



Maintenance by the Numbers



by | Matthew McNutt

#42: The answer to life, the universe, and everything—according to author of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* series, Douglas Adams.

#47: Guaranteed, there's at least one other *Star Trek* nerd out there who's rejoicing with me on this one. I'd explain it to you, but it would take the whole column.

#231: The answer to the question I'm constantly asked.

Numbers are important.

If I'm honest, putting my weight in print like that is still weird for me. Something about losing weight on national television apparently makes it okay for anyone and everyone to know what I weigh now, a year later.

I get their curiosity—it doesn't mean I always like it, but I get it. After all, numerous studies have shown that 80 percent of people who lose weight ultimately put it all back on. Only one of five dieters actually manages to keep his or her weight off.

Feeding Frenzy

The media has had a lot of fun outing *The Biggest Loser* contestants who've regained weight. Recently *US Weekly* lost interest in interviewing me after they did the math and found out I weigh exactly what my doctors want me to weigh. Instead they wanted to know if I knew of any contestants (my friends!) who had put significant weight back on.

I kept most of my desired reply to myself and did some confessing of sinful attitudes and thoughts after I hung up.

My point is that everyone waits with baited breath to see what happens with the person who loses weight because we've all seen someone succeed only to go right back where he was—and in a shockingly short time. It's probably no surprise that I'm very interested in increasing my odds. I'm actually desperate to set the healthy spiritual and physical example I'm convinced we're all called to, especially in a country where youth obesity has become a national crisis. This is also why, as I watched a documentary on drug and alcohol addiction, I was stunned to see the same rate of success in recovering addicts: 20 percent.

The Recovery Continues

I don't think it's a coincidence that the percentages are virtually identical. For many overweight people, the reasons for the unhealthy relationships with food are similar to those who depend on drugs or alcohol. But here's what I find the most fascinating: The success rate doubles for those who stay in their recovery groups. In other words, if you're a recovering alcoholic, you have a 20 percent chance of success. But if you stay in AA even after you've "succeeded," the chances of long-term success shoot up to around 40 percent.

I started looking around at the solid core group of *The Biggest Loser* alumni who've maintained their weight loss, and I've noticed a common thread: They're all actively involved in weight-loss groups. They've become personal trainers, led diet groups, host *The Biggest Loser* challenges, etc.

In other words, staying involved in the weight-loss world has been a key for them keeping it off. I've come to the conclusion that being a true obesity survivor means treating it like surviving any other addiction: It's a lifelong battle, and the best chance of success is staying in a support group of some sort, whether as a participant or as a leader.

I know for me a huge part of my continued focus is tied to the weight loss groups I lead, the public speaking I do on the subject, and the articles I write. The constant reminder of God's call on our lives to care for our temples keeps me motivated week after week.

Wired for Community

Taking it to another level, though, it makes sense. God wired us for community. Accountability, support, teamwork—these are essential in any aspect of life, whether spiritual or physical in nature. The Bible says that after God created the earth and everything in it and declared it good, God saw that Adam was alone—and Adam's physical isolation was the only thing in all of creation God labeled "not good" (Genesis 2:18). More powerfully, Ecclesiastes 4:10 reads, "If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!"

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The key to maintaining weight loss, just as with maintaining any discipline in our lives, is community. Yes, maintenance is hard—in many ways it's more challenging than losing weight to begin with. But with the right sense of purpose (worshiping God through the care of God's temple) and biblical resources (community, community, community!), maintaining a successful weight loss is a very realistic expectation.

And seriously, the 47 thing? It's very cool. Call me. We'll talk. 🙌



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