



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



February 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,

We have chosen the nine First Place commitments as the theme for our First Place E-Newsletters in 2006. This month we want to talk about commitment number one (1): Attendance.

When we attended the First Place Orientation, most of us thought that the Attendance Commitment would be the easiest one. It was just to show up once a week for thirteen weeks at our First Place meeting. My experience with the people in my class for the last 25 years has been quite the opposite. It is easy to spot the ones for which attendance is a priority; they come every week unless they are sick. I have found that if we don't make "showing up" a priority in our lives, then it won't happen as much as it will.

It has been said that 80% of life is just showing up and I have found this to be a true statement. If I show up for my First Place meeting every week, I will have better success than if I don't make my weekly meeting a priority. If I show up each day to do my Bible study, spend time in prayer, read my Bible, and work on my memory verse, I will have better success in keeping the physical goals of the First Place program.

If I show up five days a week for exercise, I will be more successful in staying on the Live It and keeping my Commitment Record. "Showing up" is putting the things on your calendar that are going to help you change and then showing up for the appointment.

This last year I have been really convicted that I never seem to have the time to do my Bible reading commitment. As I prayed about it, the Holy Spirit impressed on my heart that I could listen to the Bible as I drive the 45 miles into town each day. As the new year approached, I was thinking about which series of CD's to buy and how much this was going to cost. One day last week, I was looking over the sale table at our church book store and there in front of me was a set of 18 CD's marked down to half price. I purchased the set and it has been a truly glorious time each morning listening to God's Word read to me. What does this have to do with the Attendance Commitment? Well, it has everything to do with it. I must choose to listen to the CD each morning instead of listening to the radio or Christian music. I must "show up" to receive the blessing God has for me each day.



Carole Lewis
National Director
Carole@firstplace.org

(Continued on page 2)





Carole Lewis

(Continued from page 1)

As we learn how to give Christ first place in our lives, we will find the balance we need. The First Place commitments are the path leading us to a balanced life. Try showing up for all nine of your First Place commitments for the next seven days and see the difference it makes! Attendance: it's the key to victory!

The Houston Marathon

Our first 25th anniversary event of the year happened the weekend of January 14-15. We started off the weekend with a training workshop Saturday afternoon, followed by a Pasta Rally before the Houston Marathon at 7:00 a.m. the morning of January 15th. God blessed us with the most beautiful day imaginable. As the race began, we all watched the spectacular sunrise over the George Brown Convention Center. There were almost 19,000 participants in this year's Marathon, and First Place was represented in every event. We all wore red T-shirts with "I'm in First Place" on the front. The back of the shirt had our website address, plus "25 years of running to win."

We had more people participating in the 5K (3 mile) than the other events, but two of our participants in the 5K were our "heroes" of the day. Melody Lutz, a leader from Cincinnati, Ohio finished the race in 0:54:28 minutes and she is legally blind. Melody is such an inspiration because of her complete "can do" spirit. When she heard about the race, she immediately decided to come. After the race was over, she started making plans to do it again next year and better her time! The other "hero" of the race was Cheri Lasiter. Cheri is severely disabled by Cerebral Palsy, with leg braces on both legs and uses a walker to walk. Cheri trained at a Mall for the three-mile walk and on race day, she and her mother had a long walk just to get from their car to the Convention Center. Pat Lewis walked with Cheri the entire three miles and they finished in less than two hours! What an inspiration these two were to everyone along the route.

Six of us participated in the Half Marathon (13.1 miles) and the First Place winner was Leigh Anne Miller, from Baton Rouge, LA, with a time of 2:35:48. Leigh Anne has lost 120 pounds on First Place and we are extremely proud of her. She just became a Body and Soul aerobics instructor and will begin leading classes soon at her church. All of us that began the race finished in under four hours and we are still praising God for His faithfulness and protection over us.

Mark Gutierrez came from Chino, CA with his wife, Pam, and daughter, Nikki. Mark was our only First Place participant in the Marathon (26.2 miles). Mark began training a year ago and as part of his training, ran a 5K, 10K and a Half Marathon during the year. He set goals for each race and trained diligently. Mark finished the Marathon in 5:32:54, which is spectacular for a first-time runner. Mark has lost 120 pounds on First Place and not only leads a First Place group, but is a First Place Networking Leader in California. Mark's goals for 2006 are to run 12 races, 3 5K's, 3 10K's, 3 Half Marathon's and 3 Marathon's. We have no doubt he'll do it!

We have all of this year's participants and their times in a data base. Why not plan to join us next year and we'll do it again! You can go to www.houstonmarathon.com and type in our names to see us cross the finish line and check out our times. All of this year's participants are listed below.

5K	Half Marathon	Marathon
Pam Guitierrez	Debbie Bodine	Mark Gutierrez
Nikki Gutierrez	Carole Lewis	
Cheri Lasiter	Dana Makin	
Pat Lewis	Leigh Anne Miller	
Melody Lutz		
Sandy Matthews	Nancy Taylor	
Dee Matthews	Becky Turner	
Bob Matthews		
Susan Ray		
Gini Smith		
B. J. Whitaker		

Carole Lewis

Carole@firstplace.org





The Houston Marathon



Cheri Lasiter and Pat Lewis
Photo was taken by Peggy Newton.

