

## Finding God Through Weight Loss

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Dieting is a separate culture. Nowhere is this culture more visible or bonded more closely than in Durham, NC. I am a participant/observer of diet culture.

I have interviewed hundreds of people who have lost a significant amount of weight. All of them framed their dieting experiences in evangelical terms. I once was lost (fat), and now am found (thin). They view food as sacred (food that facilitates weight loss), and profane (fattening food). They went through six stages of a conversion to the dieting way of life, and through their physical transformation of weight loss, they found and experienced a deep connection with God. The six stages are:

1. The Call (the moment that takes one out of an ordinary life into an extraordinary one)
2. The Journey (occurs when one answer the call and is on the way to a better life through dieting)
3. The Recognition (meeting others like oneself at dieting places)
4. Backsliding (experience of sin, i.e. going off the diet)
5. Redemption (forgiveness of sins through ritual atonement and a renewed adherence to dieting.)
6. Transformation (the rites of passage are complete, and the self experiences unification with the dominant culture and a deep satisfaction with God).

The transformation of self is very difficult. Religious ethos provides an image of ideal transformation. Dieters in the process of losing weight view themselves as noble, courageous, and up to the struggle with unforeseen obstacles as well as with daily and familiar temptations of the flesh. Worshippers repeat tales of saints who have resisted the urges of appetite. They tell of miracles where people were actually cured of their obesity and never again experienced a night of bingeing followed by a morning of purging. Dieting becomes a moral as well as physical quest.