



TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE WITH THE BIBLE'S WAY TO WEIGHT LOSS



December 2005

Matthew 6:33:

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

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Newsletter . . . Sheila Robbins

Dear Friends,

As Christmas approaches, some of us anticipate this time with great delight, while others experience nothing but mounting dread. How we face the entire holiday season is largely dependent on what our Christmas looked like when we were children. Most families get together during the holidays, and if there was family dysfunction during our growing up years, there might still be dysfunction today.

This Christmas, my prayer for each of us is that we will be able to take the focus off of ourselves and how we feel, and place it on the guest of honor at the party, Jesus. All of us love the day of our birth. When people give us cards and presents, we feel special and loved. We delight in the attention we receive on our special day each year.

As parents, we love the delight we see on our children's faces when they receive great gifts from us. This month, why don't we think about and consider how we can bring delight to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, on His birthday.

Psalm 37:4-6 says, *Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and He will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.*

So what are some birthday gifts we might give to Jesus this Christmas that will bring delight to His eyes and joy to His soul?

Delight Yourself In The Lord

The first gift we can give to Jesus is to delight ourselves in Him. We can do that by not neglecting our time with Him each day. As we delight in Him, He delights in us. I have an exercise buddy and after we finish walking on the treadmills each morning at our church, we walk outside together and pray. I always grin when she says, "Lord, it's your girls out here again this morning." I grin because I envision God grinning back at us and taking delight in the fact that we are talking to him instead of to each other as we walk. Neglecting our personal time with God will make or break the time spent with our extended family this Christmas. If you are dreading Christmas this year, why not spend every morning in

(Continued on page 2)



Carole Lewis
National Director
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Carole Lewis

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December talking to God about it and watch the miracle that will unfold when your family comes together.

Commit Your Ways To Him

Another gift I want to give Jesus this Christmas is my commitment to Him, His ways and His will. This will mean that I take care of my body, His temple, during this time. I stay on track losing weight and keep up my exercise routine all through December. I don't give in to the temptation to eat all the delicacies surrounding me this month as part of my love gift to my King.

I have personally been doing great with weight loss this fall, only getting off track one time when we made a trip to California for Johnny's doctor appointment. I allowed the stress of losing Johnny's billfold and cell phone on the way to the airport to upset me to the point that I ate the whole box of snacks that Southwest Airlines passed out on the flight. After that little fiasco, I let my guard down and continued to eat foods that trip me up until we returned home. When I stepped on the scales the next week, I had gained weight, after losing every week since this First Place session began.

This little exercise in futility taught me a valuable lesson, which I hope I remember for a

long time. You see, my overeating didn't just affect that one week. It affected three weeks before I lost weight again. I lost weight before leaving for California, took a week off and gained weight the next week. Another week went by and I was now back to where I had been two weeks before. It was one more week before I lost weight again. See how insidious getting off track can be? This year, I intend to bring delight to the face of my Lord by committing my ways to Him and starting the New Year myself with delight instead of dread.

I could go on and on this morning about what gifts we can give to Jesus that will bring delight to Him this Christmas, but I think you get the picture. The gift that brings delight to our Lord is the gift of ourselves, our time, our will and our desires.

The Holy Spirit brought John 14:21, one of my favorite First Place memory verses, to my mind one morning in 2002, during my quiet time, and I based the entire book, *Back On Track*, on this verse. *Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. And he who loves me, will be loved by my Father and I too will love him and show myself to Him.*

Do we want to delight Jesus on His birthday this year? Obeying Him will do just that!

Have a blessed Christmas, Carole Lewis

Carole@firstplace.org

STOP IT! Invitation Postcard

Use this postcard invitation to encourage new and current members to join your First Place group and/or attend an informational meeting. The postcards will also promote the January 2006 release of *Stop It!* by Carole Lewis.

These postcards are a great way for you to promote your group, and they're FREE! Each postcard will allow you to customize your information about your orientation meeting, including your church name, meeting location and time, and contact information.

The postcards are in packs of 25, and can be ordered online with code RA04100 or by calling 1-800-4-GOSPEL.

