

# IT BEGAN IN THE GARDEN



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**UNDERSTAND YOUR PAST  
FOR A HEALTHIER FUTURE**

— HEIDI ZWART M.A. —

## **FOREWORD**

Health matters. From an early age, I committed to being physically fit. It's one of my top-five life values. I decided early on that whatever else happened in my life, staying healthy would be one of the keys to living a better life.

It's not always easy. Every day after work, I come to a stop sign. If I go straight ahead over a bridge, I drive home to a warm house, a warm meal, and a relaxing evening with my wife. If I turn right onto the freeway, I drive ten miles to the gym and endure a brutal workout before showering and heading home. Straight ahead leads to comfort; turning right leads to torture. Every day, I face that decision, and five days a week, I turn right. Why? Because if I keep going straight, I can't achieve my goals. I can't do what I was made to do. As hard as it is to turn right, the payoff is worth it. I'm stronger and healthier, I have more energy, and I'm in a better mood when I get home (and my wife is grateful for that!).

The value I've put on my health drives this daily decision and determines where I go and what I do. It narrows my focus and eliminates competing options. It has played a significant part in my ability to lead a church from 350 to 22,000. Without prioritizing my health, this may not have been possible. It continues to be part of what keeps me energized and mobile enough to continue leading this growing church. Even though I committed to my health long ago, it's still a daily decision to live by this value. The struggle is real. And it started long before you and I were born.

The lessons health and wellness coach Heidi Zwart talks about in *It Began in the Garden* don't promise a magic pill for better health, but they do offer a biblical understanding of the origin of our struggle and how to overcome it with small, daily decisions. The principles found within this book are grounded in the biblical account of Adam and Eve and how one simple decision created the challenges we face every day, not only in life but in our health. They also flow out of the life and wisdom of a respected friend and colleague.

I've known Heidi for many years and have witnessed her authenticity and wisdom as a respected member of our church board. Heidi's one of the best, most trustworthy people I know. She has a genuine passion for reaching people for Christ so that their lives are transformed. The words on the pages of this book flow from that heart.

Not only do you need this book, but someone in your life needs it, too. Your health matters. Their health matters. Your legacy, the life you were meant to live, is at stake. You may not be able to change the beginning of your story. None of us are. But you can start to script a better future.

Decide today to start writing. It's never too late to write a healthier ending.

**- Bob Merritt, Senior Pastor, Eagle Brook Church**

# INTRODUCTION

The world of nutrition and fitness is confusing. A quick scroll through your social media accounts or television channels is proof. We aren't lacking expert advice or celebrities promising a once-and-for-all weight-loss solution. Dozens and dozens of products and plans promise success. Advertisements, infomercials, and stories of trusted friends barrage us with options. And lots and lots of noise.

The side effect is confusion. Paralysis. We don't know what to do or who to believe, so we do nothing. Or we try, fail, and become even more discouraged that yet another plan didn't work. We blame ourselves for our lack of will-power or self-control. Or we berate the program for being too hard or too complicated. We remain frustrated and discouraged. This is not another one of those weight-loss plans disguised as a book. Inside these pages, you won't find the magic pill to shed pounds quickly once and for all. This book has no formulas to follow, meal plans to build, calories to count, or points to track. I don't believe in a one-size-fits-all nutrition or exercise program. There is no mathematical calculation for success. If that's what you're looking for, this book isn't for you. I understand your desire for a once-and-for-all solution. I get it

I've battled the weight-loss roller coaster, too. I still fight body image issues. And I struggle with depression and anxiety at times. In search of a fix, I've even become a certified nutrition and fitness coach to try to figure it all out. Honestly, sometimes I'm just as confused and frustrated as you.

But I've learned some lessons along the way. I've discovered some common challenges we face and methods to overcome them. As a master's level counselor, nutrition coach, life coach, and personal trainer, I've been fortunate to help hundreds of people make healthy life changes. These changes don't happen overnight, though. It isn't a quick-fix solution. But with patience and practice, they get unstuck.

*They lose weight.*

*They eat better.*

*They work out smarter.*

*They sleep better.*

*They are less stressed.*

*They believe in themselves again.*

Just like you, they wanted a healthier future. They knew they needed to make some changes to make that happen, so they went to work applying many of the methods you'll learn in this book. If that sounds like the kind of life you want to live, then this book is for you.

*Everyone is unique.* We have different metabolisms, hormones, and predispositions toward disease. We are different ages, genders, and ethnicities. Add in lifestyle choices like jobs, family, social commitments, church, and sports, and we've got a recipe for uncommon ground. All of it impacts our quality of life and the time we dedicate to our health.

Despite our uniqueness, however, we also share some common struggles around food and fitness. Around life in general, really. We've probably all wondered at times if there's something wrong with us when we can't exercise consistently or eat the things we know are good for our bodies. We've been struggling with this for a long, long time.

In truth, we were destined for this fight. We didn't have a choice. Way back in the very beginning, Earth's original inhabitants, Adam and Eve, *did* have a choice. And they didn't make a very good one. With their not-so-great decision about a piece of fruit came the struggle we continue to fight today. We carry the pain and consequences of the baggage they left for us. They wrote the opening line of a story we can't rewrite. That's the bad news.

But there's good news, too. Though we can't change the beginning, we *can* write the rest of the story. We've been given the opening sentence of chapter 1. That's it. We can choose a different middle and ending. Even if we haven't written an ideal story so far or made great choices to this point, there's still time to write a better one for a healthier future.

So, if you're ready to start writing a better story through simple, practical changes, keep reading. If you're ready and willing to look at food and exercise differently, through the lens of a familiar story that happened long, long ago in a beautiful garden, this is for you. You will be encouraged and equipped to make practical changes in your day-to-day life. And more importantly, connect to why it matters.

Warning. You *may* drop a size along the way or see the number on that scale finally move. You may see some improvements to your inner health, too. Better choices lead to better health. Small changes lead to a better future. A better story.

Using examples from both personal and professional experience, we'll take a closer look at desire, temptation, choices, shame, and blame and how each impacts our choices about food and exercise. You will be encouraged with small, practical steps to make better choices than our garden-dwelling, fig-leaf-wearing ancestors did. You will have takeaway principles and clear guidance to re-claim your health. Not all at once, but little by little with time and practice.

I'm suggesting a few options to fully digest this book. Choose the one that will uniquely work for you, knowing your learning style, lifestyle, and reading preference. Or use a hybrid of these options to help you meet your own personal goals.

- 1. Read this from cover to cover, at your own pace. Each chapter has an application section at the end of the book that you can use as you like. Grab a notebook and think through the questions, writing them down for your own personal growth.*
- 2. Recruit a friend to read this book with you. Pick a chapter a week to discuss together and hold each other accountable for making healthy life changes. Life is better when it's shared.*
- 3. Use this book as a small group study. As you make your way through the chapters week by week, gather together to discuss the weekly topic and support each other in your quest to live a life of health.*

Whichever option you choose, when you are finished reading this book, you will be equipped with tools for change. The small, incremental decisions and daily choices you start practicing create a ripple that, over time, becomes a gigantic tidal wave of change. What you do today impacts your tomorrow. And the next day. And the next day. So are you ready to choose today?

Your future is waiting. And the rest of the story begins now.

Thank you for downloading this  
chapter!

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