

# the new you

A GUIDE TO BETTER PHYSICAL, MENTAL,  
EMOTIONAL, AND SPIRITUAL WELLNESS

NELSON SEARCY  
JENNIFER DYKES HENSON



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To you, reader:  
For having the courage  
to seek God's best  
in every area of your life.

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## acknowledgments

**Nelson Searcy:** My ongoing journey toward the new you, toward a comprehensive healthy lifestyle has been a rocky one. It all started in 1989, as a freshman in college, when I became a follower of Jesus. That decision kicked off an ongoing journey toward spiritual health. As life unfolded, the continual challenges of marriage, parenting, leading growing organizations and my own personal struggles pushed me to seek solutions for my mental and emotional health. I was a little late to the game—I finally started to get serious about my physical health in my mid-thirties, but better late than never. So I have been on the new you journey for quite a while and am healthier for it. My hope is that the thoughts and principles contained in this book will help you as much as they have helped me along the way.

It is not an overstatement to say that this book would not have happened without the obsessive commitment of Jennifer Dykes Henson. Jennifer and I have worked together on over a dozen books, but this one has been exceptionally dependent on her passion and dedication. It's an honor for me to be her coauthor on this book. Jennifer, her husband Brian, and their family all model the new you lifestyle. Jennifer, thank you!

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Of course, it is my family that stands above all. During the year this book will be released, my wife and I will celebrate our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. This milestone is known as the silver anniversary—though my wife deserves more than a silver medal for her commitment to me. Pray I find just the right gift! Likewise, my son, Alexander, will become a teenager this year. That may be the bigger prayer request! Kidding aside, I offer my deepest and ever-growing love to Kelley, and my ongoing love and appreciation to Alexander and the Christian young man he is becoming.

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**Jennifer Dykes Henson:** When I was just out of college, newly married, and working for Dr. Charles Stanley, I had the opportunity

to sit in on some training sessions with Jordan Rubin, author of *The Maker's Diet* and founder of Garden of Life. The biblical truths I learned about health and wellness in those sessions set me on a path that changed the course of my own overall health, and ignited a passion that is culminating in the pages of this book. So first and foremost, I have to thank Jordan Rubin for his work, and for his willingness to pour the lessons of his own journey into others. I should also thank Dr. Stanley and the team at In Touch Ministries for opening the door to that connection.

My partnership with Nelson Searcy over the last thirteen years has been nothing short of incredible. I am continually humbled and excited to be involved in the magnificent work God is doing through him. *The New You* has been a true labor of love—one we are both passionate about and excited to bring to the world. I am honored to coauthor this book with someone so keyed into helping people everywhere achieve their full potential for God's glory. Nelson, thank you for inviting me into The Journey—Manhattan offices for that first meeting so many years ago and for all the ways you've encouraged our partnership to grow and evolve since. Each year—and each book—is more fun than the last!

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Finally, thanks to God for once again giving me the opportunity to engage in meaningful work that will, hopefully and prayerfully, influence the lives of those who find it in their hands for the better.

# introduction

Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending.

Carl Bard

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.

Hebrews 12:1–2

**G**rowing up, I (Jennifer) spent time at the beach every summer. Riding ocean waves with my dad was one of my favorite ways to pass the hot, salty days. We would wade out into the water, wait for the perfect little swell, and bodysurf it in to the shore. Over and over again, for hours at a time, we'd let one wave after another carry us to the sand.

One thing about playing in the ocean always caught me off guard. After we had been out in the water for a while, I would look back at the beach and not be able to find our big blue beach umbrella with my mom sitting beneath. Without realizing it, we had drifted so far from our starting point that we couldn't even see it anymore. The undertow had pulled us a long way in a direction we didn't even realize we were going. So we had to hit pause, walk up the beach until we found where we had started, and dive in again.

It wasn't until I was an adult with a family of my own that I realized undertows aren't just for the ocean. They exist in everyday life as well. Extra weight, low energy, a constant sense of anxiety . . . these things converged to teach me that drift is a real and active force. If we aren't intentional, our health and wellness slowly start to slip away as our days get busy with the demands of family life, work concerns, and messy relationships. The pull is so subtle that sometimes we don't even recognize it until months or years have passed. One day we wake up, look around, and think, *How did I get here?*

### Nelson's Story

A few years ago, I wasn't living my best life. As a pastor, I had spent my entire career building God's church, but in the meantime, I had let my own health fall by the wayside. Sometime in my thirties, I began putting on a few extra pounds every year. I began sleeping less in the name of productivity and wrestling with more stress. I was on a downhill slope toward obesity, burnout, and ineffectiveness.