Code: RA04100
FREE



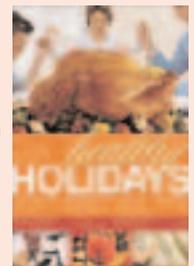
healthy Holidays

A Plan to Help You Maintain Your Healthy Lifestyle Through the Holiday Season

Healthy Holidays will help members stay on track during the tempting holiday season and encourage them to reflect on the true reason for the holidays. During a time when First Place groups generally take a break between studies, the Healthy Holidays will empower members to stick to their commitments.

Order yours today!

Code: 08307.33744
Number of Pages: 150
Internet Price: \$12.99





Talkin' With Kay

Dear First Place Friends,



Kay Smith
Associate Director
kays@bigcountry.net

7he Christmas holidays delight me. I love the music, the activities, the shopping, wrapping and family times. I hear some people grumble because Christmas has become too commercialized. I think it is great that the Christmas trees are already decorated in the stores and I hear Christmas music at the grocery store. It seems to me that people seem to be a little nicer at Christmas time and I would love to experience that all year.

The Christmas holidays can present a challenge to our faithfulness to First Place. I would like to offer a suggestion that I think would be helpful in each of the four areas of First Place.

❁ **Physical** – Christmas activities can often make exercise and healthy eating a challenge. I have found the real key to success is to “chill out” if you have been invited to eat at someone’s home and there doesn’t seem to be any good choices. Eat very little and don’t make it a big deal. A success week in First Place does not center on any “one” meal; it is the overall picture of 21 meals. I have found I can still cook all my family favorites with just a few alterations in some of the ingredients. For instance, the cornbread dressing I used to prepare had butter and turkey drippings added. I now use a combination of turkey drippings (with all the fat removed) and canned chicken broth. No one has noticed the difference. Even if you don’t have family members who are overweight, many of them have health problems and the healthy changes you make that still presents a wonderful meal is a great testimony that healthy food can taste good.

Finding time to exercise can be a real challenge. The real truth is being faithful to your daily exercise and the very thing that will give you the

energy to get through the holidays. Do the simple things, like park as far away from the door as possible when you go shopping. Plan a walk through the neighborhood with the family to look at Christmas decorations.

- ❁ **Emotional** – Don’t allow food to be the main focus of each Christmas gathering. Focus on the people. Use each gathering as a time to enjoy the fellowship of family and friends. Pray before each Christmas event that God will give you the strength to eat proper amounts and to not feel deprived if you choose to say “no” to some treats.
- ❁ **Mental** – Planning ahead is so beneficial to our success in First Place, but maybe even more crucial during the holidays. Plan menus, take your CR and plan your exercise ahead of time. Make a decision about what you will or will not eat before you arrive at an event.
- ❁ **Spiritual** – Finding time to spend with God can be a special challenge during the holiday rush. My First Place class is using the new Healthy Holidays and it is wonderful. It is packed with great recipes, and tips for the holidays. It is a six-week devotional book with two weeks each devoted to Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s. Following the devotion is a journaling page, which I have used to write prayers, and also to use like a diary to help me acknowledge God’s participation in my holiday season.

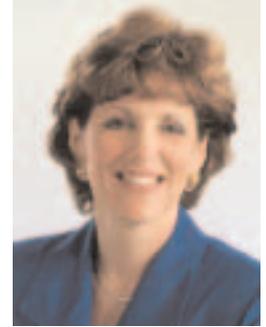
May God Bless Each of You This Holiday Season!
Kay Smith





Leadership Training

A Leader's Delight



Nancy Taylor
Leadership Training Director
ntaylor@firstplace.org

Last night, my heart experienced delight as I watched my First Place class members interact with genuine love and concern as they arrived for class. My heart continued to be overjoyed while they worked together on a group project during the first fifteen minutes of class. The room was filled with the sounds of laughter and constructive discussion. We transitioned into our Bible study time and I continued to be overwhelmed with God's goodness, as I listened to one member give a testimony of how God was working in her life and changing her from the inside out. We held hands and prayed before dismissing for the night and I thanked God for such a delightful meeting! As I look back on this meeting, I can say I truly took delight in the experience.