To my First Place family:

Well I did it! What an experience to have so many people cheering you on. Houston puts your name on the race bib, so strangers were yelling, "Way to go, Mark," "Looking good, Mark," "Keep it up, Mark, you can do it." I must have heard 150+ phrases of encouragement from the crowd. It reminded me of Hebrews 12:1. I felt like I was being cheered on by a great cloud of witnesses and it gave me energy and motivation to keep running.

I set a goal (as I always do) to run the marathon in under five hours. Somewhere around mile 15 something happened. Perhaps it's the infamous wall we all hear about, perhaps it was lack of proper training (although I did follow a novice training plan almost to a tee), or perhaps it's just part of the experience of being a novice and gets better with time and training. Whatever the reason, I had soreness in my legs and off and on in my feet. I kept going as best I could, adding some extra walking breaks along the way. Around mile 24, I decided I'd walk the rest of the way, but as I passed the 25 mile marker, I decided to run the last mile. As I began running, my legs felt like they were going to instantly cramp. I stopped, did some stretching, and then slowly worked into a run, finishing in as good a sprint as I had in me.

My initial goal of beating five hours had faded away. I then settled on 5:15, then 5:30, then figured success would be in just finishing within the six-hour limit. My chip time was just under 5:33. I must admit I'm disappointed that I didn't make my goal, but one good thing, it leaves me a lot of room for improvement.



I'm recovering this week, but will continue with light training on Thursday. Next week it's back to full training for the Los Angeles Marathon. One thing I shared at the workshop, my goal for 2006 is to run one race a month. 3 5k's, 3 10k's, 3 half marathons, and 3 marathons!

Run to win!
Mark Gutierrez





Leadership Training

You Would Have Just Had to Have Been There!



Nancy Taylor
Leadership Training Director
ntaylor@firstplace.org

After finishing the Half Marathon, people kept asking how it went. I tried to communicate with them all the emotions I felt and the insights God revealed to me throughout the race, but I found that words could not express all that I had experienced. Have you ever tried to tell someone about an experience you had and they just didn't "get it?" I have experienced some very special moments in my First Place class when someone decided to share their heart about a matter or someone experienced a weight loss breakthrough at the scale. Those moments are forever etched in my memory, yet they are memories that I have only because I was there! In First Place, the first commitment listed is attendance. To really experience all that God has for you in First Place (and in all of life) you have to be there!

You will want to explain to your members all the reasons for keeping the attendance commitment. I tend to be positive and dwell on all the benefits for attending, yet sometimes showing the members what they miss out on by not being there may have a greater impact. Here are some things they miss out on by not attending:

Knowledge – When a member doesn't attend, they miss out on tips and suggestions on how to apply the Live-it and scripture to their lives. They do not get to know the people in the class. You must spend time with people if you want to get to know them! Knowledge is power and attendance will increase a member's knowledge; thereby, giving them more power to overcome the obstacles in their life.

Fellowship – When a member chooses to not attend, they lose hope and connection. Proverbs 18:1 states it well: "He who separates himself seeks his own desire, He quarrels against all sound wisdom." (NAS) When a person has had a defeated week, they tend to want to stay separate from the very group that will give them strength and encouragement to press on. Once they miss the first meeting, it becomes easier to not go back at all and they spiral downward.

Accountability – Socrates said, "An unexamined life is not worth living." Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." The first fifteen minutes of a First Place class offers accountability. Weighing in and saying the memory verse is an examination of your progress in balanced living. People can talk about what they intend to do and what they want to do, but until they make themselves accountable, there will be little progress. Being faithful to attendance is living an examined life worth living!

May 2006 be the year that your members "get it!" Encourage them to be there so that they will not have to hear the words, "Well, you would have just had to have been there!"

Lead On!
Nancy Taylor





Coming Events

Area Leader's Meeting

February 11, 2006

10:00 AM - 2:00 PM
2:00 PM - 4:00 PM Optional Training for New Leaders
Loveland, OH
Cost: Free (Brunch provided)
Contact: Janet Kirkhart
Email: janet1stplace@hotmail.com

March 11, 2006

9:00 - 12:00 Noon
Inland Community Church | Chino, CA
Cost: \$5
Contact: Mark Gutierrez
Email: MarkAndPam@FirstPlaceCA.org

Leadership Tip

A Year-Long Scripture Memory Journey

When memorizing your weekly verse, start by meditating on the verse. Here are the steps to meditating on the Word, which Waylon Moore suggests in his Bible study, Living God's Word:

Step 1: Understand the perimeter of the verse

Reading the verses that surround the verse you are memorizing will give you more insight and a fuller understanding of your memory verse.

Step 2: Paraphrase the verse

After reading the verse, then write it out in your own words. Your goal should be to shorten the verse, so that your paraphrase simply states the main point of the verse.

