



*Three young adults learned to treat their mortal bodies as a gift from God. They found that it is more important to be healthy than to try to match some unhealthy worldly standard.*

# I THANK THEE FOR THIS BODY

By Starla Averkamp Butler

Heavenly Father loves us and has given us the gift of our bodies. The scriptures teach us that our bodies are “the temple of the Holy Ghost” and that we should “glorify God” in our bodies and spirits, “which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).

Our bodies and abilities are gifts from God, even if we don’t think they’re everything they should be. By twisting our understanding of what is good and true, Satan convinces us to disrespect or disregard our gifts from God—not only our bodies but also such gifts as our ability to see ourselves as worthy of God’s love. It can begin with a simple, repeated negative behavior, even a thought pattern that makes us forget our eternal nature as children of God. What may start out as an effort to improve ourselves can become a trial of both body and spirit.

One way this happens is through eating disorders—including anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating disorder—and disordered eating (*disordered eating* is any abnormal eating behavior that, “if left unaddressed, may develop into a full-blown eating disorder”<sup>1</sup>). Here, three young adult women share their stories of learning to rely on the Lord as they overcame eating disorders and the world’s idea of perfection.



### The Pains of Perfectionism

“Walking into any social gathering used to be torture,” says Heidi. “I compared myself with those I felt were progressing as wives and mothers, excelling in their glamorous careers, or expanding their great talents. I later learned that I was comparing their greatest strengths with my own weaknesses.

“I often thought, ‘What have I done wrong?’ No amount of personal effort seemed to be good enough to fulfill the expectations of others and especially myself. To gain any semblance of self-esteem, I began using eating disorder behaviors to lose weight. I accepted the worldly view that if I looked a certain way, I would feel better about myself. Finally, I realized that the only true source of happiness comes through the gospel of Jesus Christ. I had to accept Heavenly Father’s love for all of His children, myself included.

“From a worldly perspective, accepting help is weak—showing you are incapable

of doing something yourself. I had to learn that accepting God’s help willingly is a sign of strength. Admitting areas of weakness and humbly submitting myself to learn and improve changed how I felt.

“As I struggled to recover, I often felt frustrated that I was not able to overcome the eating disorder quickly. Several counselors advised that I try to find a sense of accomplishment in the little steps that I was making.

“As I followed their counsel, I learned that when I prayed each night, I could ponder what had happened that day and express gratitude for what I had accomplished, no matter how large or small the step, instead of being miserable over the mistakes I may have made. In time, I found that the chains of the eating disorder were loosening and that I could again feel joy, despite the setbacks of everyday living.

“The idea of having the perfect body is instilled in society through every form of



### HIS GREATEST HANDIWORK

“Fully accepting our Savior’s Atonement can increase our faith and give us courage to let go of constraining expectations that we are somehow required to be or to make things perfect. . . . We can gratefully accept, as God’s sons and daughters, that we are His greatest handiwork (see Psalm 8:3–6; Hebrews 2:7), even though we are still a work in progress.”

**Elder Gerrit W. Gong** of the Presidency of the Seventy, “Becoming Perfect in Christ,” *Ensign*, July 2014, 17.

## WARNING SIGNS

Here are some warning signs to watch for in yourself or loved ones:

- A change in weight not related to a medical condition
- Severe dieting, binge eating, or preoccupation with food
- Intense fear of being “fat”
- Evidence of forced vomiting
- Abuse of laxatives, diuretics, enemas, diet pills, or other related medications
- Distorted body image; preoccupation with body shape and size
- Obsessive or excessive exercise
- Depressed mood or anxiety

If you or a loved one struggles with an eating disorder or disordered eating, it would likely be very helpful to work with professionals such as qualified therapists, registered dietitians, and medical doctors. Seek out professionals who have experience working with eating disorders and who will work well with you or your loved one as an individual. For more information, visit [providentliving.org/lds-family-services](https://providentliving.org/lds-family-services).

media. However, I have realized that many people I come across are not perfect according to worldly standards, yet they radiate inner beauty and confidence because they love and accept who they are—children of God.”

### More Than a Number

“I struggle with an eating disorder that came from becoming obsessed with food and addicted to exercise,” says Hailey. “I would often forget that my body is a gift from God, something that I should never disrespect in any way. I would compare myself with others and constantly put myself down for not fitting the ideal ‘beautiful’ image. After I weighed myself—whether I liked what I saw or not—I would label myself as a number instead of the daughter of God that I am. There were days when I felt happy, but most days I felt like I was drowning in a sea of self-doubt and I couldn’t seem to find the shore.

“It wasn’t until I prayed for help that I knew of a surety that Heavenly Father was aware of my struggles and attempts to be better—no matter how small those attempts were. As I kept praying for strength to overcome my challenge, I came to trust that Jesus Christ, through the enabling power of the Atonement, could truly help me become better. It gives me comfort to know that my Savior knows exactly

how I feel, and it gives me courage to know that each trial can bring me closer to my Savior.

