

YOUR

*Embracing a Body-Positive Mindset*

GOOD

*in a Perfection-Focused World*

BODY

JENNIFER TAYLOR WAGNER

Engaging and a must-read for all women! This book is candid, real, and inspiring. Jennifer's own weight loss journey helps readers discover their *why* through personal reflection and action steps.

**SHARON McQUEEN**, pastor, Family Life Church

*Your Good Body* is one word: extraordinary. Jennifer has charged herself with bringing awareness to our unconscious destructive thoughts and breathing life into loving the journey we're on. This book challenges your thoughts and the relationship you have with yourself. When you start reading, Jennifer is just an author, but when you finish, she's a friend you want to invite to your house for tea. Absolutely *love* this book.

**CHARMAINE COUSINS, PhD**

After recent weight loss, this book helped me release the mental and emotional weight that I didn't even know I was carrying. I now know that I have a *good body!*

**PAIGE LOEHR**, author of *The Roots in a Woman*

Jennifer is the voice that every woman—whether 16, 46, or 60—needs in her head! Stop letting the scale boss you or shame you. Let this book be your new soundtrack instead. Take it from a middle-aged mom who is exhausted by the numbers that judge her every morning. This body is ready to remember why it is good, beloved, and beautiful just as it is.

**LISA-JO BAKER**, bestselling author of *Never Unfriended* and cohost of the podcast *Out of the Ordinary Books*

Jennifer is a powerhouse in the lane of helping women view their bodies as good. Her story and the way she models a healthy perspective has been so transformative for me, and I know it will be in the lives of her readers. I can't wait to see the freedom that breaks out in women as they come to realize God designed their bodies as good!

**REBECCA GEORGE**, author and host of the podcast

*Radical Radiance*™

I was highly impressed, emotionally moved, inspired, and empowered after I read *Your Good Body* by Jennifer Taylor Wagner. As an emphatic goal setter and goal getter, I thoroughly enjoyed Jennifer's transparency and vulnerability as she precisely shared her weight loss journey and struggle with perfectionism and how she overcame insecurity to obtain true and sincere happiness. Not only did Jennifer open her heart and life within these pages, but I also enjoyed the exercises that are included at the end of every chapter. It made me really give thought to why I do what I do. Overall, this unique book is a must-read if you're looking for empowering inspiration, practical information, and emotional support while on a weight loss journey. I promise you it will change your life because it changed mine.

**WANDA MARTIN**, author of *Go for the Goal*, founder and CEO of GO FOR THE GOAL ACADEMY, and board member and goal-setting advisor of Coaches Against Childhood Obesity

Jennifer speaks right to the journey many women have walked at some time in their life. Her words inspire acceptance and love for your body as is and propel you toward being your best self in mind and body. *Your Good Body* isn't just good, it's great.

**ASHLEY SOLBERG**

It feels like Jennifer may have written *Your Good Body* just for me. It is personal and uplifting and has helped heal years of hurt and striving for the perfect body. This book showcases that contentment is not a number on a scale but a confidence in the body that God created specifically for you. This is a must-read for women of any age and at any point in their health journey.

**MATTIE GIVENS**, [mattiegivens.com](http://mattiegivens.com)

“Woo-hoo!” was my first reaction as I read Jennifer Taylor Wagner’s *Your Good Body: Embracing a Body-Positive Mindset in a Perfection-Focused World*. It offers readers a journey of discovery: self-compassion, grit, motivation, and insight about what holds us back from reaching for our dreams and goals and how to get unstuck and move forward. It is also packed with practical tools and tips. This is *not* the typical book on weight loss. Jennifer communicates with authenticity, empathy, and hope that draws people who have struggled with similar body image issues.

**WANDA SANCHEZ**, executive producer, Salem Radio Network, San Francisco; author of the multiple award-winning *Love Letters from the Edge: Meditations for Those Struggling with Brokenness, Trauma, and the Pain of Life*; monthly contributor to *The Mighty*

We are so quick to marvel in the beauty that God has created in the world around us, but we are so quick to dismiss the beauty that is our own body. Jennifer speaks the incredible truth of the incredible beauty of each individual body—that God made no mistake in the way each of us were created and that we should love and appreciate every aspect of it. This book is one that I hope females of all ages not only read once but again and again and soak in every powerful message that Jennifer so eloquently shares!