But, honestly, I wasn't that concerned. I was too busy to be concerned. Sure, I wanted to look and feel a little better, but doesn't everyone? That wasn't enough incentive to change my behavior. Besides, really getting healthy seemed overwhelming. The scale had ticked into intimidating territory, and I could feel myself struggling

physically, spiritually, emotionally, and mentally. But habits are strong, and my unhealthy ones continued to direct my path.

Then came the breaking point. I became a father. When my son was born, I couldn't ignore what I was doing to myself any longer. I remember thinking, *I'm not going to be able to chase him around and enjoy his childhood if I don't get myself together.* That realization opened a floodgate. It led me to begin considering everything else my unhealthy lifestyle choices would keep me from doing in the future if I didn't make a change—things like being an engaged husband, fulfilling my role as a pastor effectively, simply living with contentment and enthusiasm. So I made a decision to stop being carried by the current of bad habits, tastes, and temptations. I took a hard look at the truth about my health and wellness and put a plan in place to get back to the fullness of life God had in store for me.

### **What's God Got to Do with It?**

As we each (Nelson and Jennifer) set out on our individual journeys toward health and wellness, we began to understand a transformational truth: God has a plan for our health. He has a plan for yours. Your body and ours are the living, breathing, and walking-around temple of God's Spirit. That reality has implications for how we care for ourselves physically, spiritually, emotionally, and mentally. Our skin, bones, and fleshy guts are home to the Most High. That is a humbling thought, isn't it?

As they say, the truth will set you free. A new, correct perspective on God's purposes for our health and wellness is a game changer. (We will explore that perspective in detail in the pages ahead.) After all, if God has entrusted us with these earthly vessels—not to mention all the work and plans he has for us while living in them—then where do we get off trashing them by eating what we want and sitting around letting them atrophy? Where do we get off neglecting sleep, harboring bitterness, and putting off the

healing practice of prayer? (Maybe you don't do these things—we are speaking from personal experience here.)

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*“This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”*  
(2 Cor. 5:17).

How can we rationalize treating ourselves so poorly that we can't fully engage in our Creator's purposes for us each and every day?

This goes a step further for those of us who are followers of Jesus. If you are a Christian, God has declared that you are a new creation in Christ. Scripture teaches that when you committed yourself to Jesus, you became a new person, fully and completely: “This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” (2 Cor. 5:17).

But even though we have been deemed new creations in Christ, many of us aren't living that way. Instead, we are frustrated, overweight, short on time, low on energy, dealing with chronic lifestyle-related health issues, stressed about work and family, unable to say yes to God's plans, and not experiencing fulfillment. For too many Christians, health issues—whether physical, spiritual, emotional, or mental—have become a stumbling block to living the abundant life God intends. Too many of the people filling American churches each weekend aren't able to experience life to the fullest because they are struggling with their physical bodies, their minds and emotions, and their daily relationships with God. Can you relate?

Here is some great news: walking in the reality of your new life in Christ doesn't hinge on trying harder or doing better. First and foremost, it is about surrendering to the fullness of your transformed identity in him (more on this in chapter 9)—and then doing your part to live out that fullness in every aspect of your daily life, which is what we will concentrate on in the pages ahead.

God wants us all to live full, active lives, accomplishing the things he put us here to do. He wants us to be free to live and love well. We have a responsibility to cooperate with him to make that happen.

Life is too short and too precious, and God has invested way too much in us, for us to squander our potential and let poor lifestyle choices hold us back from all he has in store.

Maybe the story your life is telling today isn't the story you want it to tell. Maybe you aren't where you expected to end up when you waded into the ocean of adulthood, and you realize it is time to look around, trudge up the beach, and dive in again. If that is you, you are not alone. It is never too late for change. By picking up this book, you have taken a small step toward a brand-new life. As you will see in the pages ahead, small steps are powerful—more than powerful actually. They are life changing. They have changed our lives, and we are certain they can change yours too.

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### **Finding Your Starting Point**

How do you feel today? Do you feel healthy? Do you feel strong and energetic? How are you doing spiritually? Are you walking in deep relationship with God? How about emotionally and mentally? What is going on in your heart and soul? Are you living out the life God has in store for you, or is that life being sidetracked by poor health in a specific area?

The first small step in the journey toward the new you—toward complete health in every area—is recognizing where you are. Before we get started, take a minute to think about your overall health and wellness. Rate yourself from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest) in each of the following areas:

\_\_\_\_ I am a healthy weight.

