I have come that you
might have life and have it more abundantly.
—John 10:10

Thin Within
1504 N Greenville
Allen, TX 75002

www.thinwithinonline.com

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BEFORE WE GET STARTED

Be sure that you have received the permission of your physician before beginning or continuing this or any dietary program. Check with him or her before changing your physical activity level as well.

Note: In our daily exercises on the attributes of God we have used one primary source for the definitions. Definitions taken from the *American Dictionary of the English Language*¹ are enclosed in quotation marks with the word *Webster’s* in parentheses.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Thin Within. We rejoice that you have accepted God’s invitation to join us. His word says in Jeremiah 29:11 that He has a plan, purpose, hope, and a future for you. Together, we will discover the blessings of His plan as He longs for you to be at peace with food, eating, your body, and your life.

Over the next twelve weeks and beyond, you will discover practical tools to assist you in this exciting adventure as you melt down to your natural God-given size. You will hear motivational testimonies and read about real men and women who have experienced God’s faithfulness in overcoming obstacles and accomplishing the impossible. You will search the depths and riches of God’s Word and excavate the vastness of His treasure found in the Bible.

The fact is many of us try one diet after the other, but discover the hard way that when we “lose” weight we often “find” it again later—plus some! In fact, 95% of all diets fail. If you have experienced failure in dieting or other efforts regarding food and weight, you are definitely not alone! We will investigate this phenomenon
and discover that by utilizing Biblical principles you can become the thin, healthy person God intended you to be—from within. As you do, you will be able to rest in God’s embrace and never again fear “finding” your extra weight.

SPIRITUAL

You are about to experience the beginning of something new and wonderful! Even now, God is doing a new thing. The prophet, Isaiah, encourages us with the following:

*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.*

*See, I am doing a new thing!*

*Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?*

*I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.*

— Isaiah 43:18–19

The fact that you are here, with this material in front of you indicates that God is at work doing something new in your life!

For many of us the past has been filled with frustration with food, our body, and with dieting failures. Often, we jumped on the latest bandwagon, committing ourselves to fads, counting points, fat grams, or calories. We plunged headfirst into the latest rigorous workout program, only to burn out. We may have even lost weight—sometimes, a lot of weight, but then we couldn’t manage to keep it off.

We may have been caught in the pendulum swing from one extreme to the other. On the one side we basked in our glory and ability to “do it all ourselves.” Then, unable to keep up the performance, we swung to the other extreme, bailing out of the diet and eating with wild abandon. In essence we went from law to license, rules to recklessness. The one side of the pendulum swing is a place of self-righteousness where we took credit for the weight we lost and for following the diet regulations. But when we couldn’t hold it together over time, we swung to the other side, beating ourselves over the head with the club of condemnation for yet
another failure. All the while we buried our pain in a half-gallon of ice cream. With this pendulum way of living, we move back and forth from one side to the other. This is the worldly path of my performance. On this path, we discover the hard way that it leads only to frustration and discouragement.

The great news, however, is that God never intended for our life to be a pendulum swing! The finished work of the cross of Christ is the stabilizing force. We rest in the fact that the grace of God is immeasurable and steadfast, and that it transforms and grounds us firmly in place. When we stumble and fall, we rely upon God’s amazing grace and the power of the Holy Spirit. He gently leads us back (Isaiah 40:11) onto His path, the path of His provision.

Our God is amazing. He who set the stars in the Heavens and measured all of the waters of the earth in the palm of His hand (Isaiah 40:12) desires intimacy with you. You are His beloved and He draws you with loving-kindness (Jeremiah 31:3). All the heavens declare His glory, yet He esteems you (Psalm 8:3–8). It is this God who calls you to join Him on the path of His provision. It is this God who provides the grace, mercy, and strength needed for you to persevere.

The pendulum swinging life is a life of fleshly lusts and fleshly pride. The life stabilized by the cross leads directly to the Father. It may be a process of sometimes moving forward and sometimes faltering back, but the course is set. Our direction and progress are assured. Slowly, but surely, step-by-step we make headway.

This is a path with a hope and a future that God has ordained for you because He loves you. God chooses to love you because, though He is highly exalted above all things, it is His nature to love. It gives Him pleasure to do so (Ephesians 1:5; Hebrews 12:2)!

He has paid the price and it is done! He bought you with His blood. He has rescued you. Christ died to set you free even while you were still rebellious, sinful, and without a care for Him (Romans 5:8). Because of His great love for you, God, who is so very rich in mercy, chose to make you alive in Christ, even while you were dead in sin. His amazing grace has saved you (Ephesians 2:4–9)!

God’s love is relentless and immeasurable. His compassion knows no end. He is personally intimate and aware of your every breath and your every thought (Psalm 139:1–5). He is aware of your pain and heartache. He shares your joys.
and sorrows. Let’s look more deeply at this and the way He has approached His people in the past.

Our God is unchanging. He has always dealt with His people with mercy and grace. Even in the garden when Adam and Eve were given only one directive, which they broke, God himself provided the first “sacrifice” by slaying the animals for the skins from which their clothing would be made.