**JENN RICHARDSON**, CEO, Fit Couture Collection





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*To my favorite human on the planet.*

*For drying my eyes a hundred times as I stepped off the scale.*

*For ordering pizza with me late at night.*

*For buying me the two-piece.*

*For loving my love handles.*

*You're one-of-a-kind amazing, Phil Wagner.*

*I love you so very much.*



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# INTRODUCTION

I want to ask you a question—

How much do you weigh?

Yeesh, right? I felt you cringe. Other than perhaps, “How would you like to die?” (or something of the like), this might be the worst question anyone can ask a woman. But before you abandon this book, I promise there is a purpose to this question. In fact, why don’t you save your answer, and I’ll tell you mine.

*Hi! I’m Jennifer. And my weight was 336.*

Yes, you read that correctly. No typo here. 336 pounds. That number will forever be etched in my brain because I think about it every single day of my life. I spent years in a body that was bigger than my capacity to navigate it through a cruel world that overwhelmingly values the external over the internal. I was bullied relentlessly all through my younger years, and things got so bad that by the time I finished high school, I fled to another state to start a new life on my own. A few years later I began a massive weight-loss pursuit.

I wasn't one of those beautifully vibrant and full-of-life curvy girls who seems completely comfortable in her body. (Those weren't as common—or at least as public—back in the 1990s.) Quite the opposite. My self-esteem was a whopping *zero*, and for nineteen years of my life, I just knew there was something terribly wrong with me because of my weight. I was sure that if I *ever* cracked the code to losing weight, my life would be wonderful. Then—and only then—I would feel great, and all would be right in the world.

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Through persistence and a shift in my relationship with food and exercise, I did what most people with weight struggles want to do: I lost the weight. One hundred sixty pounds, to be exact. I went from a size 28 to a size 8, and I learned a lot along the way about myself, about

others, and about the world in general. This book is a reflection on those lessons—and they aren't all what you might expect.

Let me warn you—this is no “How to Get Skinny Quick” guide. It's not a book about how I lost the weight and how you can too. Relax. You won't have to relive all the childhood trauma I faced or bear the brunt of my unhappy saga. This is a book about *shedding weight*—but probably a different type of weight than the type you're thinking.

Let me ask my original question a different way:

*How much weight do you carry?*

I don't mean those numbers reflected on the bathroom scale. I'm talking about the weight of pursuing perfection. As someone who has lost a monumental amount of weight, I'm familiar with the pressures women face to have perfect bodies and to *be* perfect in every area of life. I know what it's like to carry not only the weight of 336 pounds but also the weight of the perfectionistic ideal that has inscribed itself on our notions of femininity. And if I were to place a bet, I would guess that you, too, know just how cumbersome it is to carry the constant pressure of measuring up to the unspoken (and sometimes loudly spoken) body standards of the world around you.

I've had the opportunity to view the world from many different angles. The way others saw me as a size 28 is a lot different from the way they currently see me as a size 8. But you know what stayed the same throughout my entire weight journey? Me. At my very core. In fact, the way I saw myself in the mirror in plus-size clothes from Lane Bryant is no different from the way I see myself in that same mirror in my size 8 spandex leggings. Despite having reached the goal that so many people pushed me to achieve—whether through their bullying or their compassionate support—I felt no different. With so much weight gone, I still found myself waking up each morning, stripping off all my clothes, tiptoeing to the dreaded scale, and facing the stark reminder that I was still, even after all this hard work, *imperfect*.

So, you know what I did? I shed something else: my desire to be *perfect*. From those flabby arms to my cottage-cheese thighs that (still) rub together when I walk, I'm done with



the pursuit of perfection. And I think you should be too. Because 336, 186, or 101—that number on the scale is not a barometer for your happiness. Or at least it doesn't need to be.

