



Fat and Faithful
by J. Nicole Morgan

discussion guide

Discussion Guide written by Jennifer Carpenter, MDiv

INTRODUCTION

When my friend Jennifer offered to write the discussion guide for this book, I said yes immediately. Jennifer and I met as roommates in seminary and quickly became friends. We tell people that our friendship works in large part because she is a strong feeler and I am a strong thinker, and we respect those qualities in each other. Jennifer knows how to ask me the questions to get me to examine parts of my own life story that I may be ignoring. Outside of her friendship with me, she is a hospital chaplain, a biblical storyteller, and a worship pastor who is passionate about making sure that everyone she meets experiences the love of God in the midst of whatever is happening in their life. She sees and names the dignity and beauty of those around her. I have no doubt that the questions she has written below will lead you further into understanding that you are enough and you are not too much.

You can answer these questions on your own, in a group, with a friend, or share some thoughts on social media (use the hashtag #fatandfaithful). And remember, if you're meeting with a group, take a look around your meeting space and notice if it's accessible to people of size. Think about seating and the space to navigate. Be intentional about how you'll talk about any snacks you serve.

May your journey through this book and the questions below draw you deeper into a life in which you love God, your neighbors, and even yourself.

–Nicole

discussion questions

BEFORE READING THIS BOOK:

1. What motivated you to read this book?
2. What do you believe about your body?
3. What do you believe about other people's bodies?
4. What do you believe about fat positivity? Is that a concept that is difficult or comfortable for you to talk about? Share about your experiences.
5. What do you hope to gain from reading this book?

Chapter 1: MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

1. Have you ever heard of the concept of *imago Dei* before? If you have, what did it mean to you before reading this chapter? If you haven't, what are your thoughts about being made in the image of God?
2. On page 13, Nicole writes: "If each individual person is made in the image of God, then our own unique image must be part of the whole picture of God." Do you believe your body reflects the image of God? Do you believe bodies different from yours reflect the image of God? Do you believe every body reflects the image of God? Why or why not?
3. What does it mean to you that Jesus had a body? What does it mean to you that Jesus's body experienced hunger, tiredness, change, and even wounds and scars? Does Jesus having a body hold any implications for your own body?
4. Are there any people in your life who have modeled what it looks like to love your body as God created it? If not, what would that kind of person look like/do/say? If yes, what did that person do/say to demonstrate that kind of love?
5. Nicole ends the chapter by saying "We undertake an important theological task when we see and embrace the *imago Dei* in humans of all shapes, sizes, and abilities—starting with our own." How can you practice embracing the *imago Dei* in yourself and in humans of all shapes, sizes, and abilities this week?

Chapter 2: THE BODY OF CHRIST

1. In a general sense, have you ever felt like you didn't fit in at church? What was that like?
2. In a literal sense, have you ever felt like your body did not fit at church? Share from your own experiences or reflect on Nicole's stories.
3. Reflecting on Nicole's stories about baptism—both her own and the story about Rick Warren—have you ever experienced someone not being able to participate in normal church sacraments/ordinances or traditions because of their size, ability, background, or so forth? Share about your experiences.
4. How does your community, religious or otherwise, talk about bodies? What are the explicit messages stated about bodies? What are the implicit messages about bodies? (What kinds of bodies are represented on pictures, signs, in sermon illustrations, in workspace celebrations? etc.)
5. Do you believe the messages your church portrays about bodies are welcoming of every body into the body of Christ? Why or why not? How can you share welcoming and loving messages in the body of Christ this week?

Chapter 3: THINNESS IS NOT NEXT TO GODLINESS

1. Have you ever believed you could not do something you wanted to do because of the size or ability of your body? Has anyone you've known believed that about their body?
2. Had you ever heard of the concept of gnosticism before? After reading about it, have you ever treated your body as if it were bad in the pursuit of holiness? If yes, share about your experiences. If no, have you ever witnessed this happening in the church or society?
3. What does it mean to pursue holiness, even in our bodies, without punishing or degrading our bodies? Give some examples that would celebrate bodies of every size and ability.
4. How does loving our bodies help us to love our neighbors?
5. In light of this chapter, what would it look like for you to pursue holiness in your body this week?

Chapter 4: COMPARING FATNESS AND GLUTTONY

1. How would you define gluttony *before* reading this chapter? Share some examples.
2. After reading this chapter, how would you define gluttony? Do you agree with Nicole's definition of gluttony, that it is "consumption at the expense of others"? Why or why not?
3. Are there any ways you have experienced oppression because of your body or in your body?
4. How might your food/clothing/consumer choices be oppressing others? Has there ever been a time where you changed the way you consumed because of how it impacted others? Share about that.
5. What are some ways to practice love for God and neighbor in your food choices this week?

