

ANOREXIA & BULIMIA

Control That Is Out of Control



HOPE
for the Heart

June Hunt

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Out of Control

JUNE HUNT



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Dear friend,

It was a Friday evening and I had just finished speaking before an audience of 600 when a distraught woman came forward baring her soul, overwrought with emotion.

“My daughter died of anorexia,” Brenda (not her real name) sobbed. “She was just 22 and meant the world to me. She was so vibrant, so precious. Then she withered away to nothing.”

As she spoke the word “nothing,” Brenda’s body wilted, then she began to wail. At that moment, I felt the heartbreak of a desperate mother watching her own daughter shrinking down to “skin and bones,” dying of self-imposed starvation. This endeared daughter was unable to recognize her own distorted thoughts: thinking she was much too fat, when instead she was much too thin, thinking she was eating too much, when instead she was eating too little. She was slowly starving herself to death.

In the months that followed, Brenda was consumed with bitterness ...

▶ *At her husband* for not taking the problem seriously.

▪ “She’s just going through a phase.”

▶ *At her friends* for not giving compassion, just trivialities.

▪ “She’s so cute and trim and doesn’t want to be fat!”

- ▶ *At family members* for not understanding the real issues.
 - “Just *make* her eat!”
- ▶ *At the doctors* for not being more proactive.
 - “Don’t worry. We’re watching her.”
- ▶ *At the hospital* for not supplying life-saving solutions.
 - “We’re doing all we can.”
- ▶ *At herself* for not knowing what to do—sooner.
 - “I’ve never been here before!”
- ▶ *At God* for not rescuing her precious child.
 - “Why didn’t *He* make her eat?”
- ▶ *At her daughter* for not fighting to live (until the last three months)¹
 - “Why would she choose to leave me—to wither away and die?”

Brenda’s heartrending story helps explain why real solutions—*effective* solutions—must be offered to those searching for help and hope. Practical answers must address this problem on multiple fronts. In reality, strugglers and their families need help with all aspects of eating disorders—the mental, medical, and emotional dimensions, as well as the social and spiritual.

Most people don’t understand eating disorders at all. For example, *anorexia* and *bulimia* appear to be opposites: the anorexic stops eating, while the bulimic keeps overeating—but neither condition

has much to do with food. Instead, both strugglers are starving—for unconditional love, significance, and security.


Both feel they don't have control of their lives, so they substitute the one area they *can* control—their *weight*. They can control what they put into their mouths and how long they keep it there. This daily destructive cycle explains why I refer to eating disorders as “control that is out of control!”

In our media-saturated culture, where “thin is in,” where people *go all out* for perfect appearance, we need to know, “*The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart*” (1 Samuel 16:7).

How vital that we see ourselves from God's point of view. Ultimately, when you allow God's truth about you to take control of your thoughts, your actions will change, and then your life will change. Jesus says it this way, “*The truth will set you free*” (John 8:32).

Over the years, I have personally counseled hundreds of people who have found lasting freedom. My prayer is that this small book—filled with biblical hope and practical help—will bless you on your journey and then help you be a guide and blessing to others.

Yours in the Lord's hope,



June Hunt

ANOREXIA & BULIMIA

Control That Is Out of Control

“*I miss Ana,*” she laments.² Her dear friend is gone. And with that departure, her world turned upside down.

But now she wants everything back to the way it used to be. That’s when she had control over her life. That’s when Ana was crucial in her life. Yet others objected—those who forced Ana away.

Today, however, she has asked Ana to return, and she’s determined to get Ana back—her familiar friend, her best friend, her only friend called Ana—short for Anorexia.

It’s startling! Around the globe, growing numbers characterize themselves as “pro-ana,” namely, *pro-anorexic* or prone to self-starvation. They wear the label with pride, attaching it to their slowly withering figures. They claim, “Anorexia is not an eating disorder but rather a *lifestyle choice*.” And now hundreds of “pro-ana” websites dispense their dark, distorted message of death.

Websites and blogs alike help them link forces internationally to share tragic tips on everything from *how to become anorexic* to *how to hide their non-eating habits*. And for the “Mias” (short for *Bulimia*), who binge and purge food, there are “pro-mia” sites as well.

An unmistakable cloud of darkness hovers over these deadly eating disorders. Meanwhile, too many *Anas* and *Mias* in the world proudly declare that they're simply *dying to be thin*.³

For those who are painfully deluded, God's plan is dramatically different from the one destroying their lives. For today, God wants them to eat and enjoy the daily bread He provides, and He wants to be their "*bread of life*" for all their tomorrows.

For it was Jesus who said ...

**"I am the bread of life."
(John 6:48)**



DEFINITIONS

Karen Carpenter—the internationally acclaimed vocalist—could never have imagined being “center stage” for anything other than her music.

She was the sister in the sibling duo *The Carpenters*—a sound sensation in the 1970s and early 80s that repeatedly rose to the top of the pop music charts. Songs like “We’ve Only Just Begun” and “Close to You” contributed to this Grammy award-winning pair’s achieving worldwide sales of albums and singles exceeding 100 million.⁴ Karen was known for her vibrant glow and velvety voice, a combination that ignited invitations for stage performances all around the world.

But February 4, 1983, marked her final curtain call. Found unconscious at her parents’ home, she was rushed to the hospital, where shortly after she was pronounced dead. Karen died of a heart attack at the tender age of 32, but it was her medical diagnosis that once again catapulted her back on “center stage.”

Proverbs, the biblical book of wisdom, presents this painful truth ...

