go a minute without thinking about food, how many calories I was eating, and how I was going to burn off said calories. I would daydream during class about how many calories I had eaten that day. I would wake up starving in the middle of the night and do sit-ups to burn off even more calories. My intense fear of gaining weight consumed my life. I felt guilty for eating anything other than fruits and vegetables. Anorexia became my entire identity. I was no longer interested in anything other than counting calories, exercising, and losing weight. I did not know who I was aside from my eating disorder. I distinctly remember looking in the mirror one night and asking myself "Am I anorexia or am I Sydney?"

After that night, I no longer wanted anorexia to consume my entire life. I chose recovery. It was definitely not an easy decision and it came with a lot of setbacks. I had to choose recovery every day when I woke up throughout my eating disorder journey. Somedays I wanted to stop counting calories and starving myself, but I could not stop because my rituals

had become an addiction. It was a habit that I could not break on my own and required professional help.

At my doctor's appointment that fall, my pediatrician referred me to an amazing dietician. Meeting with my dietician became a crucial part of my recovery. Not only did she help me with my meal plan for recovery, but she also helped me work through my thoughts, feelings, and emotions around food and weight. At the end of each therapy session, she gave me a new challenge for the week. A lot of times it would be to eat foods that scared me. She patiently listened to my anxiety about gaining weight and eating certain foods every single week. She helped me put things into perspective and to see the truth. She was also a Christian and helped me incorporate God and the Bible into my recovery. I knew God was there when he sent her to be my dietician. If it was not for her, I would not be recovered today.

In addition to seeking therapy for my eating disorder, I also took a faith-based approach towards recovery. When I was in the midst of my eating disorder, I lost my relationship with God. I found comfort in the control that anorexia gave me. I pushed God away because I found a new identity in my eating disorder. However, my rituals only satisfied my need for control for so long before the disease itself took over me. Anorexia became a powerful demon in my life. I worshipped that demon instead of God. Anorexia isolated me from God and the people I cared about. I knew I needed God in my life that one night when I looked in the mirror and no longer recognized myself. When I chose recovery, I knew that I could not do it without God. I began praying daily for God to help me break free of my habits. I spent a great deal of time reading the Bible and finding verses that resonated with me. The anorexic demons constantly told me ugly lies about myself. Those lies had become so ingrained in my head that they seemed nearly

impossible to unbelieve. One way that I combated those lies was through filling my mind with biblical truths. I created several flashcards with a lie on the front and a biblical truth to counter it on the back. One lie that I incessantly told myself was that I was fat. I created a flashcard that said, "I am so afraid that I will be fat" on one side and Psalm 34:4 on the backside it said, "I sought the Lord and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears." I knew from reading that to myself that God would bear my burdens and fears around gaining weight. I found that reading those flashcards to myself over and over and over again helped me to see the truth and to recover. Whenever I found myself listening to the lies, I would pull out those flashcards. On my worst days throughout my recovery, I would set aside three separate times in my day to read those truths to myself. I read those truths enough times that I eventually started to believe them. The truth was my identity could not be found in anorexia; My identity could only be found in God. God helped me break free from the chains of my eating disorder. I handed over control to God and no longer allowed anorexia to control me. I would not be sitting here today writing this recovery story if it was not for God's grace and healing powers.

My mother was the final crucial element in my recovery. My mom gave up so much in order to help me overcome my eating disorder. I was truly blessed to have her by my side the whole time throughout my journey towards recovery. She prayed for me, she came to every therapy session with me, and she patiently listened to my irrational fears, day in and day out. Everything else in her life suddenly became so insignificant when she found out that I had an eating disorder. She made sure that I did not leave the dinner table until I finished all of my food. She prepared healthy, calorie dense dinners specifically to help me restore my weight. We became frustrated with each other frequently during my recovery; however, looking back

she was stern with me because she cared about me and wanted me to come out on the other side of it. I would not have overcome my eating disorder without her support along the way.

