Physical and Spiritual Practices to Metabolize Pain, Banish Shame, and Connect to God with Your Whole Self

Foreword by
JESS CONNOLLY

The Body Revelation

ALISA KEETON

FOUNDER OF REVELATION WELLNESS™

Throw out the negative programming from culture about weight loss, body shaming, and career dieting. *The Body Revelation* brings the true transformation we need. I trust no one more than Alisa Keeton to bring this solid word and get us moving in the right direction.

LISA WHITTLE, bestselling author, speaker, and podcast host

Only Alisa could take the topic of pain and turn it into a triumphant message of motivation and movement—in every sense of the word. Inside these pages, you'll be moved by both her love for the Lord and her insight into how God designed our bodies. This isn't just a book to read; it's a book to practice.

MICHELLE MYERS, cofounder of She Works His Way and author of the Conversational Commentary series

Ever wondered why you can't "just do it" when it comes to a healthy lifestyle? Or why your hard-fought results don't seem to last? Alisa Keeton knows exactly how you feel—and in *The Body Revelation*, she serves up proven solutions. With a motivating blend of scientific research, biblical wisdom, and true-life stories (plus super practical action steps at the end of each chapter), *The Body Revelation* is not just a good book to read. It actually has the power to be the best book you will ever *do*.

JODIE BERNDT, bestselling author of *Praying the Scriptures for Your Life*

I've said for a long time that what happens in our souls, happens in our cells. We're fearfully and wonderfully made by the God who loves us! If you're ready to dig in, face your fears, and activate your faith, you're ready for *The Body Revelation*. Renewal and restoration await those who read slowly and prayerfully and are willing to apply what they've learned. Alisa Keeton is far more than a fitness expert; she's a healing and wholeness expert, biblically grounded and profoundly insightful. Having worked in the fitness industry for over a decade, I must say that she's one of the most balanced and biblical leaders out there. I loved this book.

SUSIE LARSON, bestselling author, talk radio host, and national speaker

This book! Oh, the convergence of heart, soul, and body—in the form of a sage friend to hold our hand and speak into the things that lie underneath our skin and yet have so much power over our walk with God and the way we see the world. In this satisfying read, Alisa Keeton is our sage friend, gently inviting us into a new way of seeing God's heart and our bodies, and how they intersect. I'm so grateful for this message that Alisa carries with such passion.

SARA HAGERTY, bestselling author of *Unseen* and *Adore*

With so many bad messages about our good bodies floating around, I'm grateful for Alisa's voice in the world. *The Body Revelation* is informative, practical, and a huge source of encouragement. You can almost audibly hear her cheering you on through every page.

JJ HELLER, singer-songwriter

As a psychotherapist, I am captivated by the mind-heart-body connection. As Alisa brilliantly articulates, it's not simply diet and exercise that lead to health and healing. It's understanding how your story has shaped your wounds and led you to protect yourself in understandable yet unhelpful ways. *The Body Revelation* contains a wealth of wisdom, grounded in spiritual truth, that informs principles and practices that will not simply change your body but change your life. This is not a book to simply read. This is a book to practice—because it's in the practice that we are changed. I am personally grateful for Alisa's courage, vulnerability, and leadership. I know you will be too.

NICOLE ZASOWSKI, licensed marriage and family therapist and author of *What If It's Wonderful?*

The Body Revelation looks like a book, but it feels like a workout—a really good workout. This book is not hard to read, but it will be hard to forget. Alisa blends and stirs together a rich combination of stories, insights, information, and application. This book is a good meal and a great workout. It will stir your desire, your appetite, and your hope for things that are deep, real, and good in your heart, mind, and body. This kind of

transformation is what people are seeking, searching for in therapy. We have seen, firsthand, the trajectory of people's lives changed. She writes like a good but dangerous friend. She extends a compelling and disruptive invitation to work out and work through our personal history, our real hurts, and our best hopes. It is a beautiful invitation.

DR. DON AND RENEE WORCESTER, therapist and spiritual coach, speakers, and ministry leaders