**“There is a way that seems right ...
but its end is the way to death.”
(Proverbs 16:25 ESV)**

WHAT IS Anorexia?

Before Karen Carpenter's death, the word *anorexia*—unknown to the average person—was only occasionally uttered in doctors' offices, hospitals, and rehab facilities. But all that changed in the early 1980s when a stunned public learned that the gifted “girl-next-door”—America's singing sweetheart—had literally starved herself to death. From that day forward, *anorexia* has been a familiar word.

The obvious question both then and now is: *Why would anyone enter into self-starvation*, especially if they, like Karen, “had it all”—fame, family, fortune? In truth, Karen's battle with anorexia began as a desperate and deliberate attempt to eliminate her curves because she loathed her “hourglass figure.”⁵

At age 17, the 5' 4" brunette began focusing on her figure when she reached 145 pounds. At that point, she went on a diet, and in six months lost 25 pounds, then maintained an average weight of 120 pounds for the next six years.⁶ But in August 1973, Karen was appalled at pictures of herself in a concert. An unflattering dress revealed what Karen perceived to be a bloated belly, and then her painful journey began.⁷

Those in the throes of this debilitating eating disorder continually struggle with a warped sense of beauty and a distorted self-image, and if asked, they would be the first to admit the accuracy of these words from the Bible: “*Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting*” (Proverbs 31:30).

- ▶ **Anorexia** is an eating disorder characterized by compulsive, chronic self-starvation with a refusal to maintain a body weight within 15% of a person's normal weight.⁸ The word “disorder” indicates that the normal function of the mind and/or body is impaired.
- ▶ **Anorexia** is derived from a Greek word that means “without appetite,”⁹ which is actually “a misnomer because loss of appetite is rare.”¹⁰ However, after the body goes without nourishment for three days, natural hunger subsides, at least for a period of time.
- ▶ **Anorexics** weigh far less than what should be their normal body weight, which is different for every person, based on age, height, gender, bone structure, and muscle mass. Body weight that is 15% below normal poses a serious threat to physical health.¹¹ (Sometimes the word “Manorexia” is used for males.)
- ▶ **Anorexics** may experience a different cause for this *life-threatening* eating disorder than the irrational fear of weight gain or distorted body image. (For example, if you believed that God told you to eat and drink nothing indefinitely—and that to consume anything would be a clear act of rebellion against His Supreme Deity—then out of obedience you could become anorexic and literally starve yourself to death. Someone like this may be suffering from a type of obsessive-compulsive disorder known as “scrupulosity.”)

Regardless of the reason for the lack of eating, the Bible says ...

**“My knees give way from fasting;
my body is thin and gaunt.”
(Psalm 109:24)**

WHAT IS Anorexia Nervosa?

When it came to consuming food, Karen Carpenter displayed willpower—to a *fault*.

Unlike bulimics, who binge on food and then purge it, Karen was never found “raiding the fridge” for favorites like ice cream or keeping hidden candy. Her world revolved around weight *loss*—every potential calorie was a threat. Karen’s spiral downward into a full-fledged eating disorder began in November 1973 following an appearance on a Bob Hope TV special.

After viewing the videotape, Karen was distressed by how she looked, and Richard, her brother and singing partner, agreed that she looked heavier than before.

Richard passed off the conversation as insignificant, yet Karen vowed “to do something about it.”¹² In the process, she abandoned logical, adult reasoning and embraced irrational, deceptive thoughts, seeing herself through the distorted lenses of her flawed perceptions.

Sadly, she shared the distressing thoughts of the psalmist: “*How long must I wrestle with my thoughts*

and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?” (Psalm 13:2).

Being deceived, Karen did not heed the words of God ...

**“Give careful thought to your ways.”
(Haggai 1:5)**

Those afflicted with anorexia are assaulted by a barrage of obsessive thoughts about body image and food and are consumed with irrational fear and anxiety.

▶ **Anorexia Nervosa** is an intense fear of gaining weight or becoming fat even though a person is dangerously underweight (at least 15% below normal).¹³

▶ **Anorexia Nervosa** is “psychological” in that the *mind* pictures a distorted image of what the body looks like and produces an abnormal fear of weight gain.¹⁴

The two subtypes are:¹⁵

- “Restricting Anorexics” maintain their dangerously low weight by excessively restricting their eating and possibly excessively exercising their bodies.
- “Binge/Purge Anorexics” restrict their eating but also purge by self-induced vomiting and/or the use of laxatives, diuretics, or enemas. They may also engage in binge eating.

Many anorexics move back and forth between these two subtypes.

Sadly, it's as though they are living out the words from the book of Job ...

“Someone may be chastened on a bed of pain with constant distress in their bones, so that their body finds food repulsive and their soul loathes the choicest meal.

Their flesh wastes away to nothing, and their bones, once hidden, now stick out.”

(Job 33:19–21)

Body Image

QUESTION: “What is meant by the term ‘body image’?”

ANSWER: Your body image refers to what you ...

- ▶ **See** when you look at your reflection in a mirror
- ▶ **Picture** in your mind when you think of your body
- ▶ **Believe** about your physical appearance
- ▶ **Feel** about your body—your features, height, weight, shape, size, hair, and skin color
- ▶ **Sense** in your body when being physically active (gesturing, talking, walking, running, biking, singing, dancing, playing sports, exercising, etc.)
- ▶ **Think** about the degree of control you have over your body
- ▶ **Consider** to be your level of comfort in your body