



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



January 2006

Matthew 6:33:

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

FIRST PLACE

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National Director Carole Lewis

Leadership Training
Director Nancy Taylor

Newsletter . . . Sheila Robbins

Dear Friends,

7he year 2006 promises to be a very special year, one which marks the 25th anniversary of the First Place ministry. Having been involved with First Place almost from the beginning, I have many reasons to celebrate. I was a member of the very first First Place group that began in March 1981, and have been privileged to see God work these last 25 years.



Carole Lewis
National Director
Carole@firstplace.org

Founders

The twelve men and women who wrote the original First Place program are to be celebrated. Their love for Christ and their unselfishness in not wanting to profit monetarily from First Place have assured that First Place would always be a ministry and never a business. Dottie Brewer, founder of the
(Continued on page 2)

Kay Smith Leaves First Place Staff

Kay Smith has been one of my best friends for the last twenty years and she has been employed by First Place for the last seventeen years. Kay has worked for First Place from her home in Roscoe, Texas, even though the First Place offices are located in Houston at Houston's First Baptist Church.

Kay has served as my Associate Director, and it has been a great comfort to me knowing that Kay's heart was so knit with mine that she could confidently speak for me at any time, knowing what I would say in any given situation. Kay has edited cook books, worked on product revisions, written articles for our e-newsletter and was always available to take on any project. Her people skills are legendary; no one loves people more than Kay Smith.



Due to a change in the personnel policies at Houston's First Baptist Church, all full-time employees must work on site in Houston. Because of this policy change, Kay will no longer be able to work for First Place.

Kay begins a new job with a bank in Roscoe in January and she will be sorely missed by all who know and love her in First Place. Kay has the unique ability to instantly become your best friend the first time you meet her. I have always said that Kay is a hug waiting to happen, because whenever anyone walks up to Kay, her arms open wide for a hug.

Please pray for Kay in the days ahead that God will use her mightily in her new position. Pray also for First Place that God will lead us as we seek His will for First Place.





Carole Lewis

(Continued from page 1)

program, went home to be with the Lord in 1989. Buddy Griffin, minister of activities at the time First Place began, is now on staff at Sagemont Church in Houston, and Buddy's desire is for First Place to be the "health mecca on the south side of the city of Houston."

Curriculum

The First Place curriculum had a humble beginning in 1981. There was one Bible study, Giving Christ First Place. There was no First Place Leader's Guide for several years, and all of the materials were printed in our church print shop, then assembled by the First Place Leaders before each session. Today, we celebrate a spectacular array of curriculum consisting of 16 Bible studies and Scripture Memory CD's, with more to come in the years ahead. Gospel Light, our First Place publisher, has done a fabulous job of design and marketing and they have become an integral part of the First Place family.

Staff

We have had as many as 25 on the paid First Place staff and as few as the five we have today, but every one has made a contribution that we want to celebrate this year. Each man and woman who has served on our First Place staff has sought to give Christ first place in their lives. Sheila Robbins, who once served on our paid staff, still designs our newsletter as a volunteer just because she loves Christ and believes in the First Place program. People like this give us great cause to celebrate. Bob Matthews, a First Place leader at our church and a retired CPA with Exxon, volunteers his time to manage the First Place budget and finances.

All of the contributors for our First Place newsletter give freely of their time and expertise and we want to thank and celebrate each of them this year. Each one brings an area of expertise that is so valuable to our First Place participants. Scott Wilson is a certified chef; Bill Heston is a licensed psychologist; Elizabeth Crews is an Addictions Counselor and accomplished writer, and Bev Henson is a personal trainer who has lost over 150 pounds on the First Place program. Nancy Taylor was a teacher before joining our First Place staff and is very gifted in directing our leadership training, plus writing articles for our newsletter and the Leader's Lifeline newsletter.