With the Israelites, God again clearly made known His desires for His people in the Ten Commandments. Ten laws. Ten rules to break. The Israelites were like many of us. They struggled with a sin-repent-sin cycle. In His amazing love and mercy, God provided grace and forgiveness by instituting the sacrificial system. Ultimately it culminated in the sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God, who came and took away the sins of the entire world.

However, when the people began to make a mockery of the very system God used to cover their sin, and instead, continued unashamedly in their idolatry, God gave them over to that which they wanted so much—to live like pagans. He allowed His people to be taken into captivity by the (pagan) Babylonians. After years and years of warning, Israel was handed over to foreign kings to be taken into exile, removed from the land of promise, without a sense of identity, hope, or purpose.

Have you ever felt as if you were in captivity? Many of us have and do even now. Some of us feel captive inside a body that isn’t functioning the way we want it to or that looks different from what we would desire.

Have you ever felt as if your very identity was stripped from you? Have you caught a glimpse of your reflection in a storefront window and gasped, “Who is that? That can’t be me! I am not that size, that shape, or that large!” If this has happened to you, you probably wondered how you got to be that way. It may break your heart, but it also breaks God’s heart for you. He wants you to experience His hope, His joy, and His peace. Jesus came that we might have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10)!

As He spoke to the Israelites years and years ago, He speaks to us today. There were natural consequences as a result of their choices. Those consequences led to their captivity in Babylon. We, too, as a result of our poor choices, face a “captiv-
“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD,
“plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.”
—Jeremiah 29:11

He has plans for you. He has plans to prosper you, to give you a hope and a future! We can rest in this promise! He who has promised is faithful. He is able. He is willing. He says He will do it and He will.

A choice is laid before us. As the Lord spoke to the Israelites through the prophet Jeremiah, so too, He speaks to us in words that are timeless.

“And when you call, I will answer; when you ask, I will say, ‘Here am I.’ If you seek me, you will find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the LORD.
—Jeremiah 29:12–14a

Consider the number of times the word “will” is used in this brief passage. Consider the things that God desires us to “will” and to do as well as the things He says He “will” do. Consider, too, that it is God who is at work in us to will and to do according to His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). In fact, no one comes to Jesus unless the Father draws them (John 6:44). The word translated “draws” in John 6:44 can also be translated “drags.” No one seeks after God at all according to Romans 3:11. Not even one. We must be “dragged” by the Father in order even to begin to be willing to do our part. Because He initiates, He puts
it in our heart to will and to do His good pleasure. We love because He first loved us. Our seeking comes in response to a God who pursues.

As we cease from running and respond to God’s overture, we experience the joy of His presence. He brings the captive out of captivity and restores us to a “land” of hope and promise. We are transformed from within by the renewing of our mind according to the Word of God.

Even now, he begins this work in us. Even now we sense that He draws us to Himself. Out of His love for us He begins a new work.

_The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying:_

“I have loved you with an everlasting love;
I have drawn you with loving-kindness.
I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel.
Again you will take up your tambourines
and go out to dance with the joyful.

—Jeremiah 31:3, 4

We will be free from our captivity! He has a plan, a future and a hope for us. Let us cast off every hindrance and lay hold of that for which Jesus laid hold of us!

**PHYSIOLOGICAL**

Your physical transformation will occur primarily through the God-designed mechanism of hunger.

Did you know that the Bible teaches that you are one of God’s masterpieces (Ephesians 2:10)? It is true! You are His work of art. Psalm 139 teaches that you are fearfully and wonderfully made, an intricate design of mastery and creativity. Therefore, we trust that the loving God who made you knew what He was doing when He placed the natural signals of hunger and satisfaction in your system.

Throw out the old ways of thinking about food and your body. Discard the diet laws and fat gram counters, the food measurers, and so on. We will not be constrained by man-made rules (Colossians 2:20–23). Instead, we have at our
disposal God’s own perfectly designed and fail-proof approach to combating overeating and excessive weight!

**THE HUNGER SCALE**

Those on the *Thin Within* journey will learn to define their hunger with a tool we call the hunger scale. While marvelously simple, we believe you will find utilizing this scale very effective.

To illustrate what the hunger scale is, let’s walk through the hunger reading exercise. Prayerfully invite God to give you sensitivity to what He wants to show you about your body during this exercise.

Concentrate on your mouth, your throat, your stomach, and your abdomen. In succession, ask yourself the following questions: “What do I hear, feel, taste, and think that I associate with hunger? Is there anything going on in my mouth, throat, stomach, or abdomen that I think indicates I am hungry? What is it?”

After focusing on the areas of your body that represent a part of your digestive system, take all of the information that you have just gathered and evaluate whether you are physically hungry. We call this taking a hunger reading. Are you empty? Are you satisfied? Are you somewhere in between? Are you beyond satisfied? Are you stuffed? In *Thin Within*, we use the “hunger scale” to define our levels of hunger and fullness.

