



What's Really Going On Here?

Recently, a weight loss company came up with a brilliant advertising campaign. Maybe you've seen some of their ads. A little orange monster chases a woman around, tempting and taunting her with foods that obviously aren't a part of her healthy eating plan. The ads perfectly capture what it feels like to be harassed by cravings all day long.

While I've never seen this orange monster chasing me, I've felt its presence. My resolve feels strong until the next time I get hungry. And unhealthy choices are always so convenient. They are packaged and preserved and sing of salty and sugary highs tailor made for a hungry stomach. You don't find fresh fruits and veggies conveniently located in a nearby vending machine. So, I give in to that bag of chips or a candy bar because I am so hungry and it will only be for this time. These empty calories do nothing but taste good in the moment and then set me up for more unhealthy choices just a short time later.

We crave what we eat. So, the cycle continues day after day. Hunger pang after hunger pang. Craving after craving. The orange monster is there reminding me of all the delicious choices that would satisfy in ways healthy choices never would.

So, while the orange monster is a great way to visualize cravings, the ads fall short in their promise to really help a woman. The weight loss company's theory is to teach what foods are more filling

and encourage consumption of those. But does that really help overcome cravings?

For me, it does not. The answer will never be found in only learning to modify my choices. Choosing better foods is certainly a part of this journey. However, simply telling me to eat healthier foods that will help me feel full longer doesn't address the heart of the matter. I can feel full after a meal and still crave chocolate pie for dessert. Just feeling full isn't the answer to sticking with a healthy eating plan.

If feeling full were the answer, then gastric bypass surgery should be 100 percent successful. This surgery shrinks the size of a person's stomach, thus shrinking the amount of food necessary to give them a full feeling. However, one study showed the failure rate for patients who were followed for at least ten years was 20.4 percent for morbidly obese patients and 34.9 percent for super obese patients.¹ Even a significant number of those whose lives are at stake — and who have drastic surgery to help them — can't always stop their cravings by simply feeling full.

So, what's really going on here?

I believe God made us to crave. Now before you think this is some sort of cruel joke by God, let me assure you that the object of our craving was never supposed to be food or other things people find themselves consumed by, such as sex or money or chasing after significance.

Think about the definition of the word *craving*. How would you define it? Dictionary.com defines *craving* as something you long for, want greatly, desire eagerly, and beg for.² Now consider this expression of craving: "How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (Psalm 84:1–2).

Yes, we were made to crave — long for, want greatly, desire

eagerly, and beg for—God. Only God. But Satan wants to do everything possible to replace our craving for God with something else. Here's what the Bible says about this: "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world" (1 John 2:15–16). The passage details three ways Satan tries to lure us away from loving God:

- The cravings of the sinful man
- The lust of his eyes
- The boasting of what he has or does

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Let's define these things. According to the commentary in my Life Application Study Bible (NIV), the cravings of the sinful man are misplaced physical desires—issues with our food or sex outside of marriage. In other words trying to get our physical needs met outside the will of God. The lust of the eyes is being enamored by material things. The New Living Translation actually equates the lust of the eyes as "a craving for everything we see." And lastly, the boasting of what one has or does describes the actions of someone chasing what she thinks will make her feel significant.

Cravings = trying to get our physical desires met outside the will of God

Lust of eyes = trying to get our material desires met outside the will of God

Boasting = trying to get our need for significance met outside the will of God

Remember in the introduction when we briefly talked about

Eve? She was lured by the serpent into eating the forbidden fruit. As I was studying this story I realized how intentionally Satan chooses his tactics. He knows where we are weak. He desires to lure us away from God. And he knows what works . . . the cravings of the sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has or does.

Satan used all three tactics with Eve. “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food [cravings of the sinful man] and pleasing to the eye [lust of the eyes], and also desirable for gaining wisdom [boasting of what she has or does], she took some and ate it” (Genesis 3:6). Eve was tempted in precisely the same three ways the 1 John passage warns us not to be lured away from loving God.

But it doesn’t stop there. Look at how Jesus was tempted:

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”

Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.
(Matthew 4:1 – 11)

Again, the pattern of temptation is the same:

Cravings: Satan appealed to Jesus' physical cravings for food.

Lust of the eyes: The devil promised Jesus entire kingdoms if He would bow down to the god of materialism.

Boasting: The enemy enticed Jesus to prove His significance by forcing God to command angels to save Him.