This book is about shedding the burden we carry because our bodies have a bit extra around the waistline, in that booty, or in those arms that we refuse to show off in a T-shirt. I know this book is for you because I know that I'm not alone in this journey. In fact, I think if we were honest with ourselves, we would all admit that no matter our size, we've been—or are—uncomfortable in our own skin.

Why should we spend our whole lives hating our bodies? Why should we feel anxious and uncomfortable when we're in a room full of people because we can't stop thinking about our muffin tops? What are we teaching our kids about their self-image? Why strive to live a healthy daily life only to be overly critical of our bodies every single day? Shouldn't we just be happy that we have bodies that live, move, and breathe? I asked myself these questions many, many times.

Faith is part of who I am. I always knew I was loved and valued by God, yet for years I struggled to let that truth sink deep enough to believe it every time I looked in the mirror. My faith has been my anchor in every area of my life, yet it hasn't been a quick fix when it comes to learning to love and accept myself. For years I spun in circles trying to figure out how I could possibly be this discontent after so much hard work. Eventually I stopped asking questions and started looking for answers. To find them, I had to let a few things go. So perhaps this book isn't really about shedding weight—it's about letting go.

- Letting go of the cycles of self-punishment for making normal human decisions, like eating a scoop of ice cream or an extra slice of pizza.
- Letting go of the constant anxiety we feel when we throw on a swimsuit that might reveal the scars and memories visibly written on our bodies from yesteryear.
- Letting go of the fear that our bodies are not good enough.
- Letting go of the idea of perfection; because the only woman I know who has a “perfect” body is Barbie, and she’s made of plastic.

I believe that we are called to be the best, healthiest version of ourselves we can be; but I worry that the signals from the world around us are often crossed, leading us to believe that unless we *are the best*, we aren’t worth much of anything at all. I worry that we’re pursuing something that doesn’t exist, and we are killing ourselves—both physically and emotionally—in the process.

I know I’m not alone. In our highly visual culture, we’re reminded every day that our bodies don’t fit the mold. Airbrushed beauties on magazine ads, perfectly proportionate mannequins in the mall, and flawlessly trim actresses all remind me how far from stunning I must be. We’re hardwired to compare ourselves to others, and there’s no way this Cellulite Cindy could ever compare to the Perfect Pattys and Stunning Susans all around me, right?

Right. And that's okay.

Because my goal is not to be Patty, Susan, Shanay, or Raquel—my goal is to be me.

In this book I want to talk about the good, the bad, and the ugly sides of weight, bodies, worth, and the pursuit of perfection. If my conversations with women across the country are any indicator, this is a topic that impacts all of us—all day, every day. Whether it's among the ladies in the small group I'm leading, through a commenter on my blog or within my Instagram community, or among the women listening with tears in their eyes while I share my story in an auditorium full of hopefuls, I have experienced firsthand the fact that my struggle is one shared by many. Nearly every woman I've had the pleasure of chatting with beyond surface-level banter—whether she's coming to me for help or is someone I aspire to emulate within my own healthy lifestyle—has expressed something she is dissatisfied with about her body.

We so often view our bodies as bad, imperfect, lacking, flawed, and in need of fixing. But what if we instead realized that our bodies are actually *good*? Bodies from every culture, background, and race. Bodies with disabilities. Bodies of every shape and size. All good. Right now, today, without changing anything at all. What would happen if we approached our body image with a sense of gratitude, compassion, and appreciation? Seems like a lofty goal, but stay with me. I want to help you learn to love *your good body* and see it as good—not as flawed or falling short. I want you to let go of self-criticism and lean into a fresh sense of body positivity.

I want to validate your struggle of being chained to the scale, and then I want to show you how to walk in freedom. Freedom from eating like a rabbit and freedom from being bound to junk food; freedom from feeling like you're torturing yourself with exercise and freedom from feeling too inadequate to start working out; freedom from wearing tainted glasses when you look in the mirror and from sucking in your stomach every time you see your reflection. You are free to pursue all aspects of health—physical, emotional, and spiritual—without feeling that you need to pursue someone else's version of perfection. You're free to find balance and set your own goals without being crushed by others' expectations. I want to help you see that you are free to love your body as it is right now, no matter what—even while you're moving toward better health.