Participants

The First Place members and leaders over the last 25 years give us great reason to celebrate. First Place friends are truly friends for life. Just this year, Cindy Dollens, a First Place leader from years back, resurfaced at the Ohio Conference and we took right up where we left off. The love that we have for our First Place family transcends distance and time, because Christ has united our hearts in His love. If you were once part of our First Place family, we pray that 2006 is the year you return. We treasure our First Place friends and look forward to many more years of ministry together.

Our prayer for this year of celebration is that every person involved in the First Place program will truly give Christ first place this year. Just imagine what would happen in our world if we did.

Carole Lewis

Carole@firstplace.org





Talkin' With Kay



One of the definitions of the word “celebration” is to hold up or play up for public notice. This is a perfect

description of what we want to do as we celebrate the 25th year of First Place. The true celebration is not for a program, but for what God has done through First Place. Over the past 25 years, thousands of lives have been changed and many have found Jesus Christ as their savior. Through the spiritual disciplines in First Place, I have learned how to make Jesus Christ a part of every area of my life.

The First Place staff had devastating news in the final months of 2005, which directly affected me and my staff position. The Personnel Committee at Houston’s First Baptist Church began enforcing an existing policy that requires full-time employees to work on the premises. I had been a full-time employee of the church, working in the First Place ministry for 17 years. Sixteen of those years I have worked from an office in my home, which is about eight hours driving time from Houston. We hoped the committee would agree with my letter of appeal and that my situation would be covered by some type of “grandfather clause,” but they declined the appeal. My family had a decision to make; move back to Houston or lose my job. Joe and I both felt that moving back to Houston was not God’s plan for us. God has revealed himself to me in so many ways during these weeks as we have made this adjustment.

I have been greatly reminded of what we need to celebrate as we reflect on 25 years of First Place. You might think that in the face of this great loss I would have nothing to celebrate. It would take a book to express all the things I have to celebrate and be thankful for as a result of my involvement with First Place. This situation has only illuminated what I have to celebrate. I have grown in all areas of my life.

SPIRITUALLY: I have learned that nothing surprises God. I trust that He knows and He has a plan for my life. He gave me a peace that could only come from Him. For example, my First Place

Kay Smith
Associate Director
kaysmith37@sbcglobal.net

Bible study during these past weeks consistently had a special word from God directly relating to the situation I was facing. As I prepared my Sunday School lesson, it had several messages that helped me understand the good God plans to bring out of this situation. I celebrate that I now hear and receive Kingdom messages when God speaks to me.

EMOTIONALLY: I celebrate that I have learned life is often about facing difficult situations. I was able to admit the situation was not fair and it hurt. I have learned to express that pain and not deny it. My First Place family all over this country was amazing, with much prayer support and encouraging words. I even found myself calming others who wanted to take an offense in my behalf. You know who you are and I love each of you. God has blessed me with an extended family I can celebrate.

MENTALLY: When I joined First Place, I knew one verse from memory. I celebrate that I learned to hide God’s Word in my heart. In this situation it was easy to recall so much of God’s word that assured me He was still in control.

Many of you sent verses that ministered to me.

PHYSICALLY: I celebrate the fact that I am able to work. I will find a new job. I believe that the healthy lifestyle I learned in First Place has saved me from so many of the health problems I see in my family history such as Diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and others. I celebrate that because of First Place, I will be able to serve God longer and better.

This year is a year to celebrate what God has done in the past 25 years through the First Place program. What do you have to celebrate? Share with someone what God has done in your life through your involvement with First Place.

May God Bless Each of You!
Kay Smith



Leadership Training

Twenty-Five Ways to Celebrate First Place



Nancy Taylor

Leadership Training Director

ntaylor@firstplace.org

7 First Place is celebrating twenty-five years of ministry in 2006. This is a year of celebration in the life of First Place staff, leaders, and members! I love a party, so I have compiled a list of twenty-five ways you can celebrate this special anniversary with your First Place class – all year long! If you come up with more ways to celebrate send them to me and I will share it in our next newsletter!

