

# Healing Binge Eating:

## A Journey Toward Wholeness



■ by Jessica A. Parks, MSW, LCSW

Most of us have had the experience of overeating. An abundance of food is often available at social gatherings, church potlucks, family meals, and it is not uncommon to have the occasional experience of eating until feeling physically overfull. Binge-Eating Disorder (BED) is different; BED is frequent, “out-of-control” and compulsive episodes of overeating, followed by intense shame or guilt. One study found that approximately 3.5% of adult women and 2% of adult men experience BED during their lifetime, commonly beginning in adolescence or young adulthood (Hudson JI, Hiripi E, Pope HG Jr, and Kessler RC., 2007). Many who struggle with BED also struggle with their weight and with obesity-related illnesses.

### Markers of Binge-Eating Disorder include (American Psychiatric Association, 2013):

- Eating significantly more food than most people would eat under similar circumstances during a specific period of time (e.g. during a two-hour period), at least one episode per week for at least three months
- A sense of lack of control over the amount of food consumed, with related distress
- Three of the following:
  - Eating much more rapidly than normal
  - Eating until feeling uncomfortably full
  - Eating large amounts of food when not feeling physically hungry
  - Eating alone because of being embarrassed by how much one is eating
  - Feeling disgusted with oneself, depressed, or very guilty after overeating

Binge-Eating Disorder twists and warps our relationships to our bodies, our social environments, and our God. Those who suffer with Binge-Eating Disorder struggle to see food as God’s loving provision, instead often seeing food as an enemy or a vice. Social occasions and family gatherings, meant by God to provide fellowship and connection, end up feeling like dangerous minefields. Bodies, gifts from God, temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), are seen through eyes of shame. These are lies that Binge-Eating Disorder tells. These lies pull those who struggle with BED away from being fully present to the joy in His provision that God intends for His people.

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Recovery and healing are possible with Binge-Eating Disorder. If you notice some of the markers in yourself, your child, or another loved one, consider the following:

- How we talk about food matters! Leave the moral judgments about food behind. Food is not inherently “sinful,” “cheating,” or “a guilty pleasure.” Food is nourishment. When you talk about food, especially around someone struggling with BED, talk about its other qualities. Is it satisfying? Is it delicious? Does it give your body the energy it needs?
- Notice physical cues. Is your stomach rumbling? Do you feel sleepy after that meal? Did that food help fuel you with just the right energy? Learn from the wisdom that God built right into our bodies. Our bodies are wiser about what we need than we typically notice. Slow down enough to learn.
- Our culture objectifies bodies, but God tells us that our bodies are not merely a product to present as pleasing to the world. Our bodies are temples; our bodies are gifts. Your value does not come from the way your body looks. Your body is a tool for living beautifully for the glory of God.
- Binge eating is often related to shame. Ask God to illuminate ways in which shame plays a role in unhealthy eating patterns.
- Every journey needs a guide. Pray. Consult a therapist. Seek out family support. Recovery is harder alone.



God empowers recovery from Binge-Eating Disorder through healing relationships with bodies, food, communities, and Himself. Psychotherapy is a vital component of this healing, alongside family support and prayer. In Romans 12:1, God urges us to present our bodies as living and holy sacrifices in worship. Working towards healing from Binge-Eating Disorder allows us to have the kind of loving, grateful stance towards our bodies that enables us to live worshipfully. God is gracious and compassionate towards us as we strive and move towards healing. If you struggle with Binge-Eating Disorder, call out to him. He will guide you in your journey toward wholeness. ■



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