This feeling of delight doesn't always hit me after or during a class. Many times, I miss the joy of a First Place class by dwelling on the work at hand: recording weights, listening to memory verses, collecting CRs and following the agenda in a timely manner. There are times when we have to rush through a portion of the class or deal with one person's attitude negatively affecting the enthusiasm of the entire group. There are so many joy robbers lurking outside a First Place class to deny delight! Instead of dwelling on these negative influences, let's take a look at a few things God takes delight in and follow His lead as a First Place leader:

Delights in His people

For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation. (Psalm 149:4) Matthew Henry's commentary says that since God takes delight in His people, "he rules with love." As a First Place leader, we must be ever mindful that we are called to love our members. Some are easy to love and others are difficult. But God calls

us to love them all the same, just like He loves us all the same! I have had some very difficult members, who have given me the cold prickly after I have poured out all I have to offer them. When I feel I cannot give any more, God keeps saying – love them! It is easy to take delight in the member who shares in class how God is working in their life. On the other hand, it is those who are trying to do it all on their own, never satisfied with the results and show no interest in my words of counsel that become like sandpaper to my heart. In 2 Peter 1: 5-8, we are exhorted to add to our godliness, brotherly kindness and to the kindness, love and if we keep adding these qualities to our lives, we will be effective and productive. Dear leader, take delight!

Delights in boasters of God.

But let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 9:24) As a First Place leader, we praise our members for their victories at weight loss and scripture memory. Be careful to boast not in them but in the God who is working in them! Bring all the praise back to God. Be a God boaster and you will be a faith builder in the lives of your members.

Delights in showing mercy.

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but

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Nancy Taylor

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delight to show mercy. (Micah 7:18) God not only delights in His people when they are obedient, but He delights in showing mercy to them when they mess up! As a First Place leader, we have many opportunities to show mercy to our members. When they gain weight one week, don't turn in their CR, or fail to say their memory verse word perfect, we have the opportunity to extend God's grace and mercy. There have been weeks when I wanted to shake my members and say, "When are you ever going to follow the Live-it and get with filling out the CR?" But, the Holy Spirit bites my tongue and I smile and say, "Next week!" Don't get me wrong, I still encourage them strongly to write down what they eat and start day one memorizing the scripture, so that on day seven they will have it down. I help them with constructive comments, yet let them know that God is a God of second chances and that I will be there cheering them on every week, no matter what.

As God takes delight in you, may you take delight in your members, showing them His mercy and giving God all the praise for the transforming work He is doing in their lives. During this Christmas season, take time to delight in the people God has led to your First Place class and thank Him for the gifts they are to you.

Lead On!
Nancy Taylor

Leadership Tip

Scripture memory is the one tool that has transformed my leadership. Each time I teach a scripture memory seminar to leaders, several will tell me, "This is what has been missing in my leadership!" Many have the "want to," but lack accountability. Beginning in 2006, I will provide scripture memory tips, testimonies, and passages from my, as of yet unfinished book, as the monthly Leadership Tip. I am inviting all First Place leaders to join me on a one year scripture memory journey, with the commitment to memorize one verse a week and a goal of quoting all 52 verses at the end of our year's journey. Then as a gift to our readers, I will share all the testimonies of those who finish the journey and complete the goal in our January 2007, newsletter issue. If you want to join me, simply email me your name, email address, address and the church/location of your First Place class meeting.

I would like to share the inspiration behind this new Leadership Tip:

Hi, Nancy

I am the black woman who has spoken with you twice at the First Place national conference in Ohio about leaders memorizing scripture. Each time you had suggested that I email you about organizing something, and this last time you said you were considering writing a book.

So--I am emailing. You should consider challenging leaders to memorize scripture, using your ideas over the next few months until the 2006 national conference. At the same time you could field-test your book ideas and see how well they would "work" when you write the book.

Be Blessed,
Jan Wojnaroski

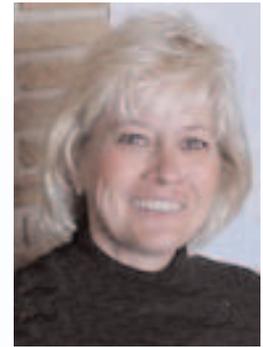
Let the journey begin!
Nancy Taylor





Bev's Footnotes

Delightful Thoughts



Beverly Henson
Certified Personal Trainer
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Googled the word “delightful” to see what would come up. I got all sorts of delightful things such as candles, cakes, cookies, pies, purses, T-Shirts, and other delightful creations, but not one single site that had a thing to do with delightful exercise. Go figure that one! The dictionary’s definition of delightful is “highly pleasing.”