To help with your plan, take a look at the meanings of celebrate from the Encarta Dictionary: show happiness; mark an occasion; perform a religious ceremony; praise something. Let's Celebrate!

1 Attend the kick-off events in Houston, Texas:

1 January 14, 2006

First Place Workshop / First Place Pasta Rally

January 15, 2006

Houston Marathon

<http://www.hphoustonmarathon.com/>

2 If you are unable to attend the kick off events in Houston, plan your own kick off event.

Host a First Place Rally on a Friday night followed the next day by a First Place 5K Fun Run or Walk. Take pictures and send them to us to put in the monthly e-newsletter.

3 First Place Relay. Plan a First Place Relay event, such as a marathon, half-marathon, or 5K and invite different First Place groups in your area to participate in the events as a team. For example, if you have 13 members in a First Place class, then each would run/walk two miles and then hand a baton off to another member until they finished a marathon!

4 Keep a blessing basket in your First Place classroom. Each week, have members write down one or more blessings they have experienced that week. During the prayer time, read the blessings and have a prayer of thanksgiving for the blessings of the week!

5 If your church has a weekly newsletter, ask permission to have a First Place Matters section each week. In this section, include how much weight was lost that week and any testimonies of God working in the lives of your members.

6 At your victory celebrations in 2006, use silver as your theme color in honor of the 25th year of First Place. Present each person with a small silver wrapped gift box (empty) as the award for completing the session.

7 Using the New First Place Favorites cookbook, have your members each choose one recipe to prepare for the class and have a First Place Recipe Tasting Party!

8 Have a T-shirt party! Everyone creates a First Place 25th anniversary T-shirt and wears it to class. Ask three people (not in First Place) to judge the T-shirts. Give prizes for the funniest, the most beautiful, and most colorful.

9 Have a First Place Prom in May! Instead of a 50's theme. Have everyone dress in the 80's (big hair) with an 80's theme in honor of when First Place started. To really make this inexpensive, require everyone to purchase their prom dress at a thrift shop!

10 Open a F.O.C.U.S. Week savings account! Save \$20 a week and by September 14th (deadline for payment), you will have the money to pay for a wonderful week in Round Top, Texas, where you will be celebrating God's presence from sunup to sundown! Present this to your members and see if any would want to join you, and make this a weekly segment of your class. Using a chart, track each person's giving toward their F.O.C.U.S. Week savings account and celebrate God's provision!

11 Attend the First Place Leadership Summit, July 28-29, 2006. Invite a potential leader, co-leader or assistant to come with you to be refreshed, motivated, instructed, and inspired to lead in the coming year.

12 Use five minutes of your wellness spotlight each week to have a celebration. Ask members to share anything they would like to celebrate: victories in their eating or scripture memory, weight loss, exercise or anything

(Continued on page 5)



Nancy Taylor

(Continued from page 4)

they would want the class to celebrate with them. Give a brightly colored balloon to each person who shares, and give out noise makers for people to use in response to what is shared.

13 Ask members to create a David Letterman top ten list for First Place. For example, "The top ten characteristics of a First Place member" or "The top ten reasons for filling out a CR." Have your group vote on the best list and send it in to First Place.

14 Create a First Place Scholarship Fund. At each victory celebration take a love offering to be used to give partial scholarships for those who have a desire to join First Place, but are prohibited from doing so because of their financial needs.

15 Plan a First Place reunion. Invite former members and current members to celebrate what First Place has meant in their lives. Make it fun by having someone provide music or plan a fun skit about First Place. Ask some to give their First Place testimony.

16 Create a First Place Trivial Pursuit game and play it during class or at your victory celebration.

17 Attend the First Place conference in Ohio, September 15-16, 2006. Have a contest (Biggest Loser) and give the registration fee as the prize.

18 Gather your member's favorite "high calorie" recipes and as a class lighten them by substituting high-fat/sugar ingredients for healthier choices. Then create a First Place Anniversary cookbook of your own! Sell copies of the cookbook at your church as a fundraiser!