But here's the significant difference between Eve and Jesus. Eve was saturated in the object of her desire. Jesus was saturated in God's truth.

I obviously wasn't in the garden with Eve, but based on three phrases from Genesis 3:6, I can only infer she never took her eyes off the fruit as she: *saw that the food was good, pleasing to the eye, and desirable*. She didn't walk away and give herself time to really consider her choice. She didn't consult Adam. She didn't consider the truth of what God had clearly instructed. She didn't talk to God. She focused only on the object of her obsession.

Remember what I said at the beginning of this chapter ... we crave what we eat. If I make healthy choices over a period of time, it seems to reprogram my taste buds. The more veggies and fruit I eat, the more veggies and fruit I crave. However, if I eat brownies and chips, I crave brownies and chips in the worst kind of way. Eve craved what she focused on. We consume what we think about. And what we think about can consume us if we're not careful.

Jesus sets a beautiful example of breaking this vicious cycle of being consumed by cravings. It's even more powerful when we understand that Jesus, unlike Eve, was in a completely deprived state. Eve was in a garden of paradise with her every need provided for. Jesus had been in a desert, fasting for forty days. I can't imagine

a more deprived state. And yet, He held strong and set a powerful example of how to escape the vicious grip of temptation. He quoted God's Word. And so can we. When we feel deprived and frustrated and consumed with wanting unhealthy choices, we too can rely on God's Word to help us.

With each temptation, Jesus, without hesitation, quoted Scripture that refuted Satan's temptation. Truth is powerful. The more saturated we are with truth, the more powerful we'll be in resisting our temptations. And the more we'll naturally direct our cravings where they should be directed—to the Author of all truth.

Cravings. Are they a curse or a blessing? The answer to that depends on what we're craving. And what we're craving will always depend on what-ever we're consuming . . . the object of our desire or God and His truth.

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In the next chapter we'll talk about how to practically consume God's truth in a way that truly satisfies. For now, consider what it means to the success of your journey to quote Scripture in the midst of a craving attack. One of the most meaningful Scriptures I used in this process is " 'Everything is permissible' —but not everything is beneficial" (1 Corinthians 10:23). We'll talk about this Scripture more in a later chapter, but I quoted it over and over to remind myself that I could have that brownie or those chips, but they wouldn't benefit me in any way. That thought empowered me to make a beneficial choice rather than wallowing in being deprived of an unhealthy choice. For other helpful Scriptures, check out the section starting on page 195. Make a point to write out meaningful verses for this journey and quote them aloud each time the orange monster tries to talk you into tarrying with him a while.

I know it's a battle, sister. But we aren't rendered powerless. The more saturated we are with God's truth, the more powerfully resis-

tant we become. Stick with me here—this isn't a plastic Christian answer. It's one that will change our lives if we let it.

Personal Reflections

1. One weight loss company personifies craving as a little orange monster that chases us around, tempting us to eat unhealthy foods. Take a moment to reflect on your own experience of craving, recently and over time.
 - If you could personify craving based on your experience of it, what form might it take? Would it be like the little orange monster or would it take a different shape? Describe what your craving looks like and how it behaves.
 - If you could sit down and have a conversation with this imaginary craving, what do you think it might say to you? What questions would you want to ask it? How do you imagine it might respond?
2. How do you respond to the idea that God made us to crave (page 20)? Have you ever pursued a craving—a longing, passion, or desire—that made a positive contribution to your life? What do you think distinguishes that kind of craving from the craving that leads you to eat in unhealthy ways?
3. If it's true that we are made to crave, how might it change the way you understand your cravings? Do you believe there could be any benefits to listening to your cravings rather than trying to silence them? If so, what might those benefits be? If not, why not?
4. The Bible describes three ways Satan tries to lure us away from loving God: cravings, lust of the eyes, and boasting (1 John 2:15–16). Lysa explains how Satan used these tactics with both

Eve and Jesus (pages 22–23). Using the list below, think back over the last twenty-four hours or the last few days to see if you recognize how you may have been tempted in similar ways.

- *Cravings: meeting physical desires outside the will of God.* In what ways were you tempted by desires for things such as food, alcohol, drugs, or sex?
- *Lust of the eyes: meeting material desires outside the will of God.* In what ways were you tempted by desires for material things—clothing, financial portfolio, appliances, vacation plans, cosmetics, home décor, electronics, etc.?
- *Boasting: meeting needs for significance outside the will of God.* In what ways were you tempted by desires to prop up your significance—perhaps by name dropping, exaggerating, feigning humility or other virtues, doing something just because you knew it would be observed by others, etc.?