Although true hunger is physiologically complex, it is consistently associated with a stomach pouch that is empty. The only place you experience true hunger is your stomach. The other sensations that we may call hunger are usually related to other bodily processes. For instance, one participant upon taking a hunger reading before she planned to eat realized that if she had a “bad taste” in her mouth, she considered it “hunger” or a call for food. It is a misunderstanding to believe that hunger is a sound. Hunger is not a sound or a “growl.” It is a feeling of emptiness in the stomach, which may or may not be accompanied by a growl.
Hunger sensations emanate from just below your ribcage.

When your stomach is empty we call that a 0 on the hunger scale. This week you will learn to recognize when you are at your 0.

When you are at a 0 and eat, the point at which you are comfortable is what we call a 5 on the hunger scale. It is when you have had “just enough” and your body does not need more food. A 5 is not “full,” but is “satisfied.”

A 10 is that very uncomfortable feeling of needing to unbutton the pants and to get horizontal! This occurs when we continue to eat after our body signals that we had enough food. This feeling may occur at least every year during Thanksgiving dinner if not more frequently!

You may discover as you consistently take a hunger reading that you will refine your hunger numbers. That is part of the process in Thin Within.

Your goal will be to eat between 0 and 5 and in this way you will release excess weight. If you eat between a 3 and a 7 you will, most likely, stay the same weight and size that you are. If you routinely eat between a 5 and a 10, you will gain weight.

Many people never allow themselves to experience true stomach hunger. It can take twenty-four hours or longer to sense a true 0. Just know that the wait will be worth it!

Before you eat, we suggest that you take a hunger reading to determine...
whether you are, in fact, at a 0. If you find yourself uncertain, we say, “When in doubt, leave it out.” If you aren’t sure you’re hungry—at a 0—we encourage you to wait a while longer until you are positive.

When your body reaches its 0, you have the freedom to eat whatever food you desire. In the days and weeks ahead, you will develop more discernment regarding what most agrees with your body and enables you to feel your best. For now we suggest that when you eat, please sit down, focus on your meal, and eat slowly so that you will be able to recognize when you are approaching that point of “comfort” that we call a 5 on the hunger scale.

As you confine your eating to the parameters that God intended when He created you, you will discover many things about yourself and about your relationship with your Creator. Continue to take hunger readings prayerfully throughout the week. Note what your hunger levels are and pray that God will continue to help you to become better acquainted with the amazing biological machinery that is your body!

**INTEGRATION**

One of the most wonderful things about *Thin Within* is that we rely on the One Who has a plan, future, and a hope for us. When we follow His lead through the Holy Spirit, we can know without a doubt that He never intends harm, but only good for us. While waiting for our 0 may seem challenging, we can gaze steadfastly on our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who redeemed us from the empty life of endless dieting failures, weight gain, rigid rules, and self-condemnation. The pendulum swing is over! He bought us out of slavery and captivity! He purchased us not with perishable things, such as silver or gold, but with His very own precious blood (1 Peter 1:18, 19).

*What, then, shall we say in response to this?*

*If God is for us, who can be against us?*

*He who did not spare His own Son,*
but gave Him up for us all—How will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?
—Romans 8:31–32

The Lord doesn’t want you to experience hunger so that you will suffer! Instead, He wants you to experience hunger so that you will see your need for Him, for His provision, for His ability to meet all of your needs. He longs to show you compassion and to pour out the blessings that will come to you as you rest in His plan, purpose, and hope. Your future begins now with Him! Cling to the hope that He offers!

APPLICATION

Our desire is that you are filled with anticipation and joy as we begin this journey. We have a hope and it is our God who is faithful to perform that which concerns Him! You, dear one, are of great concern to Him!

This week:
1. Please do the daily exercises that go along with this week’s lessons.
2. Ask for strength to wait before you eat. Discover what 0 is like for you, inviting God to show you when you are in doubt.
3. When you get to your body’s 0, you have the freedom to eat whatever food you desire. We encourage you to sit down and to pay attention to your food so that you won’t be distracted from the Lord’s provision for you! You will also be able to recognize when you are approaching that point of “comfort” that we call a 5 on the hunger scale.
4. At any given point in time, notice where you are on the hunger scale. This can help provide a frame of reference during those moments when you feel drawn to food for reasons other than true body hunger.
5. Discard anything that relates to your former “empty way of life” of dieting and dieting rules. If you are taking medication to help with weight loss, please check with your physician.
6. Foster the renewing of your mind by making some time each day to open the Bible and study, even if you read only a couple of verses. “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4). Speak to God through prayer and invite Him to speak to you through His Word and the Holy Spirit Who lives in all who belong to Christ (Romans 8:9). God will use His Word, as it is living and active (Hebrews 4:12).

In closing this week’s lesson we want you to know we have prayed and are praying for you:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy
and peace as you trust in Him,
so that you may overflow with
hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
—Romans 15:13

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened
in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you…
—Ephesians 1:18a