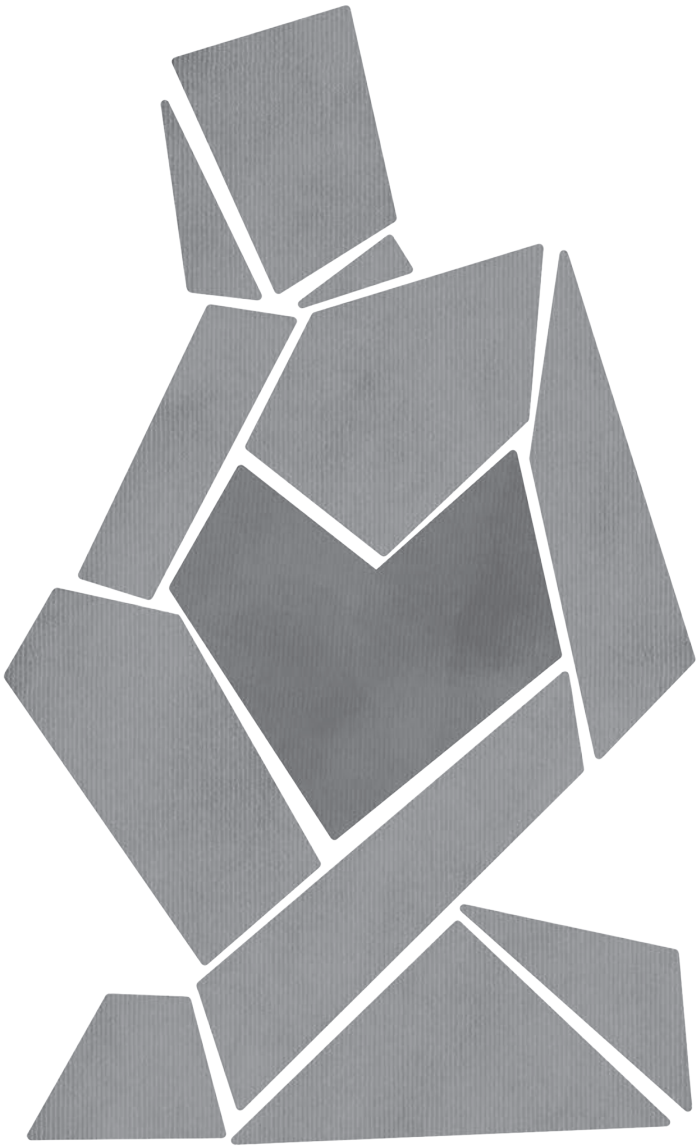
Alisa Keeton is a gift to this generation and a much-needed voice to the church. For too long in the West we have separated the heart and mind from the body, and it has caused us to miss out on the healing and deep intimacy the Lord has for us. This book is a game changer with deep insight and vulnerable stories. This is not a "feel good in your body" book but rather a liturgy of how we can grow deeper with Jesus by welcoming our bodies into the story. There's something about moving our bodies while rehearsing the truth of God's Word that transforms us. Alisa goes before us and walks with us as a teacher, preacher, and trainer in becoming formed more into the image of God.

ALYSSA BETHKE, author of *Satisfied*

No one in my life has encouraged me more in my journey with my body than Alisa. She has continually pointed me to the things that are true about my body and the One who created it. She has helped me see that God created me as a whole person—body, mind, spirit—and that all three need my attention. This book is one you will want to pass around to all your friends. Take in each chapter slowly and allow your thoughts to marinate in it. New patterns will develop. New kind words will be said to yourself by yourself! New mindsets will be created. I want this book to get into the hands of every woman who has ever—or will ever—think her body is bad.

JAMIE IVEY, bestselling author and host of *The Happy Hour with Jamie Ivey* podcast

The Body Revelation



ALISA KEETON

The Body Revelation

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The Body Revelation: Physical and Spiritual Practices to Metabolize Pain, Banish Shame, and Connect to God with Your Whole Self

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The stories in this book are about real people and real events, but names have been changed and some details changed to protect the privacy of people involved.

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The Cooldown

FOREWORD

My story with Alisa is one for the ages.

I've played it back a million times to make sure I'm not exaggerating, and here are the broad strokes:

I was a woman who desperately needed wisdom about my body. What I thought I wanted was to lose weight; what I needed was truth and healing. I thought I wanted to change my life by changing my body; Jesus wanted to redeem my life by mending my relationship with my body. And in a move that I can only imagine was led by the Holy Spirit, I sent Alisa (who was no more than an acquaintance at the time) an email in the middle of the night asking for help. She responded the next day.

Alisa immediately informed me that while she would not promise to give me what I wanted, she'd be faithful to walk with me as God gave me what I needed. And the rest is history.

She coached me, corrected me, taught me, challenged me—all with large doses of love and compassion. And there was no going backward after that: The freedom train was rolling, the Spirit of God took over, and before I knew it, I loved my body more, I loved God more, and I was more keenly aware of just how loved I was.

I don't know why you picked up this book. Maybe you want to lose weight, maybe you are sick of being sick. Perhaps the persistent pain in your life has you at the breaking point, or you may just be curious about the intersection of faith and your body.

Here's my warning: Buckle up. Stay present. Keep going. You are safe, even if you feel that your shame and pain are very much in danger of defeating you.

Alisa is still the kind, wise, compassionate guide that she was for me. Maybe you've tried—maybe you've even had some success at—making healthier choices but still feel stuck. Alisa will show you how to partner with your body to begin processing the pain that has kept you trapped. She will teach you how to move your body and quiet your mind in ways that will bring lasting healing and better health. God *is* going to use this book to change your life.

Alisa has structured *The Body Revelation* around the typical parts of a Revelation Wellness training session. Come curious for the warm-up, enjoy going all in during the workout, and then watch God seal in life change during the cooldown. You're never going to be the same again, though it might not be in the ways you expect.

Your body is a revelation of Kingdom proportion, and God is going to reveal Himself to you right where you're at . . . in the good body you're in.

Trust me, this book is for you. It's for me too.

Your friend in the fight,

JESS CONNOLLY

Author of *Breaking Free from Body Shame* and *You Are the Girl for the Job*

INTRODUCTION

Moving the Bad Out of Your Good Body

Some nights my father didn't come home.