This holiday season, I would like to give you a gift that has been highly pleasing to me as I literally walked through my weight loss journey in First Place. Now I have been known to preach a sermon or two, so what I would like to do for you is give you some of the motivational scriptures I have meditated on while I work out each day. These scriptures are food and exercise related. After each scripture, you will find what I call Rev Bev’s one line sermons. If you want to add a new delight to your workouts, memorize scripture while meditating on His words as you move. There is a big difference between memorizing and meditating. Try it you’ll like it.

Merry Christmas to you all. I love you and I hope you enjoy these scriptures and the one line sermons the Lord gave me to share with you.

Proverbs 30:32. . .*clap your hand over your mouth.*

Bev: This is good scriptural appetite control for you.

Psalms 78:25 *Men ate the bread of angels, He sent them all the food they could eat.*

Bev: Angel Bread? Sounds heavenly. I wonder how many calories or exchanges are in angel bread?

Joshua 1:3 *Every place the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given to you.*

Bev: The sole of your foot can’t tread sitting in a recliner or on the couch.

Get up! Take a walk into your promised land.

Psalms 100:4 *Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise...*

Bev: The only courts some of us know how to enter with praise is the “food court.” Help me, Oh Lord, to look deep within my soul and enter into your courts with praise.

Genesis 3:7 *...and the eyes of them both were opened and they knew...*

Bev: Oh Lord, keep my eyes open to the truth. Help me to not be blindsided by the enemy. Father, help me not to view my food through super-sized eyes! (Super-sized eyes, are eyes that see “enough” as never enough.)

2 Corinthians 10:4 *The weapons we fight with are not weapons of this world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.*

Bev: Lord Jesus I give you permission to become "Lord of my fork."

Ephesians 6:16 *Above ALL, taking the shield of faith where with you will be able to quench ALL the fiery darts of the wicked.*

Bev: Keep moving! It is hard to throw fiery darts and hit a moving target.

Habakkuk 3:19 *The Sovereign Lord is my strength. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer. He enables me to go on the heights.*

Bev: Guess what? It’s deer season! A new season for new feet! Jump up! Try out those new feet God gave you.

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Bev Henson

(Continued from page 6)

Psalms 147:1 Praise the Lord. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise Him.

Bev: Hallelujah! Something that will always fit. Praise Him.

2 Corinthians 1:20 For no matter how many promises God has made, they are YES in Christ. And so through him the AMEN is spoken by us to the Glory of God.

Bev: Jesus is my Divine YES! He gives me the power to use an anointed "No!"

Genesis 1:28-29 ...and have dominion over the fish of the sea ...the fowl of the air...fruit of the tree yielding seed to you it shall be for meat.

Bev: The Genesis Principle: Help me, Father, to exercise dominion over my food, rather than food having dominion over me.

Psalms 119:103 How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.

Bev: Got a sweet tooth? Our Father's words will change your taste buds.

Happy Holidays to you! Bev Henson

Acts 17:28
"In Him we live and move and have our being."

Scriptures from King James version

Coming Events

Area Leader's Meeting

May 12-14, 2006

Australia Leaders Training Weekend
Retreat

Theme - "Knowing who we serve"
Friday 6:00 PM to Sunday 4:00 PM
The Tops Conference Centre
The Retreat House

Stanwell Tops NSW (Illawarra Region)

Limited to the first 15 registrations.
Cost is \$100 per person and includes all First Place Meals and accommodations. Attendees must make their own travel arrangements.

Contact: Barb Lukies

Email:

firstplaceaustralia@yahoo.com.au

First Place Workshops

January 14, 2006

1:00 PM - 4:00 PM Workshop (\$15)
4:00 PM - 7:00 PM Pasta Rally (\$15)

Attend both for \$25

Houston's First Baptist Church,
Houston, Texas

Contact: Nancy Taylor

Phone: (800)727-5223, x403

Email: ntaylor@firstplace.org

First Place Conference

September 15-16, 2006

Celebrate: The Heart of Worship
New Hope Baptist Church,
Loveland, OH

More information coming soon!

