

Book Review
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Winning The Food Fight by Steve Willis, Ventura, California: Regal Books from Gospel Light, 2012, 221 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8307-6122-7. \$11.95.

Steve Willis is the lead pastor for the First Baptist Church in Kenova, WV. He also leads The Community Fellowship on the Campus of Marshall University in Huntington, WV. He played a role on ABC's Emmy-winning mini-series **Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution**. This book is an outgrowth of his experiences both personal and professional with poor eating habits and health concerns as a result of overeating.

The book is organized with twelve rounds (representing the chapters) configured as a prize fight. To win the food fight, one must successfully navigate each round. The book begins with a Foreword by Jamie Oliver, preface, acknowledgements and concludes with recipes by Jamie Oliver, a list of resources and endnotes.

In round one, Willis relates the events leading up to and including a call from Jason Skweres of ABC Television. Skweres was interested in shooting a television show in the Huntington, WV area due to the fact that it was recently listed by the Center for Disease Control as the unhealthiest city in the nation. Skweres worked for Jamie Oliver who was the executive producer of the show *The Naked Chef*. Oliver wanted to come to Huntington and do a show and teach people about nutrition. Huntington was first in the nation in the percentage of adults who did not exercise (31 percent), first in the prevalence of heart disease (22 percent), and first in the percentage of people who had diabetes (13 percent) (p. 18). The list continued: first in the number of people over 65 who did not have their natural teeth, in those with high blood pressure, circulation problems, kidney disease, vision problems, sleeping disorders and depression. Forty-six percent of adults were obese (p. 18). The problem is obvious.

In round two, the author shows how obesity affects other aspects of one's life. It can and does contribute to financial problems, marital problems, spiritual problems, multiple health problems and even death. This chapter is titled, *Weighed Down* for a good reason.

The third round focuses on God's perception of our life situations. Does God care? Willis relates his preparation of and apprehension for his first sermon on the subject of obesity. He developed his lesson around the impact that culture has on each of us. He used the apostle Paul as an example of confronting culture. Paul confronted the Gnostics of his day and repudiated their dualism (Colossians). He affirmed that the body was good and what they did with their bodies mattered. In I Cor. 6:19-20, Paul emphasized that Christians have been bought with a price and that they belonged to God and should glorify Him in their bodies and in their spirits. God does care about how you use your body!

Round four addresses a biblical plan for change. Using the example of Daniel and his three friends, Willis shows that it is possible to resist the pressures of the culture we live in and make choices that honor God. He outlines five steps to follow: (1) Make up your mind to be different; (2) Seek God's grace; (3) develop your own plan. Be specific and develop a way of measuring success; (4) Enlist help for accountability and support; and (5) practice self-control and persevere. Self-discipline will pay-off.

The fifth round tackles the problem of resistance to change and the pain of change. "Change will never take place until the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain it takes to change" (p. 77). Change must occur one person at a time. Each of us must look in the mirror

and decide to make different choices involving our diets including what and how much to eat. Once we decide to change, we must persevere in the habits of a new and better lifestyle.

Willis stresses the importance of eating meals at home in round six. It is easy for young people to get hooked on food that is bad for them. Restaurants use sugar, fat and salt to appeal to our taste buds and then addict us to certain foods. They want us to keep coming back. Children need to be educated about nutrition. For instance, an average soda at McDonalds contains about 50 grams of sugar. That equals a quarter cup of sugar. Would you allow your child to go to the sugar jar and straight-up eat a quarter cup of sugar? One-third of children eat fast food every single day (p. 91). The average eight-year old needs 1,200 to 1,500 calories a day. A typical McDonald's value meal contains around 1,200 calories (p. 91). Families need to stop eating out more and start eating at home making good nutritional choices. Here are some positive benefits to eating a meal at home as a family: (1) healthier youth development—a feeling of connectedness; (2) better nutrition; (3) better eating habits; (4) prevention of unhealthy behaviors including drug abuse, sexual immorality, use of tobacco and alcohol; (5) improved communication; (6) reduced stress and tension in the home; and (7) your children's friends are less likely to use prescription drugs.

Round seven takes a look at how changing a core belief changes a church. Since 2002, Chuck Lawrence has been persuading members of his church, Christ Temple, to follow a lifestyle that will enable them to be healthier. The plan is called "Fit For Purpose." Chuck says, "Everything you're going to do in your lifetime is going to be done in your physical body." God gave us a body for a purpose. Everybody needs to maximize what God has given them and that can be done through a healthy lifestyle (p. 110). Some features Willis recommends to help your church change: (1) start somewhere-initiate a beginning program for health consciousness; (2) enlist enthusiastic people; (3) promote the program; and (4) make sure the leaders of the church are involved.

In round eight, Willis shows that success in changing the eating habits of large numbers of people requires the efforts of many different people and utilization of many different resources. Keep focused. Rule #1, "We have to change the dietary culture in the United States" (p. 126). Recruit people in the community that believe in this rule. Develop community gardens. Develop exercise programs throughout the community. Use the media wisely.

Another area communities need to be concerned with is the school lunch program. Round nine tackles this thorny issue. Business partnerships between drink manufacturers and schools have led to vending machines offering soft drinks in schools. These partnerships are hard to change because schools need money. Alternatives to soft drinks are available and can be pursued. A bigger issue is to change the menus schools provide for students. This involves the Federal government which is a supplier of food products to schools. Politics gets involved as food growers attempt to influence the government. Providing more nutritional foods in schools will cost more. Money becomes involved in more ways than one.

Round ten focuses on the politics of food. The food industry is constantly trying to figure out ways to increase profits. They must work to keep food production costs low while encouraging food consumption. Willis explains in detail how the food industry has succeeded at their goals at the expense of the health of Americans. With increased food production, there has also been an increase in pesticide use, antibiotics in feed, and even irradiation of food products. These chemicals are harming us.

Willis introduces the subject of fasting in round eleven. Americans don't fast much. Yet, fasting can help build spiritual stamina. Fasting isn't understood by many Americans. Some

time needs to be given to study this important subject. Fasting is a way for God to transform us. It is a form of self-denial. Willis takes a look at the physical, mental and spiritual and emotional benefits of fasting.

The final round addresses the fact that the food fight is personal. Each individual has a stake in their own health and that of family members. Willis relates a personal story in which he believes he may have received a miracle. He grew up in poverty and was familiar with government assistance. He has learned from his own experiences and is willing to share that message with others. Willis closes his book with an inspirational message from the *Rocky* movies. In *Rocky Balboa* the old boxer showed the never quit spirit. He told his son that it was not how hard he hit, but how hard he could get hit and keep moving forward (p. 205). The message? Don't quit!

The book concludes with recipes from Jamie Oliver, a list of resources and endnotes. Willis has attempted to capture the essence of a serious problem in American culture. Obesity will not go away on its own. The fight belongs to each of us.