The next evening, dinner would be tense. For long minutes, the scratching of metal forks and knives against porcelain plates was the only sound. I kept my head down, feeling the icy chill from the cold shoulder my mom was giving my dad.

He was determined to pretend that all was well. "Hey, honey, did I tell you I'm going to have to travel again next week for work?"

I slunk in my chair, seething with quiet rage. I would eat a hunk of Mom's casserole as fast as possible so I could run out the door and hop on the banana seat of my sunflower yellow, one-speed bike.

When I was a child, the sense of feeling small, unheard, and unseen in my family always seemed to dissipate when I went outside and moved my body. Moving made me feel big, free, and full of possibilities. It also allowed me to forget about how much my parents fought. I would pop wheelies on my bike or roller-skate like a disco queen, and somehow that just made me feel better.

By the time I was a teenager, any illusion I had of coming from a happy home with two parents who madly loved each other and laughed with their children at dinnertime was disappearing. When I needed a hug, I received a lecture. When I needed to be heard, I was asked to do the dishes. When I needed to be celebrated just for being me, I was told to clean my room.

Disappointment, loneliness, and sadness burned deep inside me like a fire, and angry outbursts were my only release. Some people choose to keep their feelings swept under the rug, and some people, like me, choose to light the rug on fire.

Then at fourteen, I attended my first group aerobics class with my friend Julie. I laced up a pair of white Keds, threw on my favorite T-shirt and some stinky gym shorts, and headed for Fitness Source, the gym at a nearby strip mall.

That initial workout seemed like choreographed chaos to me, but during cooldown I lay very still on the brown carpet as an incredibly warm feeling of comfort and peace washed over me. I had never felt this feeling before. Not with this intensity. It went beyond the feeling of freedom I had when I rode my bike or skated through the neighborhood. My eyes pooled with tears as I lay there gently stretching and wondered, *What just happened?* Perhaps it was the endorphin rush after shimmying and shaking for an hour in a crowd of middle-aged moms, or maybe it was simply pent-up teenage energy looking for a release. But whatever it was, at that moment I had the profound sense of hope dislodging my anger and sadness. I could feel it in my bones. It was as if something deep inside my body was telling me everything was going to be all right.

Whatever brought it on, I was hooked. With money from babysitting, I purchased my first pair of Reebok aerobic high-tops, bought the hot pink spandex leotard with matching belt (which I never understood, since it's not as if a tight leotard has a fighting chance of falling down), and paid the monthly dues to secure my place on a 1,500-square-foot of brown carpet with a record player in the corner. For just an hour a week, in a room filled with moms sporting colorful 80s makeup and crimped hair in scrunchies, I found a place I could call my own. For a teenage girl trying to figure out who she was, what she wanted, and where she was going, it was there I first felt safe to work these things out. It was there I began to experience a deeper connection between my heartache and my moving body. It was there I felt empowered in my own skin. I learned how to harness the fire of my teenage angst with a good calorie burn while feeling a sense of belonging. Instead of trying to tiptoe on eggshells around my mom's emotional outbursts and parents' exacting standards, here I could

fumble freely, fall, or even step out of sync with the others and not be scolded. Mistakes were expected and trying again was celebrated.

My passion for learning how to move my body and gain strength—while feeling a sense of emotional relief—continued to grow. As a college sophomore, I spotted a flyer in the student union about a class on becoming a group fitness instructor. If I could help other people feel as safe and empowered in relationship to their bodies through fitness as I had become, I knew I had found my calling. By the time I graduated from college, I had a waiting list of clients who wanted to work with me. And because of that, I felt "loved," sought out, and wanted. I was truly living my dream. I was sure I'd moved far, far away from my dysfunctional home life—plus I was helping others!

When a fitness trainer I worked with told me she thought I'd be a real contender in fitness shows, I began bodybuilding, hoping I'd finally discovered the key to filling the void inside me. Before long, I was bringing home trophies. On the outside, I appeared to have it all together—more money than my fellow graduates who hustled in their nine-to-five, plenty of recognition and awards for a killer physique. But deep inside, my dissatisfaction continued to build.

Despite my parents' poor track record, I thought a romantic relationship might heal my aching heart. Yet almost every one of my boyfriends came and went, telling me "I just don't think I can give you what you want" as they broke things off. Then at twenty-six, I got married. I covered my pain in a white wedding dress and walked down the aisle and into the arms of an unsuspecting man.

I married Simon expecting that the love and commitment of one person would heal my hurts and quench the fire that burned within me. Instead, I quickly realized that nothing exposed my chronic dissatisfaction more than marriage. My husband's desire to climb the corporate ladder kicked into overdrive right after our wedding. Instead of candlelight dinners followed by snuggling with him while watching movies on the couch, I was home alone. And when he was home, Simon was a man of few words or—more accurately—a man of no words who had nothing left to give me after a long day at work. My growing discontentment fueled my expectations even more. And like a woman going to an empty well, I kept demanding

more from Simon than he was able to give. My irrational emotional outbursts and my tendency to give my husband the cold shoulder in our warm bed was starting to feel painfully familiar. Turns out, the pain of my childhood—feeling unwanted by an unfaithful father, unseen by a mother with fragile emotions, and unheard in a household with no room for my voice—threatened my longing for the family of my dreams.

