

Rick Warren shares good news about Daniel's weight loss plan

December 5, 2013

WASHINGTON (RNS)—Pastor Rick Warren's life always has been an open book.

He spread the word about how to live a Christ-centered life in his best-selling book, *The Purpose Driven Life*.

Over the years, he and his wife, Kay, have shared heartbreaking experiences, including her battle with breast cancer and, more recently, the death of their son, Matthew, who struggled with mental illness and committed suicide in April. He was 27.



Dr. Mehmet Oz measures megachurch pastor Rick Warren's waistline at a "Daniel Plan" forum at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif. (RNS photo courtesy Toby Crabtree/Saddleback Church)

Now, in his new book, Warren, 59, founding pastor of [Saddleback Church](#) in Southern California, is trying to help people heal their health. [The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life](#), written with doctors Mark Hyman and Daniel Amen, details a lifestyle program that helped Warren lose 65 pounds in 2011 and propelled members of his congregation to get healthier by dropping more than 250,000 pounds collectively that year.

It has five essential components: food, fitness, focus, faith and friends.

“The last two components—faith and friends—are what I call the special sauce that makes the Daniel Plan unique,” Warren said.

[The program](#) incorporates healthy eating, regular exercise, stress reduction, prayer and support from other church members in small home groups.

Warren was inspired to create the plan after he baptized more than 800 people one day in November 2010. After lowering more than 145,000 pounds of weight into the water, Warren said he thought: “Wow! Everybody’s fat!”

He concedes it wasn’t a very spiritual thought for a pastor to have, but he also thought: “I’m fat, too. I’m as out of shape as everyone else is.”

“That was the ‘aha’ moment” that started the ball rolling, “but we didn’t start the Daniel Plan right away,” he said.

He tapped three well-known doctors who all were best-selling authors—Hyman, Amen and Mehmet Oz—to help him create the plan.

‘I need to repent’

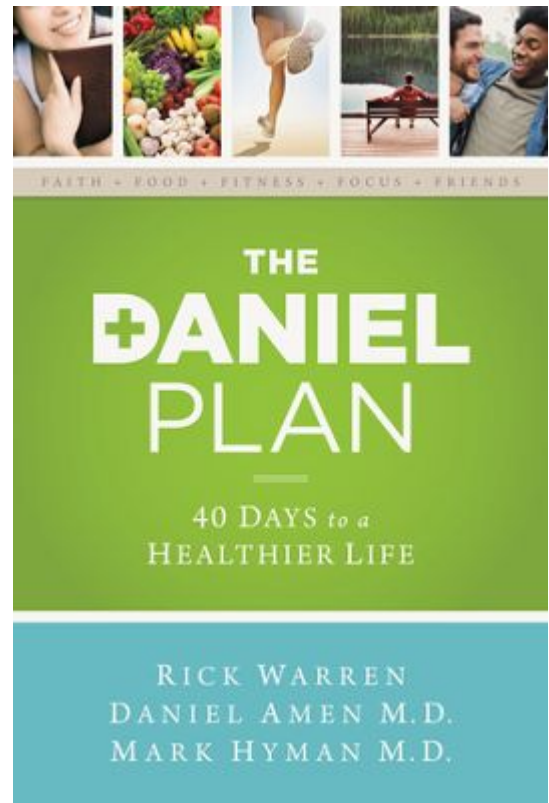
Then, in January 2011, Warren said he went in front of his congregation of 20,000 people and said, “Guys, I need to repent.”

“I told them I had gained two to three pounds a year, and I’ve been your pastor for 30 years. So, I needed to lose about 90 pounds.”

He invited them to join him. “I figured maybe a couple hundred people, but that day, 12,000 people signed up.”

Warren’s church, with eight campuses in California and several internationally, has an average weekend attendance of 22,000.

The title of the Daniel Plan comes from the first chapter of Daniel, in which the Hebrew prophet Daniel challenges the king's official guard to test some young men to eat the king's diet of rich food while Daniel and his three friends eat healthy fare including vegetables, Warren said.



“We just took the title from that concept. It doesn’t try to follow what Daniel ate, because the Bible doesn’t tell us exactly what he ate.”

The food portion of the plan involves eating “healthier, fresher and more natural foods,” he says. “The line we use is: ‘If it grows on a plant, it’s healthy. If it’s made in a plant, don’t eat it.’ My rule is no snacks, no sweets, no seconds.”

At 6-foot-3, Warren weighed about 295 pounds when he began following the plan in January 2011. He lost 65 pounds by eating more nutritiously and working out.

He was doing well on the program before his son died. Matthew suffered from mental illness his entire life, Warren said.

“When Kay was pregnant with Matthew, she got some kind of unusual rash or disease that left her bedridden for months. During that pregnancy, I had

three fears: Is my wife going to live? Is the baby to going live? And is the baby going to be healthy? Kay lived. Matthew lived, but Matthew was not healthy. He had a tender heart and a tortured mind. He struggled with suicidal thoughts all of his life.”

Warren said he gained “about 35 pounds back in six months of grieving my son’s suicide.”

Lifestyle changes

The weight regain was tied to lifestyle changes.

“My back went out, and I wasn’t able to exercise for an extended period,” he recalled. “I didn’t feel like doing anything, and our members who are so loving were bringing us meals every night. They weren’t necessarily healthy meals. They were rich in creams and enormous portions, far more than we could possibly eat. It was comfort eating. I wasn’t making some good choices in terms of what I ate.”

Warren says he’s back to working out with a friend who is his trainer-accountability partner. “I have four different workouts so I don’t get bored”—a hiking workout, a swimming pool workout, a treadmill routine and weight-training exercises.

Co-author Amen, a psychiatrist, member of Saddleback Church and author of numerous books including *Use Your Brain to Change Your Age*, said, “Exercise is the fountain of youth in so many ways.” A person doesn’t need do marathons, he insists. Just walk briskly for 45 minutes four times a week and lift weights two times a week.

Warren insists one of the main reasons for the Daniel Plan’s success among church members is the support they received from their home groups.

Prayer

Prayer is another key, Warren said. "I tell people if you prayed as much as you worried, you would have a lot less to worry about."

Some have questioned Warren's mix of church and health, but he said: "You think that God is only interested in your soul? No, he is interested in your body, mind and soul. Jesus went into each village teaching, preaching and healing. The Daniel Plan has to do with healing.

"The Bible says, 'God made my body; Jesus died for my body; the spirit lives in my body.' So I had better take care of it."