

Bears Don't Eat Fat People

Paul Chapman

What do fat people and starving people have in common? Both are obsessed with how and when they will score their next meal. Both will lie, cheat, and steal in order to satisfy the immense craving for food. But the great difference between a fat person and a starving person is motive. For one, the next meal is a matter of survival. For the other, it is merely a quick fix for an overwhelming addiction. Addiction to food is impossible to conceal. People don't have to guess what vice plagues my life. When people see me, they know I am an accomplished food addict.

Years of experience at being fat (I once weighed over 500 pounds) taught me to avoid people as often as possible. Most are polite when suddenly face to face with someone gargantuan in girth, but there are a tactless few who drive fat people underground with hurtful remarks and snickers.

My dream was to become a recluse: to live in a place where contact with people was greatly limited. The answer was the mountains, and I accepted a preaching job in the little town of Dubois, Wyoming. While wandering the dusty streets searching for the church building, I became very nervous. I suddenly realized that instead of accomplishing my long awaited goal of obscurity, the opposite would be my lot. This fat boy was going to stick out like a sore thumb in this one horse town. I was sure to be the token fat boy for the entire state of Wyoming: the literal fat of the land.

The backbone of the congregation was three elderly ladies. I respected them for keeping the church alive, and they welcomed me as their Christian brother.

After my arrival in Dubois I rarely ventured into the woods. Even in the seclusion of the forest I worried about someone spying my grand size. A forest ranger from a distant tower might get a glimpse and a chuckle at my expense.

My feelings about the forest changed one Sunday after worship when a member told me of a close call her grandson had with a bear, which he had to shoot in self-defense. The story intrigued me and I began to read everything I could about bears. The horrifying reality began to sink in. I had moved to a land where I was no longer at the top of the food chain. The greatest part of my life had been spent on the other side of the equation: constantly hunting for food to consume. Now there were creatures out there that wanted to consume **me**.

In all my research of those who had been eaten by bears, none of the victims were fat. Some may have been considered slightly overweight, but there was no evidence that any were grotesquely obese. What is the old joke? How do you keep from getting eaten by a bear? Take someone along who runs slower than you. History, I would think, should be filled with fat people falling victim to such raw-boned cunning. Out of all the incidents I read about, why did bears not eat fat people? Could it be that bears simply don't eat fat people? Was such a theory so far-fetched? I couldn't picture a bear running past a five-course meal to get to a toothpick. However, the evidence supported my hypothesis that no truly fat person had become bear refreshment. There was only one thing to do. I had to test the theory.

In anticipation of my adventure, I spent time preparing body and spirit. For the body, diet and exercise. For the spirit, more Bible study and prayer. When spring arrived I gathered my camping gear and prepared to be in the woods for a week. The bears were

more active than they had been in years due to a drought. What kind of idiot would stay in the woods for a week, for no reason, while starving bears desperately scoured the land for a morsel of food? I was sure I could satisfy a small family of bears for several days. However, knowing how to avoid bears was a major part of my learning. Yes, the whole point was to see a bear, but there was no reason to roll out the red carpet for one.

Thankfully it didn't take a whole week to find the answer to my query. The first day was full of difficulties: hiking up hill with a backpack crammed with equipment, setting up a tent, collecting firewood, building a fire, cooking meals, washing dishes, and using the restroom. All of these things were challenging enough in the comfort of my own home in the middle of town. I exited the forest the next day without encountering a bear.

Placing my most comfortable chair in front of the computer, I launched another massive research project on the Internet. The goal was to understand the cause of obesity and its solution. I always believed that getting fat was my fault: possibly a lack of moral fortitude. However, the blame might correctly be placed on some warped gene I had not requested and over which I held no control. The days passed, the study progressed, and the cold, hard truth became evident. **I was forced to change my mindset.**

In my sermon the next Sunday, I spoke of how God created man in His image (Gen. 1:27), meaning our mind, our conscience, and our spirit. And though our physical body was not created in His image, we are responsible for what we do with it. We must use it to the glory of God, to be a living sacrifice in service to Him (1 Cor. 6:19-20; Rom. 12:1-2). Obesity is an abuse of that responsibility. In December of 2001, the Surgeon General released a report making the claim that obesity had reached epidemic

proportions. It stated that approximately 300,000 deaths every year in the U.S. were associated with overweight and obesity.

The next logical questions were: what causes obesity and how can it be prevented? The report claimed many factors are involved in the cause of obesity, but the emphasis is placed on only two: People eat too much, and don't exercise enough. One's genetic makeup may be a factor, but proper diet and exercise will keep one from gaining weight, or result in the loss of weight. God does not provide a height/weight chart in the Bible, but if one's weight hinders his responsibility to God, family, and community, then he weighs too much. If one's weight threatens his longevity on this earth, then he weighs too much. Now came the hard part—gaining the internal strength to combat the problem.

Matthew 25:14-30 records the parable of the talents spoken by Christ. The principle of the parable is that each individual has a God-given potential, and is expected to do his or her best to reach it. When we misuse and abuse our bodies, we are not trying our best to reach our potential. Since God gave each of us a potential, He has also given us the ability to reach it. One of the most difficult things about improving ourselves is having enough patience. It is important to understand that God is patient (Rom. 2:4; 15:5; 2 Pet. 3:9), and so we must be patient with ourselves and with others. God created us with the ability to be faithful to Him and to make it to heaven. However, we must keep our priorities straight. We must seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33). If we do so with patience and diligence, we will reach our God-given potential. **We must face each day with a positive attitude; an attitude that we can overcome; an attitude that we can do “all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).**

The reason bears don't eat fat people is because we don't go into the woods. We are not adventurous. We don't experience the great things life has to offer. The mountains were the answer, but not to the question I thought. Jonah discovered you can't hide from God, but you can't hide from Satan either. "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Escaping the temptations of Satan in the mountains was impossible, but rejecting them was not.

You can lose weight! Refocus your mind! Make goals! Be patient! Be courageous! Get started now! Someday you will find yourself deep in the woods, afraid of bears, and satisfied.