The family I never had.

And there was no way I was going to fail at that like my parents did.

As a fitness professional in pursuit of good health, I knew something deep inside me was sick and needed help. My soul was crying out for the unconditional love and attention I lacked in my youth. For years I had done everything I could think of to push past the pain I'd grown up with. I'd tried to sweat it out, romance it out, and reason it out. Nothing worked.

Getting Unstuck: Moving from the Inside Out

Then God showed up—or rather I did. I'd heard about Him, of course, but I hadn't given Him much thought until my friend Shawn challenged me to attend the church where she'd recently met God. After some resistance, I went. I was so desperate and my heart so brittle and broken that I allowed Jesus, the Living Water, to seep in. He was coming to me in my pain but had no intention of leaving me there. God was about to turn everything I knew about fitness upside down and inside out. He understood that I needed more than simply changing the shape of my body or taking another lap around the gym. He knew a daily walk of faith with Him would restore my heart.

But He wasn't going to toss my love for movement aside. I had no idea that when I placed my trust in Jesus, I gave Him not only my heart, but my mind and body too. My first book, *The Wellness Revelation*, taught people how to look at their pursuit of good health holistically with God at the center. Readers were encouraged to consider how their relationship with God affected their relationship to themselves, other people, and other created things—like food.

After that book came out, I had conversations with many community

and faith leaders. As a way of affirming my message that in Christ we are able to live a healthy and whole life, some well-intentioned people quoted 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." While I love this passage, I noticed that it was often stated like a Christian version of the Nike slogan "Just do it!" with little love or understanding for those who habitually struggle to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Yes, it's true; we are called to honor God with our bodies. But wouldn't we agree that if people could "just do it," they would have done it by now? It's not as if anybody wants to stay sick or stuck in a cycle of trying and failing. Heavy expectations are the last thing people need when they know they are falling short.

While *The Wellness Revelation* helped many people, it made me aware that it is possible to believe in God and either do all the right things or not do any of them and still feel stuck. The root cause of such disintegrated living needs to be identified and dealt with. I suggest that the absence of change and distance from God may not be due to a lack of willpower or love for Him but to our lack of awareness of how pain has disrupted our body-brain connection.

Years ago God let me in on a secret—how the bodies He's given us are useful for metabolizing, not just food, but also mental and emotional pain. God's view of health and fitness includes partnering with the natural healing processes of our body, activated through physical activity, God's Word, and spiritual practices, to metabolize pain. In *The Body Revelation*, we'll discover how to harness our bodies' natural healing properties and access tools to help us overcome rather than be overwhelmed by adversity. By maintaining a strong body-brain connection during adverse moments, the hurtful experiences of the past and the challenging moments in our future can be used as actual fuel—the energy we need—to live the lives God destined for us.

This book is less about finding the right eating plan and doing the right workout and more about doing the patient and kind work of becoming aware of the pain that disrupts a healthy body-brain connection and keeps us cycling in an unhealthy pattern of obsessing over or neglecting

our bodies. By applying God's Word to physical and spiritual practices, we can renew our minds and live fully connected to ourselves for the purpose of moving toward the promise and purpose God has for us.

Please note: *The Body Revelation* is designed to start you on a journey toward health and wholeness, but it is not intended as a substitute for medical advice. It's important to talk with your own physician if you plan to make significant changes to your diet and exercise routines. Also, if you're looking for a quick fix, this isn't the book for you. We will be patient and kind with ourselves because that's what love does. And it's the love of God that changes everything!

Working the Plan

By the end of this book, you will stop trying to change yourself into a better version of you. You will know how to partner with your body to maintain peace by staying connected to yourself and God. As you learn to metabolize your pain, using movement and gospel-centered self-care spiritual practices that incorporate and activate God's Word, you will encounter through your body the God who loves you, knows you, and wants only the best for you. His love will change you, slowly and steadily, because slow and steady is the way to all sustainable change. And when hard moments come, you will overcome rather than be overwhelmed so you can stay free to become the person God created you to be.

Slow and steady is the way to all sustainable change.

While doing this work of reintegration, it's important that you feel safe. And one way safety occurs is through a plan. Every safe and effective class works through three phases: the warm-up, the workout, and—the best part (if you ask me)—the cooldown. Each phase of our workout time together will include two goals broken into two stages, all designed to help us metabolize the pain our bodies are holding. Here's what our workout will look like:

The Warm-Up
Stage 1: Just Surviving
Stage 2: Recognizing Your Pain

The Workout
Stage 3: Expressing Your Energy
Stage 4: Humbling Yourself

The Cooldown
Stage 5: Staying the Course
Stage 6: Taking Ownership

Each stage includes four bite-sized, digestible chapters concluding with a reflective, self-care section titled "Metabolize." Please don't skip this section. It's one thing to read and get useful information, but knowledge alone doesn't change a person. It's acting on that information that rewires a broken body-brain connection. It's doing new things that brings about internal and external change.

Each Metabolize section includes Mind, Mouth, and Move subsections. You will be asked to use your mind to answer a few questions related to that chapter. You will then use your mouth to pray and connect to God. Finally, I will invite you to engage in some healthy habits and doable physical movement to help you connect your thoughts and feelings about the things of God with your body. These Mind, Mouth, and Move sections are very important to making real body-brain connected change.