25th Anniversary Events

**Celebrating 25 Years of
Ministry in 2006**

25th Anniversary Kick-off Event
First Place Workshop and Pasta
Rally

January 14, 2006

Houston Marathon

January 15, 2006

A Complete 11-day Biblical Tour
to Israel

March 20-30, 2006

Leadership Summit

July 27-29, 2006

F.O.C.U.S. Week

October 12-19, 2006

First Place National Conference

September 15-16, 2006

**Check website for additional
information
regarding the 25th
Anniversary Events!**

www.firstplace.org





Hints & Pinches

First Place Christmas Delights

We all love to offer our guests an inviting assortment of special delights and treats during the Christmas season, but making appetizers can be so time-consuming, especially when you want to be able to offer your guests a whole array of treats. Well, you may have heard of cookie exchange parties, but how about an appetizer exchange? An appetizer exchange party can help solve a few of your holiday entertaining headaches in one big swoop, plus you get to go to a party! And who doesn't like a party – so how can you refuse?

The philosophy behind exchange parties is that it's easier, faster, and cheaper to make a whole lot of one thing than to make a little bit of a whole lot of things, so it just makes sense to get together and share! Invite some friends to each make one big batch of their favorite appetizer. They should make enough that each person can take home about a dozen portions of each item. So, if there will be eight people at your party (Remember to count yourself!), ask each person to bring eight-dozen portions, plus a little extra for sampling at the party. On the invitation, you will also want to ask your guests to bring copies of their recipe for everyone, plus a disposable container in which to bring home their newly acquired selection of holiday munchies. Ask people to RSVP and tell you what they are bringing so you can avoid repetition. (Nobody wants to bring eight cheese balls to the party only to bring home eight more!)

Exchanging appetizers can present a few challenges not faced by a cookie exchange. Appetizers and hors d'oeuvre take on all shapes, sizes and consistencies; some are served cold, some are hot and some are just great at room temperature. Some have sticky sauces, crumbly coatings or delicate structures. For these reasons,



Scott Wilson

First Place Food Consultant
firstplacechef@hotmail.com

Scott Wilson is a certified executive chef with the American Culinary Federation. If you have any questions regarding food preparation, you may write him at 7075 Red Fox Lane, Cumming, GA 30040.

not every appetizer is perfect for being transported to a party and transported home again. With a few adjustments in strategy, the party will be a lip-smacking success.

Appetizers that don't need refrigeration at all, such as candied nuts and snack mixes, are great choices. Luckily, there are also lots of appetizers that freeze well, and can be thawed in the refrigerator or heated in the oven when you're ready to dig in. To freeze appetizers for later use, just assemble them according to directions, and then freeze them in a single layer on a tray. Once they're frozen solid, they can be packed into resealable bags or plastic containers. Remind everyone bringing frozen appetizers to include baking instructions!

To exchange frozen appetizers, have everyone bring a cooler to the party with them. It may seem a little cumbersome to lug a cooler to the party, but everyone will be overjoyed once they've gotten their appetizers home and they're able to pull a few things out of the freezer, pop them in the oven, and offer drop-in guests a tray full of canapés, miniature quiches and veggie pinwheels.

The setup for hosting your exchange party is so simple: Put some holiday tunes on the stereo, put a nice tablecloth on the table where your appetizer trading will take place, set out some hot apple cider, and enjoy!

Scott Wilson





Elegant Eggnog

Makes 15 4-Ounce Servings

- 1 cup SPLENDA® No Calorie Sweetener, Granular
- 1 tablespoon arrowroot or cornstarch
- 1 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 7 egg yolks (Save the whites for another recipe. Refrigerate for 3 days or freeze for later use)
- 4 cups skim milk
- 2 cups fat-free half and half
- 2 tablespoons vanilla extract or 1 tablespoon rum extract and 1 tablespoon vanilla extract

Mix together first 3 ingredients in a large heavy saucepan. Set aside. Whisk egg yolks; add to SPLENDA® Granular mixture whisking until blended. Gradually whisk in milk. Cook over low heat, whisking constantly until the temperature reaches 175° approximately (5 to 8 minutes). Remove from heat and whisk in half and half; cool. Cover and chill 3 hours or up to 3 days. Stir in extracts just before serving. Makes 15(4-ounce) servings.