Of the three kinds of temptations, which is the most difficult for you to resist? Which is the easiest to resist? Why?

5. Jesus quotes the truth of Scripture to defeat temptation (page 22). Have you ever used Scripture in this way? What was the result? How do you feel about the idea of using this approach to address your unhealthy eating patterns?



Replacing My Cravings

I roll over and look at the clock. Another day. Beyond all reason and rationality, I slide out of bed and strip off everything that might weigh even the slightest ounce as I head to the scale. Maybe today will be the day the scale will be my friend and not reveal my secrets. Maybe somehow overnight the molecular structure of my body shifted and today I will magically weigh less.

But no. I yank out my ponytail holder—hey, it's gotta weigh something—and decide to try again. But the scale doesn't change its mind the second time. It is not my friend this day.

Vowing to do better, eat healthier, and make good choices, I head to the kitchen only to have my resolve melt like the icing on the cinnamon rolls my daughter just pulled from the oven. Yum. Oh, who cares what the scale says when this roll speaks such love and deliciousness.

Two and a half cinnamon rolls later, I decide tomorrow will be a much better day to keep my promises to eat healthier. And since this is my last day to eat what I want, I better live it up. Another cinnamon roll, please.

The next morning I roll over and look at the clock. Another day. Beyond all reason and rationality, I slide out of bed and strip off everything that might weigh even the slightest ounce as I head to the scale. Maybe today will be the day. But once again it isn't. I yank out my ponytail holder and try again. But no.

Vowing to do better, eat healthier, and make good choices, I head into my day only to find myself making more excuses, rationalizations, and promises for later.

Always later.

And the cycle I've come to hate and feel powerless to stop continues. Who could I talk to about this? If I admit my struggle with food to my friends, they might try to hold me accountable the next time we go out. And what if I'm not in the mood to be questioned about my nachos con queso with extra sour cream?

I'll just tell them I'll be starting on Monday, and they'll be fine with it. They don't think I need to make changes.

But I did need to make changes. I knew it. Because this wasn't really about the scale or what clothing size I was; it was about this battle that raged in my heart. I thought about, craved, and arranged my life too much around food. So much so, I knew it was some-

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thing God was challenging me to surrender to His control. Really surrender. Surrender to the point where I'd make radical changes for the sake of my spiritual health perhaps even more than my physical health.

Part of my surrender was asking myself a really raw question.

May I ask you this same raw question?

Is it possible we love and rely on food more than we love and rely on God?

Now, before you throw this book across the room and curse my existence, hear me out. This question is crucial. I had to see the purpose of my struggle as something more than wearing smaller sizes and getting compliments from others. These things would be nice but not as appealing in the moment as that cinnamon roll or those chips or that brownie.

It had to be about something more than just me.

I had to get honest enough to admit it: I relied on food more than I relied on God. I craved food more than I craved God. Food was my comfort. Food was my reward. Food was my joy. Food was what I turned to in times of stress, sadness, and even in times of happiness.

And I hated admitting that. I felt stupid admitting that. I felt like such a spiritual failure.

I told a couple of people about it and most seemed supportive. But one well-meaning lady quipped what others would echo in the months that followed, “You’re making this diet thing a spiritual journey? Does God really care about our food?”

Yes, I think He does. As I scan the list of Scriptures found at the end of this book, I do think it’s an issue God takes seriously. As a matter of fact, I think it is an issue that deserves to be studied with the desire to excavate the many truths the Bible has for those struggling with unhealthy cravings.

God never intended for us to want anything more than we want Him. Just the slightest glimpse into His Word proves that. Look at what the Bible says about God’s chosen people, the Israelites, when they wanted food more than they wanted God: “They willfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved” (Psalm 78:18). Yikes.

And what became of them? They never reached the Promised Land. These people wandered in the desert for forty years and no one but Joshua and Caleb was allowed to enter the land flowing with milk and honey. Not one. God waited until every one from that generation died before He allowed Joshua and Caleb to lead the younger generation into the abundant life they desired with all their heart.

I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to wander about in a “desert,” unable to enter into the abundant life God has for me because I willfully put Him to the test over food!