\_\_\_\_ I eat and drink in a way that nourishes my body.

\_\_\_\_ I walk at least ten thousand steps every day.

- \_\_\_\_\_ I have good, authentic friendships in my life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I volunteer regularly.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I spend time seeking God daily.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have forgiven the people in my life who have hurt me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I get seven to nine hours of sleep every night.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I manage stress effectively.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am intentional about choosing thoughts that benefit me.

These numbers represent your starting point. If they are low, don't be discouraged. Be excited by the opportunity for growth. If your numbers are strong, that is great. As you work through these pages, focus on how you can make them even stronger. Whatever your starting point may be, God will find you there as you commit to getting healthier and displaying his excellence to an onlooking world.

### Small Steps to the New You

Small, incremental steps are the key to transitioning from an unhealthy lifestyle to a healthy one, the key to stepping into the fullness of the new you. Don't think you have to undergo an instant

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*Small, incremental steps are the key to transitioning from an unhealthy lifestyle to a healthy one, the key to stepping into the fullness of the new you.*

extreme makeover to get where you need to be. Just focus on minor improvements every day, every week, and every month. Over time, you will be amazed at the cumulative effect of your small efforts.

What if you could improve your health by just 10 percent over the next six months? What if you could improve it by 10 percent more the following six? That would make you 20 percent healthier this time next year than you are right now. If you could do that again

the following year, you'd be 40 percent healthier two years from now. Small changes to your lifestyle can get you there. You don't have to be intimidated by anything discussed in the pages ahead. Just take in what works for you and make the changes that will help you get to where you know you need to be.

Beginning in chapter 3, we will be suggesting “Small Steps to the New You” at the end of each chapter. These small steps will help you start making simple changes to your lifestyle. You can work through them at your own pace as you read, or you can take “The Small Steps Challenge,” a four-month challenge found at the back of the book that will lead you to incorporate specific small steps into your life each month. This approach may work well if you are reading *The New You* with others as part of a group study. Either way, the small steps we suggest will work together over time to revolutionize your health, taking you from feeling overweight, sick, stressed, tired, and average to being excited about life, eager to face every day, and ready to take on all that God has for you in the time you have left before he calls you home. How you approach these steps is up to you.

Our friend Dave Ramsey often talks about how being willing to live like no one else now will allow you to live like no one else later. Dave is a financial expert, so he is speaking in terms of how you view and handle money. But the same truth applies to health. If you are willing to make small changes now—changes that many others are not willing to make—you can live healthier for your entire life rather than suffer from the predictable results of unintentional living. You can avoid so many of the problems associated with excess weight, poor diet, lack of sleep, and high stress. You can sidestep much of the mental and emotional strain caused by poor thought patterns and poor relational practices. By being intentional about

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*By being intentional  
about how you live  
today, you can do  
your part to ensure  
that you will be living  
your best life for all  
your tomorrows.*

how you live today, you can do your part to ensure that you will be living your best life for all your tomorrows.

## **The Life You Have Imagined**

Imagine what life would look like if you woke up in the morning rested and energized, if you ate in a way that fueled your body instead of making you feel overly full and sluggish, if you could slide on those jeans in your closet and feel good about the way you looked instead of feeling a quiet desperation about the passage of time and the unruliness of your body.

Imagine what life would look like if you didn't need medications and caffeine to keep you going, if problems with your family members didn't dominate your thoughts, if you were proud of how you shaped your days and of your contributions to your work and to the people around you.

Imagine what life would look like if you felt a sense of deep connection with God, if you were surrounded by others who knew you well and could help you through anything life threw your way, if you felt as if you were right on course with the greatest plan for your life.

All this and more is possible. You can live the life that now you may only be able to imagine. We wrote *The New You* to help you get there.

Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. (Eph. 3:20)

P A R T 1

# small steps to the new you

# 1

## whose you are

### *Opening Up with God about Your Health*

The reason why many are still troubled, still seeking, still making little forward progress is because they haven't yet come to the end of themselves. We're still trying to give orders, and interfering with God's work within us.

A. W. Tozer

Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.

1 Corinthians 6:19–20

**A**s a teenager, I (Nelson) spent some time speaking at young entrepreneur conferences around the country. Thanks to that circuit, I had the privilege of working alongside the late Zig Ziglar. A great Christian businessman and leader, Zig spoke

eloquently about matters of vision, change, work, and commitment. One thing Zig used to often say has stuck with me through the years. “Character gets you out of bed; commitment moves you to action . . . and discipline [enables] you to follow through.”<sup>1</sup>

Character, commitment, and discipline—the ability to move from where you are in life to where you want to be will flow from these three things. All intentional change is born out of character, anchored in the commitments you make, and achieved through discipline.