Chapter 5: HONORING THE TEMPLE

1. Before reading this chapter, had you heard of the concept of "honoring the temple" as how you care for your body? What messages did you receive about "honoring your temple"?
2. Have you ever believed that you or your body were not made to honor God? Why or why not?
3. What messages does your church teach about honoring the body? According to what Nicole has written, does what your church teach about honoring your body line up with the whole of scriptural teaching, or does it align more with cultural teaching?
4. What does it mean for your body to be a holy and acceptable offering to God right now as you are?
5. How can you treat and offer your body as a holy and acceptable offering to God this week?

Chapter 6: BUT WHAT ABOUT YOUR HEALTH?

1. What are the messages you believed about what it means to have a “healthy” body before reading this chapter?
2. Have you ever had an experience at the doctor's office like Nicole's? Share about your experiences.
3. How can your church or community be proactive about welcoming and including bodies of differing sizes, with illness, or different abilities?
4. What are ways a person can practice being healthy or honoring their bodies without focusing on achieving a particular body type?
5. What are ways you can practice health without focusing on a particular body type this week?

Chapter 7: DIET DEVOTIONALS

1. How do you, your family, and friends talk about food? Do you use terms of morality (“good,” “bad,” “sinful,” “holy”) to describe the things you and your family eat? What impact might that be having on you or the people around you?
2. Have you ever failed at a diet and felt like you failed God? Why or why not?
3. Do you ever feel “not enough” in any capacity of your life? What might change in your life if you could hear God say to you: “You are enough, and you are not too much”?
4. What are ways fear and shame are promoted in your life or in the life of your church around the subject of bodies and food? What are ways you could remove fear and shame from your life and the life of your church?
5. If your prayers have included praying about your weight or health, replace those prayers with prayers for others this week and see what happens. Spend time praying for and changing the conversation about the ways you and your church speak about all bodies.

Chapter 8: FAT GIRLS AND RIGHTEOUS FOXES

Note: Potentially triggering subject matter and questions.

1. How are bodies unintentionally promoted, objectified, or sexualized in your church or community? Share your experiences as you feel safe to do so.
2. In the church and in your experience, what messages are given to women about desirability? What messages are given to men about desirability?
3. How can we change the conversation about beauty and desirability from selfishly objectifying each other to selflessly honoring each other?
4. In light of this chapter, what reflections do you have about your own value and humanity regardless of any distinctions about your body?
5. Did you see yourself described in what is beautiful in the Bible passages Nicole shared? Either in this book or in your own Scripture reading, find a passage of Scripture that resonates with you and reminds you God loves you and calls you beautiful.

Chapter 9: THE CHURCH THAT EATS TOGETHER STAYS TOGETHER

1. How often do you share a meal with others?
2. Have you ever made special accommodations for others to make sure they could eat with you? Has anyone made accommodations for you? What was that experience like?
3. How can eating together around a common table bring shame to yourself or others? How can eating together around a common table help build unity and community?
4. When is the last time you invited a stranger or a neighbor over for dinner? What was that experience like?
5. After reading this chapter: what might God be asking for you to work on at the dinner table (that is not your own body) this week?

Chapter 10: LIVE A FAT-POSITIVE LIFE

1. When you hear the word “fat,” what first comes to mind? Is it positive or negative? Share your experiences.
2. In light of this chapter (and the book thus far), what would it mean for you as an individual to live a fat-positive life?
3. What are the tips Nicole shared that would be most helpful for you to be more fat-positive with yourself and with others? Do you have any tips not mentioned that have been helpful to you for being fat-positive?
4. Are there parts of living a fat-positive life that you struggle to embrace? Are there parts that come naturally to you?
5. How can loving yourself be a part of loving your neighbor? What does that look like for you this week?

Chapter 11: BE A FAT-POSITIVE COMMUNITY

1. Is your church or community welcoming and accepting of bodies of every size, shape, and ability? How do you know if it is or is not?
2. After reading this book, are there ways your church or community could grow in being welcoming and accepting of bodies of every size, shape, and ability?
3. What could you do to be a part of making your church or community more welcoming?
4. What are ways you can speak up for welcoming and accepting bodies of every size, shape, and ability? Are there aspects of speaking up for others that come easy for you? Are there aspects of speaking up for others that are more difficult for you?
5. What one action can you take this week to make your community more fat-positive?

AFTER READING THIS BOOK:

1. Read out loud the prayer in the epilogue. Share any thoughts or reactions to this prayer.
2. How do you view your body in light of reading this book? Have your views been affirmed, challenged, or changed?
3. How do you view others' bodies in light of reading this book? Have your views been affirmed, challenged, or changed?
4. What can you do to be more loving and accepting of yourself/your body moving forward?
5. What can you do to be more loving and accepting of others' bodies moving forward?
6. What part of this book has left the greatest impact on you? (If you use social media, feel free to share: **#fatandfaithful**. Twitter: **@jnicolemorgan** or **@fatandfaithful**. Instagram: **@fatandfaithful**).

JENNIFER CARPENTER, MDiv, is a chaplain and a musician. She is passionate about stories of all types and about building bridges for stories and storytellers to intersect in life-giving ways.