Moving your body is a critical part of metabolizing your pain. As I've worked with countless students over the years, I've seen that when our bodies move, our minds seem to receive God's Word with less resistance. I've lost count of the breakthrough aha moments that have occurred for my students while moving their bodies over the years. Here's how I think this works: Physical exercise engages the limbic system in our brain, which is where our instinctual flight, fight, or freeze response occurs. With the limbic brain productively occupied, higher reasoning seems to occur more easily.[1] In addition, the increase in oxygenated blood flow helps us think more clearly and boosts our mood. All of this makes it easier to access and

process thoughts and feelings that have felt stuck in our body, keeping us trapped in poor habit loops.

Our bodies are how love makes its way into the world. More than building muscles and minimizing fat, we need bodies that are fit to carry love to others; for example, by carrying groceries up a flight of stairs to a single mom in need or by being rested and mentally sharp enough to patiently help our kids with their homework. In this book we will train to love God, ourselves, and others—all of which glorify God. His love holds all things together, mobilizes us to love in word and deed, and is the core strength of a healthy mind-body connection.

At its heart, this is a fitness and wellness book, written by me with guidance from the Holy Spirit, with one goal in mind: to bring freedom to captives of pain. Please don't skip the sweaty parts. Because I know that many of you will encounter a radical change in how you feel when moving your body with this new perspective, you may want more ways to move while renewing your mind with God's Word. At the back of the book you will find additional links to workouts and resources from Revelation Wellness, the nonprofit ministry I founded in 2011. Fitness and wellness are our ways of spreading the Good News of God's love to good bodies around the world. If you're looking for a coach to lead you through this book or a small group to go through the book with, be sure to check our website to find a Revelation Wellness instructor near you.

Don't just read this book. Do this book! Read, then join me in the training to metabolize your pain. I will be with you every step of the way. God has designed a wonderful life for you that lies just beyond the boundaries of your pain.

So let's train!

The Warm-Up

STAGE 1

Just Surviving

There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me." And he divided his property between them.

LUKE 15:11-12

CHAPTER 1

THE FIRE OF YOUR DESIRE

Up and down the stairs she went.

It was a sight I had never seen before. Whenever I came home from school, I could count on finding my mom working hard somewhere around the house. Whether she was feverishly ironing our clothes with a can of spray starch clutched in her hand or scrubbing the cold Spanish floor tiles on her hands and knees with a bucket of Pine-Sol, she was always working hard at something. It was Mom's way of surviving another day.

But this type of hard work was a new sight for my seven-year-old eyes. Why was Mom sweating so heavily and breathing so hard, going up the stairs and coming right back down? She didn't even have a load of laundry in her hands! Then it clicked—my mom was exercising! Gasp! She was willingly subjecting herself to physical work that had no benefit to our family as cleaning the house or preparing a meal would.

This was 1978, and moving our bodies wasn't at the forefront of people's minds like it is now. The days of wearing yoga pants in public and purchasing green juice concoctions at the mall were in the distant future. But

thanks to a few sweatband- and stretchy pants–wearing pioneers like Jack LaLanne and Richard Simmons, the message of reshaping the human body was beginning to take hold. The methods were simple: diet, exercise, and the calories-in-calories-out formula. It certainly had grabbed the attention of my thirty-year-old mom, who wanted her twenty-year-old body back.

Then one day a couple of months later, it all stopped.

Maybe Mom hung up her sneakers after another screaming blowout with my dad or maybe it was another morning when she woke up to realize that her husband hadn't come home the night before. Mom's continual disappointment with her husband, the man who was supposed to love and cherish her, was depleting her energy, reinforcing the lies of her youth, and overpowering any hope for change. Mom hadn't been caring for her body as an act of kindness toward herself. Her only motivation had been to whip her body into shape in hopes of regaining my father's love.

Each time she woke up in the middle of the night to find the other side of the bed empty, the message of being unchosen, unworthy, and unattractive grew stronger. *You're worthless; just give it all up already.* Taking control of her post-baby body was not enough to hold my father's affections. She must have decided, Why bother? And just like so many other women who wake from their fairytale dream of someone rescuing them from their destitute castle of pain, my mom had woken to the nightmare of dashed hopes and unmet desires.

Over the years I watched my mom physically shut down. She traded in burning calories by running up and down the stairs to more bingeing of calorie-laden foods. Food numbed her pain and became her comfort, her go-to friend. It was the early 1980s and the processed food industry was in high gear. Packaged goodies, potato chips, and TV dinners promised pleasure and convenience. This revolution in ready-to-eat food made "friends" available to her in the pantry, at the corner fast-food joint, convenience store, and nearly everywhere she went.

It was as if Mom slowly began to build a barricade around her body with food. She used it to insulate herself from the emotional pain of the world and the physical touch of my father.

The weight of her disappointment started in her heart, unseen, but eventually made its way onto her body to be seen and judged by all. Each

excess pound compounded the message of shame she already carried in her heart, making it harder for her to move and breathe deeply.

Why Pain Must Be Processed

My mom was stuck, but she was safe. Surviving and safe.