Exchanges: 1/2 milk, 1/2 fat

Chicken Nut Puffs

Serving Size: 2 Pieces

- 1 1/2 cups finely chopped, cooked chicken meat
- 1/3 cup toasted and chopped almonds
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon chopped parsley
- 1 teaspoon granulated garlic
- 1 teaspoon seasoning salt
- 1 teaspoon celery seed
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 4 eggs

Combine chicken and almonds and set aside. Preheat oven to 450 degrees. In a large saucepan, combine the chicken broth, vegetable oil, Worcestershire sauce, parsley, garlic, seasoned salt, celery seed and cayenne pepper. Bring to a boil. Add flour all at once; stir mixture until a smooth ball forms. Remove from heat and let stand for 5 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each. Beat until smooth. Stir in chicken and almonds. Drop by heaping teaspoonfuls onto greased baking sheets. Bake in preheated oven for 12 to 14 minutes or until golden brown. Serve warm with a honey mustard sauce or cranberry chutney. Makes about 6 dozen.

Exchanges for 2 pieces: 1 fat

Banana Cream Angel Bites

Makes 3 Dozen

Angel Bites

- 5 Egg Whites (Use reserved egg whites from another recipe)
- 1/3 cup SPLENDA® Granular
- 1 1/2 teaspoons Vanilla Extract
- pinch of salt

Preheat oven to 350° F. Lightly oil a large baking sheet. Set aside. Separate egg whites from yolk. Place egg whites in a medium bowl. Whip on high speed using an electric beater or wire whisk until frothy. Add SPLENDA® Granular, vanilla extract and salt. Mix until stiff peaks form. Spoon slightly rounded tablespoons of egg whites onto baking sheet. Bake 10-15 minutes. Remove from pan. Cool.

Banana Cream Filling

- 1/2 cup Egg substitute (such as Egg Beaters®)
- 1 cup Skim milk
- 2 teaspoons Vanilla Extract
- 2 tablespoons Light Butter
- 1 tablespoons Corn Starch
- 1/4 cup SPLENDA® Granular
- 1 teaspoon Banana Flavor
- 2 Bananas, sliced

Place egg substitute, milk, vanilla and butter in a small saucepan and stir well. Blend SPLENDA® Granular and cornstarch together. Add to ingredients in the saucepan and stir well. Cook over medium heat (3 minutes). Stir constantly. Remove filling from heat and add banana flavor. Stir until well mixed. Chill filling for 1 hour before serving. Sandwich Angel Bites with filling. Place three Angel bites on a plate with the bottoms facing up. Top with sliced bananas and a spoonful of banana cream filling. Stack another Angel Bite on top. Garnish with light whipped topping and chocolate shavings or drizzle of fat free hot fudge. Makes about 3 dozen.

Exchanges for 3:
1/2 bread, 1/2 fat; for 6: 1/2 meat, 1 bread





First Place Success Story

I was born and raised in an average close knit, lower middle-class, farming, and church-attending family in Everett, Washington. As a child, I found myself eating food for emotional reasons - during times when I experienced both positive and negative. I found solace in sneaking a treat and eating in secret, even stealing spare change to purchase comfort food to eat when I was alone.

Though I had a close relationship with God as a young child, as a young adult it was distant at best. Eventually, I participated in counseling, in part to assist me with my tendency toward compulsive overeating, and eventually began to be more active in a local church. However, I gradually began gaining weight and going from a size 16 to an 18. By January 2003, I looked at my reflection in the mirror and found myself facing a person that no longer resembled the person I believed myself to be, but rather a stranger weighing over 305 pounds and barely able to wear a size 28.

Despite having the best of intentions to lose weight, I weighed 285 pounds before my first pregnancy. Three years later, when I became pregnant the second time, I was likewise approximately 285 pounds, despite vowing to others and myself that I would lose weight before attempting to have another child. Unlike my first pregnancy, only by the sheer grace of God did both my daughter and I survive. I continued to maintain and eventually gain weight. I also continued to struggle on and off again with my eating disorder.

I left my career as a counselor in between having my two children, and began a home daycare business to enable me to contribute to the family income and be home more with my children. In the fall of 2002, I fell in our play yard at home, catching my youngest daughter who was falling off our swing set, and injured my knee, causing me to be even more sedentary.