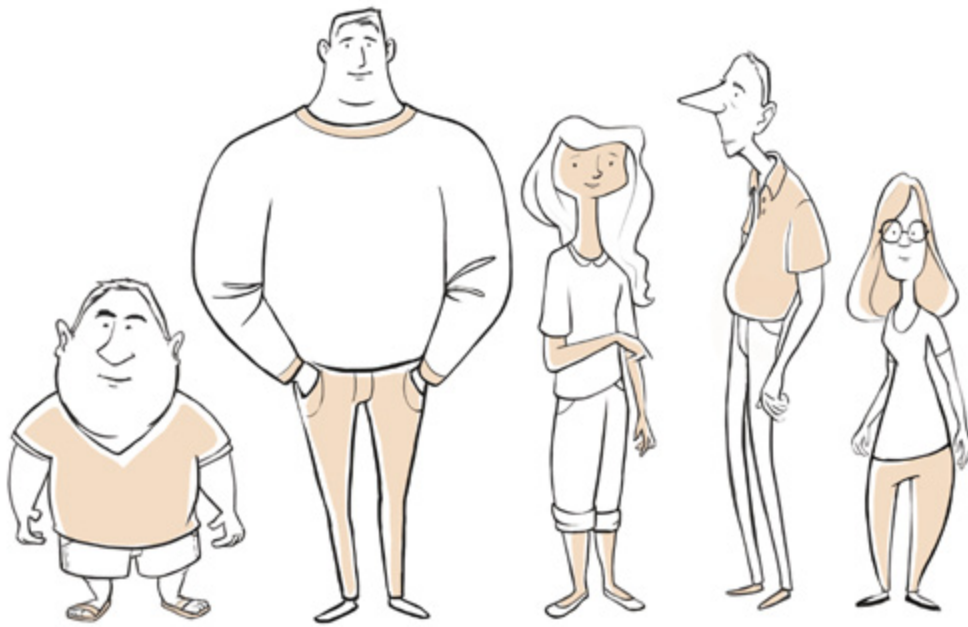
“Like Peter when he walked on water (see Matthew 14:25–31), there are days the ‘wind [is] boisterous’ and I must call upon God to save me from my doubts. But as I have faith that the Savior can transform me to become like Him, I no longer feel like I am drowning.”

### Becoming Who He Wants Me to Be

There is one person who knows us better than any other—our Heavenly Father. Heavenly Father loves us, and He can help us learn to love ourselves as we work to overcome our weaknesses and challenges.

Megan recalls, “When I started college I pushed myself to the point of breaking to maintain the same high grades that I had in high school. By my sophomore year of college, anorexia had started to devour me. I was destroying the body Heavenly Father gave to me, but at that point I was proud I could control my weight when I couldn’t control anything else.”

Megan realized that her anorexia and perfectionism weren’t what Heavenly Father wanted for her and knew that something needed to change. “Before my smile and strength could return, I had to tell myself I was worth something. I



## HELP FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY OF THOSE WHO STRUGGLE

- Eating disorders affect both men and women of various age-groups.
- Eating disorders are typically based on feelings such as powerlessness, anxiety, and shame.
- Don't be afraid to discuss worries early on, but realize that a loved one may display warning signs such as preoccupation with body image and yet not be developing an eating disorder.
- Try using "I" statements instead of "you" statements that may reinforce feelings of shame. For example, instead of saying, "You can't keep forcing yourself to vomit after meals," say, "I am concerned that you are forcing yourself to vomit after meals."
- Be caring but firm. For example, don't promise never to tell anyone.
- Encourage your loved one to seek help, including from therapists and doctors.
- Let the person see that although at times you may feel frustration, anger, fear, or helplessness, these feelings don't stop you from loving that person.
- Remember that recovery takes time and that the decision to heal ultimately has to come from the one with the disorder.

could do hard things. I had to convince myself I was smart, lovable, and a whole heap of other things I had come to believe were lies over the last few years.

"I started attending an emotional-eating group. It was hard for me. I felt like by attending the meetings I was saying that I was sinning by the way I ate, and I didn't want to be a sinner. However, I've learned not to be so ashamed, because it helps me become the daughter of God I want to be.

"People have told me to tell myself I am beautiful every day, thinking that will help me through my anorexia. That has never worked for me. I chose something my brain doesn't automatically dismiss: 'I thank Thee, Heavenly Father, for giving me this wonderful body.' I truly am grateful that God has given me such a precious gift, and

I plan on doing everything I can to hold on to it."

God loves each of us. We don't have to attain our idea of perfection, whether it be physical perfection or any other kind, to earn that love. It's true that the Lord wants us to keep trying to be better, but not alone. Moroni 10:32 promises that if we "love God with all [our] might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for [us], that by his grace [we] may be perfect in Christ." It is by relying on Jesus Christ and His Atonement that we can hope to come closer, little by little, to what He wants us to be and avoid the false expectations of what the world tells us to be. ■

*The author lives in Utah, USA.*

### NOTE

1. Marcia Herrin and Nancy Matsumoto, *The Parent's Guide to Eating Disorders*, 2nd ed. (2007), 50.