You can't bury or evict hurt and suffering; it must be metabolized or, to put it another way, processed. I define pain as any life experience that made you feel bad, sad, mad, or scared and that, whether you know it or not, has left a lasting negative effect on you. Let me ask you a question: What if a bad experience you suffered, childhood neglect you endured, shame you carry, or hurtful words you absorbed not only got stuck in your head but in your body too? Your body has been with you through all the hard times, sorting, filing, and storing the energy of your pain in order to help you live through another day. And although your body is efficient at internalizing your pain, it isn't efficient in actually dealing with it.

You can't bury or evict pain; it must be metabolized.

Research shows that when the brain receives information combined with a negative emotional charge—as when a loved one dies, someone you love's been hurt, or someone you love hurts you—your nervous system can become overwhelmed.[1] This is known as a trauma response, and in these moments, the body-mind connection that usually helps you purposely move through life stops working optimally. Instead, it simply tries to help you survive the moment and stay safe. Bessel van der Kolk, MD, respected trauma researcher and author of the bestselling book *The Body Keeps the Score*, says, "Traumatized people chronically feel unsafe inside their bodies: The past is alive in the form of gnawing interior discomfort. Their bodies are constantly bombarded by visceral warning signs, and, in an attempt to control these processes, they often become expert at ignoring their gut feelings and in numbing awareness of what is played out inside. They learn to hide from their selves."[2]

In essence, your body can feel more like an enemy than a friend since it becomes the storage room for your pain. Whether you lived through adversity when you were five or thirty-five, you experienced these upsetting moments, not just emotionally or cognitively, but with your whole body, your whole self.[3] This "bad stuff" stuck in your good body is not your fault, and it can be moved out. In this book we are going to move it out together.

Pain from your past may be getting in the way of healthy living for you if you find yourself:

1. blaming others when anything bad happens to you
2. harboring unresolved shame
3. assuming you are the problem in every situation

Each of these actions can help you feel safe, but hiding out in these go-to emotional shelters can never free you to be who God made you to be. I should know: I was once the reigning queen of assigning blame. It was a way of projecting my pain onto someone else. But the weight of criticizing everyone else became far too heavy a burden for me to carry. Yes, like my mom, I learned it could keep me feeling safe and in control, but it always backfired and pushed me further from the true love—unconditional, patient, and kind—that I longed for.

Mom lived with one primary desire burning inside of her. It's a desire we all share—to be loved. Our hunger to be loved includes the need to be seen, heard, valued, and chosen. We all look for someone who is committed to being faithful to us in sickness and in health, in good times and bad times, until death do we part.

When it comes to that desire, I've got some good news and bad news.

First, the bad news: Our desire for love (to be seen, heard, valued, and chosen) will never be filled by another human being. Every person's love is temporal and will fail us, just as every weight-loss diet we've tried works for a while but can't be sustained forever.

Now the good news: This love we long for can be found in Jesus Christ. He is fully God and fully man, and He put on flesh and came to earth, not to condemn us but to rescue us from the endless search for the love we once had but lost.

Placing our faith in Jesus helps us put everything, including our desires, back in working order. He helps us determine whether our desires come from God or derive from our pain. According to Jeremiah 17:9, the human heart is "deceitful above all things . . . who can understand it?" God, the one who gave you a heart and a body, understands it. When we give Him our hearts' desires, He empowers us to break free from choices that drive present, past, and future pain.

When Desire Causes Pain

A desire, according to my dictionary, is a "conscious impulse toward something that promises enjoyment or satisfaction."[4]

At our core, each of us is a pleasure seeker because God is the author of pleasure. He seems to have hardwired a desire for enjoyment into each one of us so that we might find Him. In fact, desire, like hunger, is a very good thing. Satisfying both is necessary to our survival.

In the case of Adam and Eve, desire and hunger looked identical when a serpent came calling. These first two people, living as one, were in perfect relationship with God and creation until their desire for something that looked pleasing to their eyes and stomachs overpowered their devotion to God. Led away by a lie, they gave in to the desire for something pleasurable apart from Him.

When we desire things that God doesn't, we come to ruin:

> For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.
>
> PHILIPPIANS 3:19-20

As a child, I saw this play out in my own family. My mom believed the lie that a man's love would bring her unending pleasure, while my father believed the lie that the love of many women would satisfy him. When God isn't the source of our pleasure, the one we look to determine our desires, we run into problems and bring pain to ourselves and others.

James 4:1 says, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" (NIV). According to James, it's not our lack of faith in God that causes problems among us; it's the desires we feel we must satisfy. Like my mom, who depended on a man to rid her of the rejection she felt as a child, we may carry around unmet desires, making unhealthy choices in an effort to satisfy our needs. My father did the same thing. Both my parents misplaced and misused desire.

When we misplace our desires, we look for them to be met by other people or things who may be unwilling or incapable of fulfilling those needs. And in the misuse of an unmet desire, we either express our pain by explosively unloading our disappointment onto others or we repress our feelings by burying them deep inside. We often are totally unaware of how the explosion or repression of our feelings affects other areas of our lives, including our physical health.