Your character drove you to pick up this book. Something inside you is longing to live life at a higher level. Maybe you can feel

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*All intentional change is born out of character, anchored in the commitments you make, and achieved through discipline.*

stress, sickness, or anxiety tugging at your shirtsleeve, and you know it is leading you down a path that should be avoided at all costs.

Discipline will determine how well you follow through with the small steps we suggest—the steps that will help you realign your overall health and wellness with God’s best plan for you. You will learn a great deal in the pages ahead about living to your full health potential, but how well you apply what you learn is completely up to you. No one else can change your life for you.

That leaves commitment. The commitments you choose to make in your life shape your path through this world. If you look back over the years, you can probably recognize a handful of commitments that have determined where you are today. Maybe you made a commitment to go to one school over another, and that decision led you to your current life situation. Perhaps you made a commitment to marriage, or you may still be hoping to make that commitment one day. If you have children, you made a commitment to love and raise them well. Each one of these is a life-changing commitment. Stepping out of the status quo and

deciding to reclaim your health and vitality is also a life-changing commitment, one we hope you will make.

### Three Key Commitments

When you have all areas of your health under control, you are free to live life to the fullest. To get started, choose to embrace the following key commitments that are foundational to becoming the new you:

- surrender your health to God
- stop making excuses
- start taking small steps toward change

These commitments form the basis of your ability to build a life marked by complete health and wholeness. We will look at the first commitment here and the other two in the chapters to follow.

### Surrender Your Health to God

Here is a game-changing truth for you to consider: your body wasn't created for your own gratification; it was created for God's glory. But if you are like most people, you treat your body as if it is yours to do with as you please. You are quick to gratify your own tastes, preferences, and whims. But the reality is that your body was made both *by* God and *for* God.

First Corinthians 6:13 says, “[Our bodies] were made for the Lord, and the Lord cares about our bodies.” You probably intuitively understand that God made your body, but maybe you have never thought of it as being made *for* him. If your body was made for

*Your body wasn't  
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the Lord, and he cares about your body, doesn't that mean you should care about your body too?

This is an area where most people—Christians in particular—need to flip the lens. Too often, we use God as the ultimate excuse for letting our health slide. We run our bodies down, fill them with disease-causing foods, let them atrophy from lack of movement, and then call it God's will when we get sick. We fill our minds with toxic thoughts, neglect healthy relationships with other people, fail to engage with God regularly, and then blame him when we wind up lonely and anxious.

The truth is that pursuing excellence in every area of our health is a way to honor God. His sovereignty is not an excuse to live any old way we want to live because he is going to work it out in the end; instead, he is the beacon calling us to live in a way that shines his brilliance to others. Keeping ourselves in good health is really an act of stewardship.

### **Good Health = Good Stewardship**

Again, your body is not your own. It has simply been entrusted to you for a period of time. You are called to steward your health in the same way you steward your money, your time, and your relationships. As Rick Warren wrote in *The Daniel Plan*:

This life is preparation for our next life, which will last forever in eternity. God is testing you on earth to see what he can trust you with in eternity. He is watching how you use your time, your money, your talents, your opportunities, your mind, and yes, even your body. Are you making the most of what you've been given? God isn't going to evaluate you on the basis of the bodies he gave to other people, but he will judge what you did with what you have been given.<sup>2</sup>

Have you ever thought about having to stand before God and give an account for how you cared for yourself—for how well you

ate, how active you were in an effort to stay healthy, how intentional you were about managing your stress and your emotions to avoid negative health consequences? That is a scary notion, isn't it?

Most of us have never thought that deeply about our physical stewardship responsibility. But it is not too late to start. No matter what kind of health you are in this very minute, it is not too late to surrender your body—to surrender every aspect of your physical health and well-being—to God.

Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body. (1 Cor. 6:19–20)

Start by having a conversation with him. Talk to God about your current health. If you haven't been taking care of yourself, repent of that. Ask God to help you be a good steward of the body he has entrusted to you. Only then, working from the foundational understanding that your body is not your own but his, can you forge ahead into the complete health he wants you to have. (For more on talking with God through prayer, flip to chapter 19.)

We will take a look at the second commitment—stop making excuses—in the next chapter.