I would ask God to forgive me and help me, but then continue to binge on comfort food at night after my children went to bed, or when I was alone during the day. My relationship with my husband at times grew distant, fearful, or even hostile as we became less intimate with my growing weight and decreasing self-esteem. And now my weight was impacting my health and my ability to receive appropriate health care.

In late December 2002, all of these, as well as other factors, came to a head and during the next week or two, several things happened at the same time. First, I can remember crying out to God while driving home from the store late one night, finally giving the ugliness of this problem to Him and giving up the control related to this complex issue. Second, the doctor decided I needed to go to physical therapy as a last resort before surgery on my knee. Third, my church started a brand new weekly small group Bible study that was open to everyone, but

was health centered. No one pushed me to go; I just felt this was God answering my prayers for help. So, I was finally ready to start my new life and see where God would take me on this journey

You might be asking what this testimonial has to do with First Place, but wouldn't you know it, the Bible study was a First Place one, and the leader, who was the wife of our interim pastor at the time, had been doing First Place for a number of years. During that first session, I focused on the physical therapy, which was twice a week, for the exercise commitment, and doing the old CR form with a simplified and basic version of the Live it plan, and the Bible Study - Life Under Control. My quiet time was minimal, but a vast improvement as compared to before joining the group, and the Bible study really hit home regarding my control issues and who really should be in control of my life, and the good that would happen if only I would truly surrender my life back to Him. I began to experience a more abundant life, as Christ truly became Lord of all aspects of my life - spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical. No longer was I hiding from God and the world behind layers of fat, plus I was beginning to realize that the fat was not a healthy protector. Instead I was beginning to embrace God again, and strengthen my relationship with Him. The nine commitments were doable and made sense to me. As I began to lose weight and continued in physical therapy, my knee began to heal, and soon I was able to switch from the physical therapy to working out at Curves three to five times per week.

Over time, the pounds, fat, and inches came off almost like clockwork, most within the first year and a half, and I am now wearing a size 16, and weigh less than 200 pounds. I maintained my weight at approximately 205 pounds for approximately a year despite a desire to lose a remaining 15-20 pounds. Still I hung in there as not just a member, but as the leader of my group, as the original leader had to leave after the first session. I knew First Place was working for me, and felt God's pull to step up and take that risk.

In the position of leader, I felt God was using me to lead others toward a closer relationship



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Success Story

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with Him, and to better their lives, and I was feeling positively challenged and growing in my knowledge session after session. The group evolved to include members from the community at large, as well as from other churches, and we began to obtain and use more First Place related resources. Still I continued to sit on that plateau.

In the spring of 2005, God granted me a special wish that has brought numerous blessings to me. First, I finally got the nerve to e-mail Nancy Taylor, one of the First Place staff in Houston, TX, regarding a question I had as a leader, and took the opportunity to ask about trainings and support closer to where I live. You should have seen my face when she sent me a personal e-mail back and gave me the name of a wonderful leader in my own state to e-mail. I finally sent an e-mail and once again God answered my prayers with a supportive reply from a wonderful leader who lived not too far away. In fact, the moment we began e-mailing back and forth we both realized that we each could support each other immeasurably, and have kept in contact ever since. Since then she has become our state-networking leader, and I have had several opportunities to

meet with her one-on-one, as well as attend and speak at functions she has planned within our state.

One of the biggest surprises God had in store for me was when He made it possible for me to travel with her to the Leadership Summit in Houston this summer. Not only did the workshops and speakers at the Leadership Summit, as well as the fellowship time energize me, but also I got to meet other fabulous leaders and members and many of the national leaders.

While there, a group of seven of us joined hands and



hearts to support each other on a new and exciting journey via Carole Lewis' Back on Track Book. We made the 16-week Back on Track commitment August 1st of this year, and I have begun to see the additional progress I so desperately desired before. I am in a healthier, more balanced and Christ-centered place in my life. I am continually growing in my knowledge of what it takes and what it means to believe, trust and obey my Father fully, and through this, He is blessing me with continued weight loss. My self esteem continues to improve, so that my insides better match my outsides. I have come to understand that God had a plan for both my initial weight loss as well as the lengthy plateau I then faced, and that I needed both in my life to really get to a place where I can begin to truly be the instrument for Him that He wanted His servant to be.