Yes, my friend—there's a whole world of freedom out there for you to experience, and I hope that through my vulnerability about my journey to freedom, you'll feel

empowered to pursue it on your own terms. Our goal is to find happiness *right where we are*, even if we're not where we want to be just yet.

Throughout the book we'll look at ways we can progress on our health journeys. I'm not interested in telling you what to eat or what workout to follow, but I do want to help you find balance in all aspects of health. I want to help you change

Our goal is to find happiness *right where we are*, even if we're not where we want to be just yet.

the way you think about your body, food, and exercise; figure out your right motivation; and learn to embrace who you are. Each chapter will highlight a step on the journey, and then I'll leave you with a quick action step and a question to consider.

Part of learning to love yourself as you are involves learning to speak to yourself with kindness and compassion. All too often we reinforce society's messages of perfection with the words we tell ourselves: "I feel so fat!" "I look awful!" "No one can love me like this." At the end of each chapter, you'll find a *flip the script* challenge where I've given you a new, positive message to say out loud and internalize. It's time we rewrite the lies we've allowed ourselves to believe about our bodies, replacing them instead with the *right* words, *right* framing, and *right* perspective.

One note: In this book we'll mention themes like diet culture, body dysmorphia, and disordered eating. If those are uncomfortable for you because of struggles you've experienced, know that I've been there too. Read through these sections slowly in a way that works for you.

So throw on your superwoman cape, girl—whether it's a size XS or a 4X. We've got a battle to win. As you make your way through this book, you're going to learn to stand up tall with your hands on your hips—no matter how wide they are—and your shoulders squared, shouting from the rooftops that you are choosing to love your good body as is while working to become the best possible version of yourself.

Grab another cup of coffee, honey; we're in for quite the conversation.

## *Chapter 1*

# BEYOND THE NUMBERS

If you think about it, all of life is built from numbers. Our big welcome into the world is preceded by nine months of anxious waiting. At about age one, we walk. At sixteen, we are granted permission to drive. At eighteen, around the time we land our first job, we're "permitted" to pay the government a cut of our income. At twenty-five, we can (finally) rent a car. At sixty-five, we're told it is time to retire. Somewhere between eighty and one hundred, on average, it's time to bid our humanity good day. And at 191 pounds, the whole world falls apart.

Or at least that's what you'd think if you were with me on that rainy Tuesday morning a few years ago.

As I shook off the remaining drops of my morning shower, I headed to my closet. Past the Christmas tree we store there. Past the suitcases. Past the boxes of baby clothes that I couldn't get rid of, even though my husband and I weren't planning to have more babies. Even past that *other* box of baby clothes (you know, *just in case*). There it was—the thing I had hidden like a shameful, dirty habit. In part, it was.

That scale had become my enemy numero uno. But like a long-lost cousin after you win the lottery, there it was, waiting for the attention it sought. Carrying it gingerly, as if it were a bomb, I soldiered back through the battleground, waging war in my mind as I tiptoed into the bathroom as quietly as possible and placed the scale on the cold, hard floor. And then, in that familiar choreography, I slowly lifted my legs one at a time and stood atop the twelve-by-twelve-inch square that had come to define my life.

My life has always been about the numbers—not just any numbers; *these* numbers. So when I saw “191” pop up on the cobalt screen of my digital scale, my mood quickly started to match that shade of blue. In and of itself, 191 is fine, just as 91 is fine for some and 291 is fine for others. But for me, that 191 couldn't be digested without a closely associated number: 336—the number I was at when I started my weight loss journey more than a decade ago. I'd lost so much weight, but keeping it off was a constant battle. I was up a few pounds from last week, and every gain made me worry that I was headed back to where I'd started.

Before I could even lift my somber head, I heard the feet behind me. There he was—my husband. And though my heart normally ticks up a notch when I see him, this time it sank into my stomach. How many times would he bear witness to my self-defeating square dance with that wretched metal scale?

