



Getting a Plan

Last spring I took a shortcut through a neighborhood and caught a glimpse of a man planting a flower garden. It was just a quick glance, but long enough to produce a lingering thought: *I wish I had a pretty garden.*

For years I've looked at other people's flowers and secretly wished for my own lush display. However, the glimpse of this man with his hands digging deep into the earth brought a new revelation. He has a garden because he invests time and energy to make it. He didn't wish it into being. He didn't hope it into being. He didn't just wake up one day and find that a garden of glorious blooms had miraculously popped up from the dirt.

No.

He worked at it. He sacrificed for it.

Day after day. Row by row. Seed by seed. Plant by plant. It took effort, intentionality, sweat equity, and determination. Then it took time and commitment before he ever saw any fruit from his labor.

But eventually, there was a bloom . . . and then another . . . and then another. I saw this man's flowers and wished for my own—without a clue about all the work that had gone into producing them. I want the flowers but not the work. Isn't that the way it is with many things in life—we want the results but have no desire to put in the work required?

Besides a garden, I also wished for a thinner body for years but

was lax about actually changing what I ate. When it came to eating, I excused away the necessary discipline. Then I'd catch myself wishing I were thinner and making excuses about my age and metabolism, lamenting the unfairness of my genetic disposition and blah, blah, blah.

The reality is, I can't eat like an athletic teenager and then complain about my extra layers of fluff.

Or my pants size.

Or my tummy pooch.

Or my arms that are starting to wave back at me when I raise them.

I can't wish blooms into place any more than I can wish fat away.

I can't eat like an athletic teenager and then complain about my extra layers of fluff.

It's just the cold, hard reality.

But I knew I needed a plan.

I had a friend who'd found a nutritionist she really liked. She followed a plan, got her issues under control, lost weight, kept it off, and experienced the empowering feeling of success. As she was telling me about her plan, she looked across the table and said, "Lysa, if you do this, it will work."

I wanted to believe her. I desperately wanted to believe her. I knew I'd be making an appointment with this same nutritionist.

The day of my first appointment, I sat in my car and chuckled at my choice for a *last meal*—the meal before I'd have to make changes.

I stared down at the paper plate. Minutes before, it had been piled high with slices of Chef Boyardee pizza. Cheap, boxed pizza had been the absolute delight of my childhood taste buds. Who am I kidding? It had been the absolute delight of my adulthood as well. And if my food choice alone didn't seal the deal that changes needed to be made, my next move certainly did.

I licked the plate. I did. Yes, I did. If this would be the last time I'd enjoy this delicacy, I was for sure not leaving a drop of sauce on the plate. Not a drop.

Then I checked the rearview mirror for any stray evidence. Getting on a scale in front of another woman would be horrible enough. I didn't want to compound this mortifying situation with her telling me I had pizza sauce smeared across my cheek. Cheap pizza sauce at that.

I looked myself straight in the rearview mirror and, with nothing but grit and determination, ignored the screams of my taste buds and stepped out of the car. After tucking my muffin top into the waist of my jeans, my body nodded in agreement with my head: this is something we must do. My taste buds never did agree with the rest of my body that day.

Inside the nutritionist's office, I was told I was overweight. This was not news to me. I had gone up two pants sizes over the past year and now even my big pants were protesting. And not even my trick of standing on the bathroom scale with only one foot—and no ponytail holder—could diminish the escalating numbers.

Something had to give.

Someone had to learn the discipline of giving up some things and that someone was me. And those “things” were poor food choices that were sabotaging my body, my mental energy, and even my spirit.

Food had become like a drug. And honestly, it's a good drug choice for a Christian woman. Every church event I attended readily provided my drug out in the open with no hesitation or judgment.

I didn't struggle with the addictions most people refer to when they find out someone has issues with food. I was not anorexic or bulimic. I never

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binged and purged. I wasn't overeating until I made myself sick or anything like that.