When I started, I knew this battle would be hard — harder than I ever imagined. But through it all I determined to make God, rather

than food, my focus. Each time I craved something I knew wasn't part of my plan, I used that craving as a prompt to pray. I craved a lot. So, I found myself praying a lot.

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Don't rush past that last paragraph. I used my cravings for food as a prompting to pray. It was my way of tearing down the tower

of impossibility before me and building something new. My tower of impossibility was food. Brick by brick, I imagined myself dismantling the food tower and using those same bricks to build a walkway of prayer, paving the way to victory.

Did this simple visualization make it easier? Sometimes it did. And other times my cravings for unhealthy food made me cry. Seriously, cry. Sometimes I wound up on the floor in my closet, praying with tears running down my face. And I gave myself permission to cry, just like the psalmist: "Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my sighing. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation" (Psalm 5:1–3). And that is literally what I did. Each and every craving became another brick I could lay on my walkway of prayer.

"God, I want a biscuit this morning. Instead, I'm eating poached eggs. I'm thankful for these eggs but I'll be honest in saying my cravings for other things are hard to resist. But, instead of wallowing in what I *can't* have, I'm making the choice to celebrate what I *can* have."

"God, it's 10:00 a.m. and I'm craving again. I want those snack crackers that are literally screaming my name. But instead of reaching for those crackers, I'm praying. I'll be honest, I don't want to pray. I want those crackers. But, instead, I'm going to have a handful

of almonds and brick by brick . . . prayer by prayer . . . lay a path for victory.”

“God, it’s lunchtime and all my friends are heading out for Mexican. I love Mexican. I could seriously justify myself right into a big bowl of chips and guacamole right now. It’s been a tough day. But once again I’m choosing to pray instead of getting stuck in my craving. Help me, God, to feel satisfied with healthier choices.”

And that’s how my prayers continued throughout the day. Laying my requests before God and, like the psalmist says, waiting in expectation (Psalm 5:3).

Then, one morning it finally happened. I got up and for the first time in a long while, I felt incredibly empowered. I still did the same crazy routine with the scale — no clothes, no ponytail holder — but I only stepped on it once. The numbers hadn’t changed yet, but my heart had. One day of victory tasted better than any of that food I’d given up ever could. I had waited in expectation using prayer as my guide and I did it.

I did it that day and the next. Then the next. Why not shoot for four victorious days in a row? And then maybe one more.

I can’t promise you there won’t be any more tears. There will. And I can’t promise the scale magically drops as quickly as you wish it would. It probably won’t. But it will be a start. A really good start.

Personal Reflections

1. Lysa describes her morning ritual with the scale and her failed efforts to eat healthier as a vicious cycle she felt powerless to stop (page 28). When it comes to your relationship with food, what repeated behaviors or events describe the cycle you experience and feel powerless to stop?
2. There are many reasons we have for wanting to eat differently — losing weight, fitting into a favorite pair of jeans, looking good for an important event. What reasons motivate your desire to eat healthier? Do these reasons give your struggles with food a purpose strong enough to help you resist unhealthy eating? How do you respond to Lysa’s statement, “I had to see the purpose of my struggle as something more than wearing smaller sizes and getting compliments from others. . . . It had to be about something more than just me”?
3. “I had to get honest enough to admit it: I relied on food more than I relied on God. I craved food more than I craved God. Food was my comfort. Food was my reward. Food was my joy. Food was what I turned to in times of stress, sadness, and even in times of happiness” (page 29). Consider your eating experiences over the last few days or weeks. Using the list below, can you recall specific situations in which you turned to food for these reasons?
 - Comfort
 - Reward
 - Joy
 - Stress
 - Sadness
 - Happiness

Keeping the same situations in mind, how do you imagine your experiences might have been different if you had relied on God, craved God, instead of turning to food?

4. How do you respond to the idea of using your cravings as a prompt to pray? How has prayer helped or failed to help in your previous food battles?
5. Brick by brick (or craving by craving), Lysa dismantled her tower of impossibility and used the same bricks to build a walkway of prayer, paving the path to victory. Brick by brick is an effective way to dismantle something but it also takes time and careful work. In your battles with food, are you more likely to choose a drastic, quick-fix approach or a moderate but longer-term approach? What thoughts or feelings emerge when you consider dismantling your own tower of impossibility one craving at a time?