Don't get it twisted—Phil is no fat shamer; in fact, he is just the opposite. Despite my ball-and-chain relationship with that scale, he has loved me throughout *all* the numbers: 336 (my highest), 169 (my lowest), and everywhere in between. For those of you who aren't quite sure the same is true in your relationship, don't worry—we'll get to that in a later chapter. But in that moment, supportive and loving as I knew my guy was, I couldn't think about his love. All I could think about were the rendezvous I'd had with other loves as of late.

That overly greasy, saturated-in-cheese slice of pepperoni pizza.

That massive burger paired with its favorite partner of all time: fries.

That decadent warm brownie topped with even more chocolate and served with a glass of whole milk (because dairy is a food group, don't you know?).

I tried to remind myself that life is about balance, but in that moment, there was no balance in my emotions as I went full-blown *teenage girl going through puberty who was just dumped by her new boyfriend of three days*. That number on the scale signified the end of my life, at least at that moment.



I'd been through this cycle so many times, yet each time those numbers served as a painful reminder of my humanity, my imperfection, and my shortcomings. Roller coasters are fun at an amusement park, but there's a reason the ride ends after only a few minutes—we can't handle the twists and turns too much longer than that. The roller coaster of my weight confirms that sometimes our bodies can prove to be too much. The 191 on the scale again reminded me that this ride was not yet over, despite how badly I wanted off.

I knew there was no quick fix. Those pesky pounds had crept onto my body with absolute ease, but getting them back off would be a tooth-and-nail battle. I knew they wouldn't melt off with a trendy fad diet, a quick jog, or the faulty promises of some magic pill. This would take work. A lot of really diligent work.

As the drops of water from my shower finished evaporating into the air, I rehydrated my skin with the moisture of a good salty cry. And that's when Phil could no longer keep silent.

"Why do you do this to yourself, babe?" he asked, his genuine empathy coupled with the memory of a thousand times we'd had this same conversation. He'd just as soon throw the scale in the dumpster and never look back.

Knowing that there was no way he could possibly understand, I snatched that scale up again—this time with some force—and I marched back to my closet, past the Christmas tree (no sugar cookies for me this year) and those boxes of baby clothes (I'll be darned if I'm going to *willingly* gain

weight again!). I shoved the scale as far back into its dusty home as I could, pushing the surrounding boxes tight against it, as if to figuratively starve it of any fresh air and show it who was boss. “I’ll be back for you,” I threatened aloud. But it already knew . . . we’d meet again soon for our normal affair. Same time, same place, same routine.

In the familiar pattern that had come to define my life, I put one foot in front of the other, dried my tears, and moved on with my day. I reminded myself of the numbers—five hours until lunch (a healthy one, I promised myself), eight hours until my husband would be home from work (plenty of time to plan out how I was going to attack these pounds), and just sixteen until I could go to bed and put this horrible day behind me. Yet again.

### THE NEVER-ENDING REMINDER

Most of us find the weight of the world overwhelming to carry at times. For me, the *world of weight* is even heavier. For years it defined my whole existence. Although I had been carrying *more than* the normal share of body fat for as long as I could remember, others always saw me as something *less than*. That’s the toughest part of carrying extra weight. I own—and quite like—my curvy girl status. But we all know that this isn’t just about

Although I had been carrying *more than* the normal share of body fat for as long as I could remember, others always saw me as something *less than*.

being curvy. And try as society does these days to celebrate bodies of different shapes and sizes, we all know that it often falls short. Bodies that don't quite meet the thin ideal are often briefly showcased and then tossed aside, replaced again with more of the same old, same old that we've come to accept as the perfect standard. This preoccupation with thinness is so routine that it's almost become unspoken, yet it's something that women face their entire lives.

My first exposure to this came in kindergarten through a boy—let's call him Nick. He was a nice-enough brown-haired kid who seemed to always wear the exact same pair of knee-high socks and khaki shorts. Still, what I remember isn't his niceness but a passing comment he made to me while playing. Nick felt it was his duty to let me know that my face was "different." "It's funny . . . your cheeks look like this," he said, puckering his lips together and pooching out his cheeks. "You look like a chipmunk!" And just like that, five-year-old me instantly became self-conscious about having a round face.