Author and mental health specialist Louise B. Miller points out that "losing your temper affects your cardiac health, it can shorten your life when sustained. Anger also compromises your immune system."[5] And a study from the University of Texas found that when we avoid expressing our emotions, we exhaust our self-control, which can actually strengthen our negative emotions in the future. This, in turn, can lead to many physical and mental maladies.[6]

Those are our unhealthy choices: Explode and oppress others, or do nothing and repress ourselves. Either way, everybody pays the price of pain due to misplaced desires. But there is a God-given way to fulfill desire: Instead of exploding or repressing, we can learn to take our hurts to God and process our unmet desires with Him. In this book you will learn how to put pain to good use as you discover ways to develop and maintain a strong body and brain connection, which will strengthen your faith and abiding love for God.

As we've said, desire isn't necessarily bad or a cause of pain. Desire is God-given and the way He uses us to bring more of His Kingdom to earth. We hope or desire for things like a great marriage, friendship and companionship, world peace, good health, clothes that fit, less stress, and even more likes on Instagram. None of these are destructive in themselves.

It's when what we want usurps our desire to know and enjoy God and to fulfill His commands that they become ungodly. Such desires are sinful (misplaced and misused), and they cause pain. Desiring to lose weight or gain muscle aren't bad things—it's when we expect these desires, once they are met, to satisfy us and give us what only God can that we can get or cause hurt. It's when we desire something more than God that our desires become destructive.

Desiring, seeking, and serving someone or something other than God is what the Bible calls idolatry. Idolatry fuels unmet, misplaced, and misused desires and contributes to physical sickness, weight loss, weight gain, disease, and dis-ease. Most tragically, idolatry results in disconnection from God, the Source of Life.

When Our Desire Causes God Pain

Throughout this book, we'll be returning to a story that Jesus told in an attempt to teach some tax collectors and sinners about God's Kingdom. This story centers on a wealthy father and his two sons, who seemed to have everything they could possibly need: a nice home with a warm bed and three square meals a day; important jobs working for the family business; seats of honor at the lavish parties their father threw. But the younger son's desire to explore the world outside his father's gates was so strong that it caused him to do a scandalous thing. He asked his father for his inheritance before his father's death: "Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me" (Luke 15:12). That was the equivalent of saying, "Father, you're dead to me."

How does a young man who seemingly had it all decide that life could be even better? Was this son more interested in life in the big city than on the farm? Was he suffering from a severe case of the grass is always greener? Or had he made friends with people who appeared to live more footloose and fancy-free? Did these friends give him a hard time and try to make him feel less than for having more? Or did this son always battle with a deep-seated root of insecurity that kept him from feeling satisfied with life? Jesus doesn't tell us the cause of this son's request, but we do know the effect. The younger son's desire to leave his father's presence grew so strong that

he couldn't wait for his father to die. Just imagine the pain this must have caused his father's heart.

Before we judge this son too harshly, however, we must remember that we all suffer from the young son's condition because of the years we lived outside our Father's gates. Prior to putting our faith in God, we live as orphans on the earth, roaming the world looking for value, for something to "eat" to satisfy our inner ache. Our belief in God takes us off the streets and inside our Father's home and care. We are no longer orphans but chosen and adopted sons and daughters of a Father who lacks nothing and freely gives us all things.

We all come to God dragging a duffle bag filled with desires. These wants are everything that people outside our Father's gates tell us we should pursue—like the perfect body, the marriage of our dreams—and things we feel we must offer the world—like dazzling talents, skills, or abilities. If we leave this bag of desires unchecked at the door of our Father's house, we end up using them to decorate our room in our Father's house. We place these objects on our shelves like collectible figurines, reminding us daily of what we want our Father to give us.

Like the Prodigal Son, we cause pain to our Father's heart when we elevate things of this world above Him. When we think we can find life's enjoyment and satisfaction in other people, places, or things, we hurt God's heart. It's crazy to think we have the power to cause God pain, but if you've ever loved someone who didn't love you in return, you've experienced it too.

As we come back to the story of the Prodigal Son in later chapters, we'll consider what happened to him as he wandered away and what finally brought him home, back to the father whose heart was always full of love for his wondering-wandering child.

Our inability to desire and process pain in a healthy way can interfere, not only with our need for love, but with our ability to receive love. Needing implies a physical posture of grasping with our hands, while to receive, we must allow our hands to slacken and open. When we receive God's love, we soften our grip, stop striving, and drop our duffle bag. We entrust our lives fully to His care. Doing what He says feels like a delight, not a duty.

Many Christians say they love God from a posture of desiring protection

and deliverance from their pain, but fewer love God because they have received His love with open hands, expecting healing from and transformation of their pain.

I'm about to say something that may sound provocative but is both biblical and true: God desires to love the hell out of us. He wants to expose and evict the dark places inside us—fear, shame, guilt, rejection, condemnation, insecurities, gluttony, pride, sexual immorality, selfishness, and greed. These are not in line with God's nature, character, or His Word, so they no longer need to be part of our reality. They lead to wrong desires that hurt us and cause more pain. But when we choose God, we choose His perfect, refining love. God's desire is to transform us until there's nothing left but His love with breath, bones, and muscle, covered in skin. Once He clears out the dangerous desires we carry inside of us, we are free to become the people we were meant to be.