So far, I have lost nine additional pounds, and am on my way to my ideal weight. We have one more week to go, and I can honestly say that there have been a number of highs and lows for me during this time. At first, my motivation was primarily to support my new friends, and I thought losing additional weight would just be a plus. However, through this process I have received much more than I have given, as I came to realize areas in my life that were definitely not on track, as well as a struggle with rebellion. God showed me not only what I needed to work on, but gave me the tools to begin this process, and rewarded me when I took the risk to truly believe, trust and obey Him in actions and not purely in words. Memorization has been the toughest commitment for me, in part due to my tendency to be lazy, and controlling in nature, and yet over and over again, I have used portions of scripture during difficult moments and realized just what a powerful tool it is, thus I continue to see this as an area in which I need to rely more and to strive to improve.

I am excited to look at the positive way my life, my health, and the status of my family has changed since I began my participation in First Place. Now the options are limitless and the future is bright. I feel very grateful to God for this wonderful blessing He has given me, for He, in essence, gave me back my life. First Place will always be part of my lifestyle as a tool to keep Christ always in his rightful spot. I know that in order to do this, I must continue to work on having a healthy balance in my life physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. The learning never ends, the journey is ongoing, and the rewards are priceless.

That is what First Place is all about; it is not a fad diet, but a way to realign our lives, lives that have been twisted and stretched out of sorts by worldly things and Satan, and put back to the useful and pleasing beings God intended us to be, both inside and out. That way we can fulfill His purpose and plan for us effectively, and to the best of our ability, bringing Him pleasure in the process.

***Your Sister In Christ,
Susie Duren
Napavine, WA***





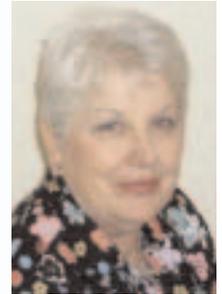
Winning Words for First Place Losers

Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 37:4



Delightful December! December truly is a month filled with wonder and delight as we remember the birth of the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Lord. For those of us in First Place, December is also a month filled with challenges and dangers as we strive to participate in the delights of the season, without losing sight of our commitment to health and fitness. However, we are not without the resources to deal with the temptations inherent in this delightful season. The key to health and balance during the holidays is found in the verse listed at the top of this writing: “Delight yourself in the Lord.” This is the time to focus your attention on Jesus, the Reason for the season—and the Reason you make health and fitness your year-round goal. Jesus came to give you life and health and wholeness. Anything that distracts you from that purpose is not part of His plan for your life. Remember, you show your love for Him by caring for your body—the sacred place where His Spirit resides. When you delight yourself in the Lord, it becomes easier to avoid those holiday goodies that threaten to steal the joy Jesus came to bring.

When you care for your body as a reflection of your love for Jesus, you are worshipping the Newborn King and giving Him honor, glory and praise. This year, as you get ready to celebrate His birth, rededicate yourself to giving Him first place in your life by keeping the nine commitments of First Place. Make that renewed pledge of diligent self-care the gift you bring to the manger this Christmas Eve. Jesus humbled



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Elizabeth Crews is a licensed addictions counselor & educator, a Bible teacher and a First Place Networking leader in San Diego, CA. To subscribe to Winning Words for First Place Losers—a free daily e-mail devotional written by Elizabeth—write to firstplaceloseers@cox.net and ask to be added to the First Place devotional subscriber's list.

Himself and came to earth in human form to give you joy and peace and a life filled with abundant hope. Don't let the Grinch steal your delight this Christmas by giving in to self-indulgent behavior that erodes your commitment to diligent self care. Keep your eyes on Jesus, the Reason for the season. When you delight in Him, He will give you the desires of your heart.

God exhorted His people through the prophet Isaiah:

*Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.”
(Isaiah 55:2b)*

That is my exhortation, and my prayer, for all who are in First Place this holiday season. Allow your soul to delight in what is good by listening to the living Word of God. Eat what is good and care for your body because of His great love for you.

With warm wishes for a delight-yourself-in-the-Lord Christmas to all First Place Losers.

Elizabeth Crews