I'm sure Nick didn't do the same to you (if he did—gosh, that kid really gets around). But I'd imagine you have an experience of this variety somewhere in your past too. Those words spoken to us in our childhoods often play a formative role in our personal growth throughout our lives. The weight of those words lingered with me, intensifying at an alarming rate until it peaked in middle school—perhaps the toughest time in any young girl's life. As I bounced around the country between my divorced parents (moving around

thirty-two times before the age of eighteen), the other kids, who barely had time to get to know me, often met my *weight* before they met me. Thankfully, bullying is taken quite a bit more seriously these days, but around that time it was often dismissed under the “kids will be kids” mindset. Kids will be kids; and as it turns out, kids will also be *little jerks* if you let them. The bullying was relentless.

Over and over again, year after year, from kindergarten until I graduated high school, it seemed like *everyone* felt entitled to draw attention to my weight. They’d tell me I needed to go on a diet or assure me that I could lose the weight if I really wanted to. If I had a cold, strep throat, or a broken finger, my doctor’s first suggestion was always to lose the weight. At church I felt the sting of the youth leader’s message when he highlighted how the Bible instructed us to “take care of our temples”<sup>1</sup> (so mine was a megachurch . . . big deal). Whether the words were outright and bold or presented in the guise of compassionate care, I carried them all the same way. They were a heavy burden on top of what crept up to 336 pounds by the time I entered high school. What began as growing up in poverty and having limited food options eventually led to poor eating habits, which then ultimately paved the way for using food to soothe an aching soul.

For years I carried a body in excess of 300 pounds and maintained that weight until I lost it in my adult years. And all throughout, those words followed me. Truthfully, I could probably fill the pages of this book with stories about how

mean kids in school were about my weight. It was excruciating. The ridicule cut deep, almost as if the comments were tattooed onto my psyche.

I think these types of memories have such an impact because they happen so early for many of us. I'll always remember walking into Ms. Garden's class, where the chairs were scattered around the room in no particular arrangement. We could choose the seat we wanted every day as long as we got to class and claimed it before anyone else did. You remember that game, right? It was like an old-school mash-up of musical chairs and *The Bachelorette*. Yet, like most of those extra-tanned, one-note men who show up determined to snag the grand prize, I was regularly reminded that *I was not the one*.

Our sixth-grade bachelorette? Sheila. She was perfectly popular in every way. Most girls flocked to her with unbridled determination to touch the hem of her ~~garment~~ skirt. I avoided her at all costs. But I'll always remember the day when I showed up late to Ms. Garden's class and found that the only available seat was right in front of Sheila. As I maneuvered my body into that row and sat down, I felt my hips hang over the side of that front-and-center chair. The familiar and comfortable sound of mindless chatter filled the air as I breathed a sigh of relief that I had avoided being made fun of . . . for now. Then I heard it out loud—a voice cutting through the silence: “Who here thinks that she should wear bigger clothes?”

Pause.

*Who?* I wondered. Then I realized.

“She needs clothes that actually fit,” Sheila opined, sounding authentically nauseated that I dare wear clothes over my body. “You can see her fat rolls through her shirt!” And then the chorus started—not a chorus directed by the hands of Ms. Garden but the chorus of a song that followed me throughout my early years: corporate laughter speckled with the shame, disgust, and pity that all comprised the song of my life.

I’d been in situations like this before. Sometimes I got up quietly and left; sometimes I tried the art of the comeback (not my greatest strength, but darn it, I tried). Sometimes I pretended that I hadn’t heard. But that day, I just sat there and counted the numbers . . . again.

*Only 46 more minutes until this class will be over. Two more years until I’ll be done with middle school. Six more until I’ll graduate from high school. Just 714 miles from here to the cute little town in Tennessee we visited when I was younger where I’ll escape to one day. Just 160 pounds to lose and I won’t be fat anymore.*

The theater of my teenage life was quite melancholy. I cried. A lot. I internalized even more. By the time I graduated high school, my soul bore the marks of my physical experience. I had no self-esteem, no support system, no rest from the torment. I’d come home from school each day and barricade myself in my room, lie in my bed, and cry. And like a sad story on repeat, this came to define my daily life.