19 First Place Shower! In honor of First Place, host a shower for your church or community food pantry. You may even want to do this at the beginning of a session, asking members to bring in foods they purchased

prior to First Place that do not correspond to the Live-it, for example: sugar, shortening, or cookies.

20 First Place Quilting Circle. Those members who quilt may want to create a quilt with squares representing the different Bible studies, commitments, or First Place events.

21 First Place Scrapbook Party! Take pictures the first day of a session and ask a member to be the official photographer for the entire session. For the victory celebration, have each member create a page for a First Place Class Scrapbook. Use the scrapbook as a way to publicize your First Place ministry.

22 First Place Night of Prayer & Praise. Plan a praise service for your First Place class, inviting someone to lead worship. Have members quote the scripture memory verses and pray them for one another. Use the Bible study's reflection days as a guide for the service.

23 Have your class contribute toward the purchase of a Member Kit or several First Place Bible studies and donate them to your church library in honor of First Place.

24 Make a First Place video starring your class members! Have someone interview each member, asking one or two questions about their experience in First Place. Use it to promote First Place in your church or send it to First Place to use in some way.

25 Ask each First Place member to write a list of the 25 ways they have been blessed by participating in a First Place class.

Now, go out there and celebrate!

Lead On!
Nancy Taylor





Coming Events

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

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 accomodations. Attendees must make their own travel arrangements.

Contact: Barb Lukies

Email: firstplaceaustralia@yahoo.com.au

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

FIRST PLACE CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF MINISTRY

Workshop and Pasta Rally
January 14, 2006
 Workshop - 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM (\$15)
 Pasta Rally 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM (\$15)
 If you attend both the Workshop and the Rally the cost is \$25 total.

Please send completed form and a check payable to First Place to:
 First Place, ATTN: Nancy Taylor
 Houston's First Baptist Church
 7401 Katy Freeway
 Houston, Texas 77024

*If paying by credit card you may mail or fax your registration to:
 (713) 688-7282, ATTN: Nancy Taylor

For more information you may contact Nancy Taylor:
 (713) 688-6788, ext. 403 or (800) 727-5223, ext. 403 or ntaylor@firstplace.org

Leadership Tip

Scripture Memory Challenge

Last month I invited leaders and members to join me on a one-year scripture memory journey. The journey entails the challenge to memorize one verse a week for 52 weeks and be able to quote all 52 verses at the end of 2006. To help with this challenge, each month I will share with you practical ways to implement scripture memory into your life. The goal of this journey is not necessarily knowledge, but application. Let's memorize with purpose!

First, let's start with the purpose behind memorizing scripture. This month you will select one verse per week to memorize. Select verses from your First Place Bible study, sermon notes, or from a daily devotional that will meet one of these purposes:

- ✓ Overcome temptation Psalm 119:11
- ✓ Renew the mind Romans 12:2
- ✓ Character development 2 Peter 1:4,
- ✓ Answered prayer John 15:7
- ✓ Direction and guidance 2 Timothy 3:16

If you would like to join the one-year Scripture Memory challenge, there is still time! Contact me with your name, email address, mailing address, and the church where you lead or attend a First Place class.

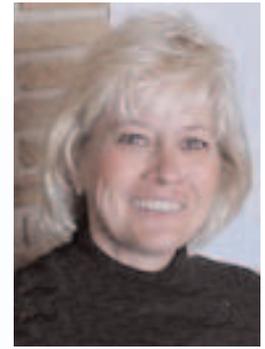
Enjoying the Journey!
Nancy Taylor





Bev's Footnotes

2006: The Year for Celebration



Beverly Henson
Certified Personal Trainer
Bevh1952@bellsouth.net

9 can't think about celebration without the song "Celebration" by Kool and the Gang running through my mind. I particularly like the line in the song that says:

*How you gonna' do it if you really don't wanna dance.
Get your back up off the wall! Dance! Come on!"*

2006 is the year of celebration. It is time to get your back up off the wall and get moving. Many times in the book of Psalms we find King David dancing in celebration to the Lord. He used his body as an outward expression of celebration to the Lord in his spirit. This is the year to get our bodies in gear and get in shape to celebrate.