Not only does my mom deserve some recognition, but the rest of my family does too. Some people may not realize the huge toll that an eating disorder takes on an entire family. My younger sister Kayla showed her support by eating extra calories with me to help me feel more at ease. Both of my siblings demonstrated such selflessness during a time that my parents had to give most of their attention to me rather than them. My whole family prayed for me and was patient with me throughout the trials of my eating disorder.

Overall, my battle with anorexia lasted nearly two years. The first year was incredibly difficult and the second year was a more manageable struggle. As I mentioned earlier, God, my dietician, and my mom brought me through it. God was the main component of my recovery and my mom and my dietician were the vessels. Recovery is a gradual process for many and it was for me too. However, I vividly remember a point in time where I knew I was recovered. My family and I were at Sandy Pines for the weekend as usual and we had friends over for the day. My mom's friend asked me if I wanted some of her famous puppy chow. I thought about it for a minute as I always did before eating any form of junk food. Even though I already had two "unhealthy" snacks that day, I decided to eat AND enjoy the puppy chow without feeling guilty. I can honestly say from that day forward, I never intentionally starved myself or felt guilty for enjoying foods that I loved. I am 100% recovered today and that is all because of God's miraculous healing.

I have learned many lessons from my journey with anorexia. Some of the lessons I did not learn until reflecting back years later. I even derived some from writing this. One of the

most important lessons I learned was to give full control to God. The reason I was searching for control through the rituals of an eating disorder was because I never fully gave control to God. Another valuable lesson I learned was to find my identity in Christ. Before my eating disorder, I struggled to understand who I was. I felt lost at times and I coped through finding my identity in anorexia. Finding my identity in Christ is not a lesson I learned immediately from my recovery. When I did find my identity in God several years later, I found so much peace and purpose. I have found beauty in the struggle. I am in no ways perfect and I still struggle daily to surrender my life to God. God has shown me how he can use me in big and small ways. I am hoping that God will use this story to help someone battling with an eating disorder.

Unfortunately, so many young girls and women struggle with eating disorders today. The advice I have for anyone in the midst of an eating disorder is to not be afraid to seek professional help, confide in someone you trust, and turn to God and his Word. More times than not, professional help is necessary for recovery. God wants us to turn to him and use the professional help that is available to us. Seeing a counselor and/or dietician is nothing to be ashamed of. They can help us see the lies that are clouding up our brains and provide us with the necessary tools for recovery. Having a strong support system is also important for recovery. Confiding in someone you trust can help hold you accountable, whether that be a family member, a friend, or a mentor. They can encourage you, watch out for you, and pray for you. Ultimately, turning to God is the single most important action you can take towards recovery. God can lead you to the best support system and the best form of professional treatment. Turning to God's Word can help fill you with truths instead of the lies that your eating disorder tells you. Creating flashcards with lies and biblical truths to combat them was an exercise that

helped me, and it may help you as well. Take some time to reflect and figure out what God may be trying to teach you through your struggles with an eating disorder. Remember that anorexia is not a choice; however, recovery is choice. The path is never easy and requires a conscious decision every day to choose healing.

I am truly amazed by the work Homer Burgess is doing through Finding Freedom Ranch. It has already touched so many young girls' and womens' lives through the mentorship program and moms' group. Finding Freedom Ranch plans to incorporate three important components in recovery: Christian counseling, medical intervention and equine therapy. It was awesome to see how many individuals came out to support eating disorders at the golf outing in July. It truly showed me how much people care about those who struggle with eating disorders and want to see them find healing. I cannot wait to see how God will continue to bless lives and grow Finding Freedom Ranch.

I am truly blessed to be sharing my story of recovery today. God is faithful and provided for me through the storms of anorexia. I hope each and every one of you reading this can take something from it. Maybe you will be encouraged to walk alongside a friend or a family member struggling with an eating disorder or maybe you need to hand over whatever is currently controlling your life to God. If you are currently in the midst of a battle with an eating disorder, I hope you choose recovery so that you can find peace with God and the freedom that comes with healing.