

## **Bod for God?**

by Dr. Bryan Litfin

I recently ran across a media segment about a pastor who has come out with a new book called “Bod 4 God.” Steve Reynolds, pastor of Capital Bible Church in Virginia, has lost over a hundred pounds after he instituted a dieting system he says is taken from the pages of Scripture. “If you’re ready to get healthier and slimmer and grow closer to God at the same time, Bod4God is for you,” his web site proclaims.

I haven’t read Pastor Reynolds’ book so I can’t criticize it one way or another. I must confess, though, that the idea of discovering dieting principles in the Good Book struck me at first as very strange. The interesting truth is that fatness in the biblical world was a mark of blessing. In a society where food was scarce and famine was a real possibility, being fat was a sign that God had provided plenty to eat.

For example, Nehemiah 9:25 describes the Israelites’ blessing in the Promised Land by saying “So they ate, were filled and grew fat, and reveled in [God’s] great goodness.” Proverbs 15:30 says, “Bright eyes gladden the heart; Good news puts fat on the bones.” The book of Nehemiah even counsels the Jews to eat fatty meat on a holy day of celebration. Not many dieticians today would give that advice!

But as always, we must put verses like these in historical context. The diet of the ancient world was far healthier than ours today. Meat was a rarity, especially red meat. Most ancient people ate a grain and vegetable based diet out of necessity. Their foods were not processed or refined, and fats and sugars were minimal. Also, most people lived rigorous lives that included lots of manual labor. It probably wasn’t harmful to occasionally celebrate a feast with a delicious, well-marbled piece of meat. Having fat on the bones meant that a person had adequate food and wasn’t in danger of starvation. In balance, the Bible often criticizes overweight people as rich and powerful “fat cats” who have abused the poor to feed their own desires.

On the subject of diet, so much depends on motive. Are we obsessed with our outward appearance so we can be viewed as attractive in human terms, especially to the opposite sex? If so, that is pride. However, there is nothing wrong with respecting yourself enough not to have a potbelly or a bloated physique. Body weight is also an indicator of personal health. Obesity is linked to many physical ailments like heart disease, diabetes, and joint injuries. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, and we are to honor them as such by not letting them be obese.

Though the Bible does directly address dieting, it does teach that self-discipline is an important virtue. Spirit-aided discipline helps us become sanctified as we choose to deny the urges of the flesh – not just in areas like sexuality or laziness, but also the sin of gluttony. The same Christian man who would never dream of visiting a prostitute might still gorge himself on doughnuts or fast food. A woman who prides herself on being godly and spiritually mature might have a very unhealthy body and think nothing of it. Maybe it’s time to start considering what we eat as a spiritual issue. That’s the view from here. For Moody Radio, I’m Bryan Litfin.