For those of you that are just starting out or those of you starting over, here are a few tips to get in shape to celebrate.

- 1. Have a plan.** Find an exercise plan you like, one you will stick with and can't talk yourself out of doing.
- 2. Measure your body before you begin.** Weighing is important, but getting your measurements are just as important. Measure your upper arms (2 inches above the elbow), chest, waist, hips and thighs (3 inches above your knee cap).
- 3. Don't come out of the gate too fast.** Set a realistic pace you can maintain week after week. Many of those who go out too fast burn out.
- 4. Listen to your body.** If you have pain, check it out.
- 5. Don't forget your water.** Even though it is winter. stay hydrated.
- 6. Laugh Often!** It enhances your fitness level.

For those of you who are in shape and have a lifestyle that includes exercise:

- 1.** Look back at 2005 and ahead to 2006; evaluate your fitness level and what you would like to do differently this year.
- 2.** Think about adding cross training to your workout to enhance your fitness level.
- 3.** Consider taking a fitness dare. Climb a mountain, roller blade, enter a race, or plan a walking weekend trip. Do something differently to celebrate your fitness level.
- 4.** Keep a fitness journal. Measure yourself. Find someone to measure your body fat.
- 5.** Continue to press on!
- 6.** Pump more iron. It will enhance your powerhouse.

If you press on with your fitness every day in 2006, this time next year you will be celebrating with your back up off the wall. I challenge you this year to strive for fitness.

Make the switch in 2006! Switch from fat to fit! Switch from sedentary to mobile. Switch from bondage to "free indeed." Get your back up off the wall and celebrate! You will feel like dancing the way David danced. Fitness, It's a Celebration!

Bev Henson

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





Hints & Pinches

Anytime Celebrations



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.

7he Christmas parties are over and there are no birthdays in sight but you've still got the party itch? Any day can be a reason to party. Families can celebrate the small, but important, things in life by preparing a special First Place meal, a family outing for the day, baking a special First Place dessert, or giving a special memento to a family member. Here are a few good excuses for a family party:

GOOD REPORT CARD. When one member of the family brings home a terrific report card or grade on a special project.

CELEBRATE THE SEASONS. Observe the changing to your favorite time of year with a dinner featuring fresh seasonal foods.

NEW PET. A new "family" member is certainly grounds for a party.

NEW HOUSE OR APARTMENT. Make your new place feel like home by breaking it in with a family party.

A PROMOTION. A great time to have a small celebration to commemorate the occasion

THE FIRST JOB. When your teen gets his or her first job, celebrate their entry into the work world!

TAILGATING. The "big game"—whether high school, college or professional—is a great time to get together with friends and family.

LOST WEIGHT. Taking off pounds is definitely a time to celebrate—with low calorie cake and frozen yogurt.

A GOAL ATTAINED. Did you finally break your selling goal at work, finish a long-term project or reach your desired goal in First Place? All good reasons to celebrate your accomplishments.

FIRST PLACE'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY. Need I say more?

When having a celebration it doesn't have to involve food. You could shop, rearrange the furniture in a room in the house or just spend time with the family. If it does include a feast, just make sure it includes good healthy choices and most of all, have a good time!

Scott Wilson

Sesame Chicken

Serves 4

Nonstick cooking spray
3 tablespoons sesame seeds
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper
4 skinless bone-in chicken breast halves (about 1 1/2 pounds)
3 tablespoons light teriyaki sauce
1 tablespoon reduced fat butter

Coat a large baking sheet with cooking spray; set aside. In a large plastic bag combine sesame seeds, flour, salt and pepper. Dip chicken into teriyaki sauce. Add chicken to the mixture in the bag. Seal and shake to coat the chicken. Place the chicken, bone side down on prepared baking sheet. Drizzle with the melted butter. Bake in a 400 degree oven for about 40-45 minutes or until chicken is done.