## RESOUNDING SIGNALS

Don't stop reading yet. This book is no somber sonnet or boo-hoo brochure about my life. In fact, this book isn't even really about me. I'm merely sharing my stories in hopes that you'll take the time to reflect back on yours. This journey is about so much more than recognizing who we're *not* and how we don't measure up. It's about going through a process of learning to celebrate who we *are*. It's about taking a good look in the mirror and watching a smile form at the corners of our lips. It's about feeling our fingertips graze the curvy hills of our tummies and beginning to love every inch. This is about learning the lyrics of an anthem of freedom and dancing like nobody's watching—even if *everyone's* watching. That's why we start here. People *are* watching, so perhaps we need to stop waiting to enjoy ourselves and our bodies until they stop looking. They never will—and that's okay.

I'm about to make a shocking statement. Are you ready?

Women are so hard on themselves.

We know this already, right? We're expected to be a size 2 but cook like an Iron Chef. We're expected to keep the house clean, tend to the children, keep a steady stream of income, and meet all of society's (unrealistic) ideals of feminine perfection. We have social media feeds to keep fresh, friends to impress, and a whole slew of fellow women to prove our adequacy to. (Side note: Friends you have to impress aren't true friends.) The demands are real. And true to our nature, we often internalize most of the pressure. We take it upon

ourselves to police our own actions and make constant corrections to ensure we meet or exceed all the standards set before us.

And can we be honest? It is utterly, completely, almost beyond description *exhausting*. Lest you think this is just the ranting of a bitter woman, let me assure you it isn't. I love being a woman. In fact, being a wife, a daughter, and a mother are among the gifts that I cherish the most. But those aren't the areas of my life that get me down; it's the areas in which that old message—*I am not enough*—gets reinforced.

We're often reminded that the grass is *not* always greener on the other side. Yet over and over again *green, green* grass is dangled in front of our faces. Companies have mastered the messaging that catches our attention and reveals a need we didn't know we even had. Just think of the magnificent magazine promises that taunt us as we check out in the grocery store:

“Be a size 2 by summer!”

“141 ways to tone up those problem areas.”

“Eat better, stress less, and drop 10 pounds with this simple trick!”

“Tear your fat, ugly face off and put it in the trash because you'll never be anything unless you drop 25 pounds.”

We're subconsciously conditioned to believe that *who we are at our core* is never actually enough.

Okay, so I'm exaggerating on the last one, but you're familiar with the rhetoric that drives us to look in the mirror and



quickly turn our heads away in disgust. We're subconsciously conditioned to believe that *who we are at our core* is never actually enough. We're told that with some small change, act, or purchase, we can get one step closer to perfection—a perfection that is temporal, fleeting, and (spoiler alert) can never actually be attained. But the problem here is that the image we're striving for isn't presented as "perfection." It's presented as "normal," and it is dangerous territory when we come to understand *perfect* as *normal*.

Since so many resounding messages about our supposed shortcomings center around numbers, it's no surprise that we tend to reduce ourselves down to one thing: the number on the scale. We let our weight, jean size, or the millimeters of thigh gap we wish we had become the most important thing to us—the thing that defines who we are and what we're worth.

Some astounding numbers also undergird the bait and switch of the self-improvement industry. According to McKinsey & Company, the global beauty industry generates \$500 billion in sales a year.<sup>2</sup> Yes, billion. Each year. That's larger than the economies of many industrialized countries in the world. And most of that profit comes because of the subtle reminders sent our way that something isn't quite right with us.

It's no wonder, then, that we become discontent with ourselves, feeling like we're never enough. Because the very thing we're reaching for is forever just beyond our grasp—always available with the next product, with the next diet, or at the

next size down. We're always looking at the grass on the other side of our circumstances, forgetting the simple truth that the greenest grass is the grass that gets watered.