I was just eating too much of the wrong kinds of foods and felt trapped in a cycle of hunger. I felt hungry all the time. And I felt discouraged and down about my escalating weight yet powerless to make the necessary changes.

I had lost weight before, but I couldn't keep it off for any extended time. My changes were always temporary; therefore my results were also temporary. I was too dependent on food for comfort and saw no need for a long-term discipline plan for my eating. I wanted to eat what I wanted, when I wanted, in the quantities I wanted. So, despite exercising, my food choices caught up with me and my changing body revealed all my secrets.

That's both the blessing and the curse of issues with food. Poor choices with food will rat me out every time — if not in my waistline, then in my energy level and my overall well-being.

I left the nutritionist's office that day with a plan. Under her supervision and with a weekly weigh-in to hold me accountable, I felt empowered for the first time in a long while.

The plan I chose was strict and restrictive. I knew in my heart it had to be. I had to break the addictive cycles my taste buds had grown to crave. I needed to train my body to not be hungry all the time. I had to keep my blood sugar in check.

The healthy eating plan I adopted then and maintain now is a balanced protein-carbohydrate plan. I learned correct portion sizes, food combining, when to eat and what to eat. I still eat carbohydrates, but I'm limited in how much and what kind. I don't eat most breads, potatoes, rice, corn, pasta, or other starchy things. Mainly, I eat low-fat meats, veggies, and fruits.

Wait! Wait! I'm not saying this has to be your plan. (You need to do your research, consult your doctor, and create a healthy and realistic plan for *your* everyday life.) I'm saying this is *my* plan and,

believe it or not, I've grown to love it. Notice I said "grown to love it." I won't deny there have been some really hard days.

My plan is realistic for me because the foods I eat are things I can buy at my local grocery store and because my family can eat what I eat for the most part. However, they usually have starches that I skip.

This journey will require you to make some tough sacrifices, but I've come to look at this process as embracing healthy choices rather than denying myself. There are lessons to be learned and perspectives to be gained in the season of embracing healthy choices. These will not just be physical lessons. The mental and spiritual lessons gained in this time will be the very thing that will equip you for the long haul. And keep you healthy and blossoming just like that man's garden.

Speaking of gardens, I have a funny truth to share about the healthy eating plan I chose. Basically, I eat what a wild animal eats — meat and things that grow naturally from the earth. Only I cook my food and use manners. I was immediately encouraged by the possibilities of this new eating plan because I have yet to see an overweight animal in the wild lamenting over excess cellulite.

Think about it.

And while you are thinking that silly little thought, think about and pray for some friends to join you on this journey. I have to tell you, having friends to walk through the same healthy eating plan as me has been such a help. Getting a plan is the first crucial step; getting a friend or two to join you is the next.

But, in the meantime, don't be expecting any fresh cut flowers from my garden. That is still but a wish.

A girl can't do it all, you know.

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Personal Reflections

1. What thoughts, images, or emotions do you associate with the word *plan*? Are you the kind of person who says, “I love it when a plan comes together!” or are you more likely to say, “Planschman, can’t we all just go with the flow?”
2. Are there areas of your life in which having a plan works well for you? For example, in your finances, for vacation trips, accomplishing daily tasks, reaching professional goals, reading through the Bible in a year. In these areas of your life, does having a plan feel empowering or restrictive? Do your feelings change when the plan is about food, what you will eat and not eat?
3. “My changing body revealed all my secrets. . . . Poor choices with food will rat me out every time” (page 38). What is the relationship between food and secrets? What secrets do you think your body reveals?
4. Choosing a healthy eating plan that works for you may require research, experimentation, and consultation with your doctor or other health care professionals. How does the prospect of doing these things make you feel? Does it energize you and help you to feel equipped or does it overwhelm you and make you feel discouraged?
5. Lysa described her food plan but emphasized the importance of choosing a healthy plan that works for you. What words or phrases would you use to describe the kind of plan you think would be realistic for you over the long term? On a scale of one to ten, how hopeful are you that you can find a realistic food plan, one that you can grow to love just as Lysa grew to love her food plan?