Exchanges for chicken: 3-1/2 meats, 1/2 bread, 1/2 fat

Serve with cooked brown rice and steamed sugar snap peas.

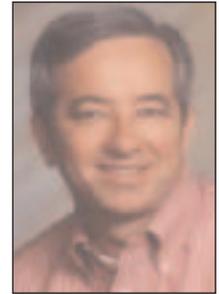
Southwestern Chicken Taco Salad

Serves 4

1/2 cup salsa
1/2 cup reduced fat Ranch dressing
1 10 ounce bag romaine and leaf lettuce mix
1 cup shredded 2% Mexican cheese blend (4 ounces)
1 6 ounce package frozen cooked Southwest flavor chicken breast strips, thawed
1 2.25 ounce can sliced ripe olives, drained (optional)
4 Roma tomatoes, quartered
1 cup chili-flavored corn chips, crushed

Combine salsa and dressing in a small bowl. Add remaining ingredients except corn chips in a large bowl and toss with the dressing until coated. Top with the corn chips and serve.

Exchanges: 2-1/2 meats, 1 bread, 1/2 vegetable, 1 fat (add 1/2 fat with olives)



Remember the Wonders

Dr. Bill Heston

Dr. William Heston was minister of pastoral care at Houston's First Baptist Church; clinical member of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, and a marriage therapist licensed by the state of TX. He has also led seminars at First Place Conferences." Bill Heston is on staff of First Presbyterian Church of Houston, Texas

Celebrations are an expression of joy of past successes.

- July 4th in the US celebrates independence from Great Britain.
- Thanksgiving remembers the gratitude of the earliest settlers of our nation.
- Christmas is a time to rejoice for the grand gift of the Christ Child.
- Wedding anniversaries acknowledge solemn vows taken in the past.
- Birthdays recognize the beginning of life [often untold years ago].

Now 25 years later, First Place celebrates its silver anniversary.

There are many statistics that can be reviewed which represent thousands of churches, groups and individuals that had life changing experiences. More than healthy bodies have been experienced – deeper eternal things, as well, have been discovered. Self esteems lifted, families finding joy, help offered, hope found and faith discovered are but a few of the many dreams that have become realities through First Place groups.

The commitment of the founders, the writers, the group leaders, but most of all the committed

members, has been a force that has impacted innumerable individuals and all that touch their lives. This time of celebration is not so much a time of boasting or even looking to the past for a sense of importance. Celebrations that are centered in recognizing what God has done are not only biblical but also spiritually encouraging.

"Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done." I Chronicles 16:8 [New International Version]

The Bible Call to Celebration – A Time to Remember

- 1. It builds confidence.** If God acted with power and faithfulness in the past he can do it again.
- 2. It encourages gratitude.** All good things come from God, and we should never forget that in all things to give thanks.
- 3. It creates community.** When God's people collectively recognize what he has done for them, it brings them together even when they may be divided in other ways.
- 4. It stirs joy.** The overflow of emotion that is centered in God's goodness does the heart good.
- 5. It gives roots.** In an age of loss of identity, it gives people a way to belong to something greater than themselves.

No one 25 years ago could have dreamed that this simple program of recognizing that God wanted to redeem [to buy back] all aspects of his creation, all four areas, that it would so powerfully be a part of transforming lives. It is a mystery of God.

People have worked faithfully, the plan is sound and well proven - but that does not explain the something extra this ministry has experienced.

It is good to give thanks! His hand has been on this ministry from the beginning, and continues to be that something extra.

Thanks be to God!