So, let's water our grass, shall we? It might be easy to think that my argument here is that we should run far away from industry standards of beauty—grow our hair out, stop shaving, and let the acne pile up on our faces after eating so much we've got the meat sweats (unless that's your thing—in which case, you do you, girl). No. This is about finding balance and loving who we are while also working on who we are.

Nothing in life is ever invented and perfected at the same time. We think nothing of buying the latest and greatest Apple product, only to receive an update a few short months later to “fix” the errors that came with the device when we bought it. We're used to buying flawed products, yet we've somehow fallen into the trap of believing that when it comes to us, it's an all-or-nothing game—perfect or bust. What if we could learn to love ourselves and improve ourselves at the same time? What if we took back control of the narrative and, instead of letting a multibillion-dollar industry or the voices of our past tell us who we should be, we penned our own stories? What if we saw ourselves as more than a number and learned to see our bodies as good?

The resounding messages in our heads can scream loud enough to knock us off track. So before that happens, let's get a few things straight. You do not have to travel down the road

of feeling less than. Of loathing what you see in the mirror. Of allowing the numbers to jumble up your day and send you into a cycle of crash dieting. With careful planning, the right map, and some intentionality, you can turn away from Self-Defeat Lane and onto Self-Love Boulevard.

That's what this book is about. This is about reprogramming our GPS so that no matter where the roads of life take us, we can find our way back to the people we were meant to be. We're "fearfully and wonderfully made," as Psalm 139:14 (NIV) tells us. That second half—wonderfully made—is easy to cite but unfortunately quite easy to forget. What about the first half? What does it mean to be "fearfully" made? The Hebrew word that scholars translate as *fearfully* is *yare*, which means "to stand in awe of" or to "be afraid."<sup>3</sup> To me, that says there's something just a little scary about our design. There's something in us that should be feared. We are full, multidimensional beings with unique personalities, quirks, likes, and dislikes. When we reduce ourselves to a number, we erase so much of ourselves. Maybe that's the true starting point in any health journey. How different would our approach be if it came from a place of realizing our value and wanting to change the way we think about and treat our bodies to reflect that truth? If we knew how to tap into the magnificent power and potential given to us by design, we'd approach the world with such a confidence and drive that people would say, "Watch out! She is fierce. And here she comes!"

I invite you to reprogram your GPS with me throughout

these next few chapters. Let's take a long drive together and chat about what makes us unique, what makes us tick, and what stands in the way of our living our best lives. We'll talk about being confident in our relationships and saying no to comparison. We'll look at how we can have healthier relationships with food, the scale, and movement, and how we can continue our health journeys while viewing our bodies as good vessels that we can celebrate, not broken vessels we have to fix. Don't worry—I'll drive. And as I do, I'll let my guard down. I'm going to show and tell a lot about me. Much of it will not be flattering. But as you get to know me, I hope that you'll reorient yourself with *you*. I hope you will learn to love your good body and treat it with compassion.

We'll take it slow here, not zero to sixty in ten seconds flat. We'll enjoy the scenery and many different types of terrain, because I truly believe this message is for all of us, despite our vast diversity of lived experience. Together, we'll camp out in the trenches where things are hard and wake up early to enjoy the sunrise. We'll laugh together, cry together, and bare the depths of our souls. Then we'll stare victory right in the face with the confidence that comes only once we learn to love ourselves as is.

That brings us right to our first step in changing the narrative and learning to accept our bodies as good. Pause and look at the *flip the script* statement on the next page. If this lie is one you tell yourself, how can you replace it with the truth? Reflect and take action!

### *Flip the Script*

Instead of telling yourself, “I’m nothing but a number,” say this instead:  
**“I’m so much more than a number.”**

### *Reflect*

How would your life and attitude change if you could believe that you are enough—not after some self-improvement projects, but now, just as you are? What would help you believe this?

### *Action Step*

Take a minute to jot down some of your personal attributes. What do you like about yourself, and what makes you *you*? Are you friendly, kind, hardworking, smart? Can you sing, cook, paint, organize, lead, teach? What about your body? List some things you like about it. No negativity allowed!