> There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.
>
> 1 JOHN 4:18, NIV

God's love is not meant to just be a theology for our mind; it's meant to penetrate every cell of our being. With our renewed mind and joy-filled bodies, we are empowered to share His love with others. Our theology should influence our biology until we have a great biography—a story that glorifies our God who makes all things new.

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The only thing that can heal us, teach us, and empower us to change is God's love. In Christ, we are new creations. We are empowered by God's Spirit living inside of us to walk away from our old nature and unhealthy,

co-dependent desires. We are free to stop dragging around our duffle bag of desires, filled with everything the world tells us we deserve or need, whether another sleeve of Oreo cookies, a bottle of wine, or six-pack abs and a flat stomach.

It's possible to love God but never let His love truly change us. For the sake of God's goodness, let Jesus love the pain, hurt, and shame out of you. That's what this book is here to help you to do! Admittedly, trying to make changes for the better, especially when it comes to health, is never easy. In fact, it can be downright crazy-making. The adversity you've experienced has negatively affected your brain's health, making it difficult to think clearly with your mind, stay hopeful in your heart, and make better choices for your body—like whether to take your body to the pantry for a snack or take it on a walk around the block and talk with God.

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My mom never learned what to do with her unmet desires and disappointments. She never learned how to partner her body of hurt with God's grace to be transformed into a new creation. Instead, with Jesus buried in her heart, she set up camp in the battleground of her pain, got stuck, and grew cold and bitter. But this doesn't have to happen to you.

That is why, though this book is designed to help you understand how pain affects your relationship with your body, we have no intention of remembering the hurt we've experienced in order to get stuck there. We will not replay the tapes of what was done, not done, or said over and over again in our heads. We will not glamorize, glorify, or build monuments to our pain. The goal instead is to learn how to stay present in your body and exercise the authority you have over it, by feeling what you feel, observing what you're thinking, and reorganizing that information until it supports your ability to move through life's pain checkpoints and into the life Christ died to give you.

You no longer have to remain in the pain of misplaced and unmet

desires. You can release the bad stuff that's gotten stuck in your body. During my experience with thousands of students over the years, I've learned that getting unstuck from the dis-ease in our body isn't something we just need more faith for. A faith that moves us from surviving to thriving and living with purpose must be active or, according to James, it is not faith at all: "So then faith that doesn't involve action is phony" (James 2:17, TPT).

Be sure to do the work below to start metabolizing your pain. Soon you will be more able to think, feel, and choose in line with what God says is best for you.

Metabolize

Reading good information alone doesn't change a person. Only acting on that information will bring change to your body, brain, and life.

We will metabolize your pain using the three *M*s: Mind. Mouth. Move. The Mind section will help you think new things. The Mouth section is for you to declare and say a new thing. And the Move portion will ask you to do a new thing with your body. Thinking, saying, and doing are three essentials to trigger neuroplasticity—your brain's ability to adapt, change, and form new connections. Our goal is to strengthen healthy neural pathways, which will help bring vitality to your body. Improving your brain health while using your body as a tool is the method you will use to metabolize your pain.

Mind

1. What life desires leave you feeling chronically disappointed and cause you pain?
2. How has the pain of unmet desires affected your mind (thoughts), soul (what you desire), and body?
3. List some areas of pain in your life that could use Jesus' transforming love.

Mouth

In each chapter, please try praying the prayer out loud. The goal of this book is to embody faith. Use your vocal cords to let your ears hear what

your heart desires to be true. Prayers don't have to feel real to be effective. Faith makes prayer effective, not our feelings.

God, my desires have brought me joy and distress. You have placed desires within me in order to bring good things into the earth, but I struggle to make these things happen without causing hurt to myself or others. I know I need to desire You more than anything or anyone else, but that idea seems foreign to me and if I'm honest, boring and unsatisfactory. Come and replace with your love anything that keeps me from desiring You. Help me to receive Your love until my mind, will, and emotions mirror You, for then my body will live in good health. Amen.

Move

Begin to move your body with the primary objective of processing your pain rather than changing the shape of your body. If you are able, get outside and go for a walk while listening to the short audio recording I designed for you. You will move your body at a moderate pace, feeling your blood flow and breathing rate increase as you listen to my voice coach you through some of the concepts you learned in this chapter (and chapters to follow). The goal is to get in your body by getting in touch with what your body is feeling physically and sensationally in order to process the pain and get unstuck.

Each Move recording is twenty minutes long. The goal is to appropriately challenge yourself with kind, mind-renewing movement, not an extreme calorie burn. If you're prone to obsess over your body's fitness level and always wear a fitness tracker, you may want to take it off. You're not trying to "crush" a workout. I want to get you back in your body in a gentle, curious, and kind way. If you've been neglecting your body and it's been a while since you've moved, don't be afraid if your breathing feels a little challenged, but also try to avoid pushing yourself to the point that you are breathless.

Whether or not you regularly exercise, this way of moving will likely be a totally new experience and a key step to begin processing your pain.

We are all in this together!

Find the link to the Move audio that goes with this chapter here: https://www.revelationwellness.org/tbr/move/.

If you find new joy in moving your body this way (which I am certain you will), be sure to access more kind, mind-renewing movement available to you on page 274.