Dr. Bill Heston

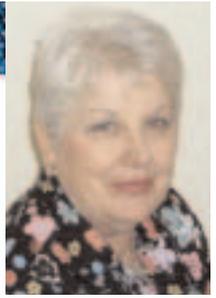
Chicken Penne a la Marengo

Serves 4

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 14.5 ounce can reduced sodium chicken broth
- 1 medium green bell pepper, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 small red onion, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 1/2 cups uncooked penne pasta (4 ounces)
- 1 14.5 ounce can Italian-style stewed tomatoes, undrained
- 1 1/2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 2.25 ounce can sliced ripe olives, drained

Heat a 12-inch skillet over medium high heat and add olive oil. Add chicken and stir-fry for 2-3 minutes or until brown. Add the bell pepper and onion and sauté for 2 minutes more. Stir in broth and heat to boiling. Stir in the pasta and bring to a boil, reduce heat to medium. Cover and cook 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add tomatoes and tomato paste. Cook uncovered for 5 to 10 minutes or until pasta is tender. Stir in olives. Serving size about 1-1/2 cups.

Exchanges: 3 meats, 1 1/2 breads, 2 vegetables, 1 fat



Winning Words for First Place Losers

*They will celebrate your abundant goodness
And joyfully sing of your righteousness.*

Psalm 145:7

Elizabeth Crews

Addictions Counselor & Educator
firstplaceloseers@cox.net

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.

As we begin this year of jubilant celebration it is important to remember that celebration is a time of remembering the good things God has done for us, AND an invitation to respond to His goodness by living a life worthy of our calling in Jesus Christ. Celebrating victory in Jesus is a call to use our new-found freedom as an opportunity to prove our gratitude and love for God's goodness to us through joyful obedience to His Word. Today, let's look at this year of First Place celebration as an invitation:

- ✦ An invitation to live a lifestyle of thankfulness in response to God's goodness to us. Carole Lewis' book, *A Thankful Heart*, and the companion Bible Study, *Choosing Thankfulness* will show you the way to give thanks in all things—even those things you don't normally view as reason for celebration.
- ✦ An invitation to learn God's way of celebration by completing the new *Celebrating Victory* Bible study written especially to commemorate this celebration year so that all of our celebrating will be done in a manner pleasing to the One whose goodness we honor.
- ✦ An invitation to truly grasp the nine commitments of First Place and let Jesus do for us what he has done for so many before us through this wonderful program.
- ✦ An invitation to stop doing those things that lead to defeat and despair so that we can experience the joy of First Place victory. To help us with the *Stop It!* challenge, Carole Lewis has written a book by that name, and there will be a companion *Stop It!* Bible study released in September 2006.
- ✦ An invitation to hope again, after our hope has been dashed to pieces and we are tempted to fall into despair and hopelessness.
- ✦ An invitation to pick up the broken pieces, get back on track and see each day as a new beginning to run the good First Place race still before us.
- ✦ An invitation to affirm that Jesus has defeated evil and so will we.

- ✦ An invitation to rededicate ourselves to our commitment to keep Christ first in all things, confident that as we give Him first place He will bless us beyond our ability to ask or imagine.
- ✦ An invitation to attend all the First Place celebration events that will make this a special year of festivity and fellowship for the First Place family.
- ✦ An invitation to accept the Good News that Jesus is alive and active in our world, ready to work miracles for us, if we but let Him.

First Place is committed to making this an exciting year with events and studies that will allow you to rejoice in God's goodness in full measure during this 25th Anniversary celebration year. As you read over the invitation, commit this year in prayer to God, asking Him to abundantly bless all our celebrations with His glory and grace.

Today, it is my prayer that you will accept our heartfelt invitation to celebrate the victory of First Place! Come share in our joy as we look forward to many more years of celebrating the victory that is ours when we are faithful to the First Place program and are willing to give Christ first place in all things by honoring Him in all that we say and do.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, as we celebrate victory in First Place style! (see 2 Corinthians 13:14)

Elizabeth Crews