

# The Hole

## EXCERPT FROM GOODBYE ED, HELLO ME

I'm sure you know about the hole. It's that empty space inside that we all try to fill with something. Some of us will do almost anything to fill it. Or we will do almost anything to make it disappear so we don't have to fill it--or feel it--anymore.

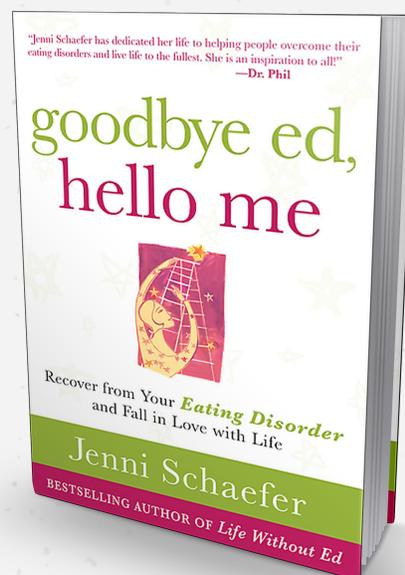
It is that hole inside that you tried to fill with eating disordered behaviors. When that didn't work, you might have turned to drugs, alcohol, or both. Many people do--bouncing back and forth between an eating disorder and an addiction. Some of you turned to a man or a woman. Some turned to self-injury. No matter what you did, the hole was still there.

I used to be able to starve, purge, and binge the hole away temporarily. But eventually, my eating disorder stopped "working" altogether. I would still starve, purge, and binge, but the hole would still be there, only it was coupled with more pain.

Luckily, I was far enough along recovery road at that point to know that nothing external was going to fill the hole. Instead of acting out with other types of destructive behaviors (which I thought about but never did), I actually felt the hole, the pain beneath the eating disorder. It was raw, piercing, shaking, numbing, and immobilizing all at once--cutting to the bone. It was a deep space of loneliness, desperation, and hopelessness that seemed to penetrate my very core. Nothing had ever felt like this before. If this was recovery, I didn't want anything to do with it.

It turns out that the hole wasn't recovery; it just signified that I had more work to do. The hole is part of why I still needed therapy even though I was eating right and maintaining a healthy weight. (This was sometimes difficult for people in my life to understand.)

My friend Aaron, who is in recovery from alcoholism, says that the hole can only be filled with God. He compares it to filling the gas tank in your car. You can fill the tank with lemonade if you want. The tank will be full, but the car won't run. Gas is the only thing that will make your car go, and Aaron says that God is the only way to truly fill the hole inside of



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us.

To me, filling the hole with God meant filling it with all things spiritual. This involved not only connecting with God but also building relationships with people. (God often talks to me through other people.) It meant getting in touch with my heart, my feelings, and my passions. Music and nature are also spiritual experiences for me, because both connect me back to myself in a real, authentic way.

Part of filling up with God meant not being attached to results. If I believe that my life depends on this book becoming a New York Times bestseller, then I am too attached. When I recognize this kind of attachment, I have to step away and find peace in the moment.

My friend Nicole, who is in recovery from an eating disorder and an addiction, says, "To me, filling the hole with God meant I had to get out of myself and find a way to look at life as a gift and not a constant battle. I had to look at people as blessings and friends, not my competition or enemies."

I don't know if the hole ever actually goes away, but I do know that it doesn't have to go anywhere. The hole is not a personal deficit--it's just a part of being human. (We are whole even when we experience the hole.) As long as I am mindful, I can recognize the hole. I can notice any urges or compulsions that go along with it. I can make a decision not to let the hole interfere with my goals or my value system.

I can experience the hole and figure out what it's trying to tell me. Is it telling me that I need to grow in a new area? That I need to practice better self-care? That I need more balance in my life?

Today, I try not to pass judgment on the hole. I try to accept it and do the next right thing. For the

most part, if I stay spiritually fit, the hole doesn't seem to have much power over me.

The concept of filling up with God might look different in your life. Maybe you use different words to define God and spirituality. Your job is to figure out what works for you.

I'm fairly certain that you won't fill your gas tank with lemonade. How will you choose to fill the hole inside?

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*Jenni Schaefer is a singer/songwriter, speaker, and author of Life Without Ed and Goodbye Ed, Hello Me. She is the co-author of Almost Anorexic: Is My (or My Loved One's) Relationship with Food a Problem? (released by Harvard Health Publications and Hazelden). For further recovery resources as well as information about Jenni's work, visit [JenniSchaefer.com](http://JenniSchaefer.com). Connect with her at [Facebook.com/LifeWithoutEd](https://www.facebook.com/LifeWithoutEd), [Twitter.com/JenniSchaefer](https://twitter.com/JenniSchaefer) and [Pinterest.com/JenniSchaeferTX](https://www.pinterest.com/JenniSchaeferTX).*

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