Step 3: Pulverize the verse

Read aloud the memory verse many times- each time emphasizing a different word. Then pick one word from the verse that stood out to you and begin asking questions using who, what, where, when, and why.

Step 4: Personalize the verse

Pray and ask God for insight and wisdom as to how you are to practically apply the verse. Remember, the goal of scripture memory is application (a changed life).

Step 5: Pray the verse into your life.

Pray the verse back to God, inserting your name and circumstances. For example, "God of hope, fill me with all joy and peace as I trust in you, so that I may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Romans 15:13

Please email me any scripture memory testimonies along the journey. I would love to hear how God is working in your life through the memorized Word!

Feasting on the Word!
Nancy Taylor

March 18, 2006

10:00 AM - 2:00 PM
Oakdale Emory United Methodist Church
Olney, Maryland
Contact: Kathy Geehreg
Email: kegeehreg@aol.com

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!

First Place Workshop

March 4, 2006

9:00 AM - 4:00 PM
South Australia
Contact: Tracy Garton
Phone: 08 83921484
Email: firstplaceaustralia@yahoo.com.au

25th Anniversary Events Celebrating 25 Years of Ministry in 2006

A Complete 11-day Biblical Tour to Israel
March 20-30, 2006

Leadership Summit
July 28-29, 2006

F.O.C.U.S. Week
October 12-19, 2006

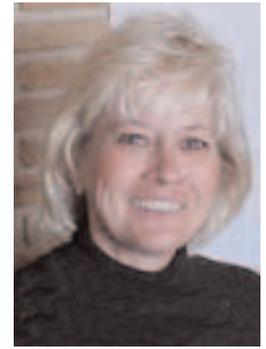
First Place National Conference
September 15-16, 2006

Check website for additional information regarding the 25th Anniversary Events! www.firstplace.org



Bev's Footnotes

Making Your Battle Plans



Beverly Henson
Certified Personal Trainer
Bevh1952@bellsouth.net

I have been through 18 years of schooling, obtaining various degrees and professional titles. I can tell you that I didn't obtain these degrees by just intending to show up. I didn't get where I am by just thinking about going or saying, "I meant to go. I will get back on it next week." I had to make it a point to be faithful and attend to reach my degree or title. It is the very same way with health and fitness. You've got to be there faithfully. It's not just what you do today; it's what you do every day that gets you to where you are going. You must attend if you are serious about obtaining a new level of health and fitness. You must have a good battle plan.

Before setting out to conquer Jericho, Joshua was given a visible sign from the Lord that he needed to depend more on the Lord's force and power than on his own military skills. (Joshua 5:13-15) Those of us who are skilled dieters and have knowledge of physical workout and exercise must come to realize this battle belongs to the Lord. God has a different battle strategy in mind this time. The first battle will begin in our mind. Are you willing to take your marching orders from the Lord even if they are contrary to all of your diet books and workout DVD's? It's time to set up your own personal battle plan.

You have to come to the point that you understand your physical workout is not only to lose weight, but to become healthy. If you look at your workout as only a way to lose weight, once you get to goal weight you are more likely to quit.

Your workout and exercise time should be a holy time on holy ground with you and the Lord. Exodus 15:13 (KJV) says, "...Thou hast guided them in thy strength unto a holy habitation." The word "holy" means sanctified or set aside. Your workout time should be a time you set aside with purpose.

Before you begin each workout, your first battle

plan should be to say a blessing over your workout. You pray over your food; why not pray over your workout? The blessing in Deuteronomy 28:3-6 says "...You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out." Blessed when you start your workout and blessed when you finish.

My workout prayer: *Father, I give my workout to you. Guide me. Help me to use wisdom in my workout. Protect my body from injury. Help every move I make to be an offering up to you. I thank you Father that I can move.*

Spiritual Tip: Your workout place is holy ground. Take it serious! Do it with purpose! It is the time and the place you are getting into condition for the Kingdom of God!

Physical Tip: Establish a Workout Schedule. Turn mere behavior into a good habit. Motivate yourself to stick to your program by getting a large glass jar. Place the jar in a place of prominence in your home. Every day after you come in from your workout, put a dollar in the jar. If you don't stick to your schedule you made for yourself, take a dollar out. When your jar is full, go out and buy yourself something special.

Bev Henson

II Peter 1:5-8 (NIV)

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."





Hints & Pinches

Dining Out and First Place

We are sad to announce that Scott Wilson, who has been self-employed for many years, has taken a full-time position as a chef at an assisted living facility and will no longer be contributing to our newsletter each month. In honor of Scott's wonderful First Place ministry through his articles and recipes, we will re-publish the "best of the best" of Scott's articles for the next few months.

Scott Wilson

First Place Food Consultant
firstplacechef@hotmail.com

Scott Wilson is a certified executive chef with the American Culinary Federation.

You've just started First Place and are planning to try a new restaurant, call ahead to see whether it offers suitable menu choices or if substitutions can readily be made. With the exception of fast-food restaurants, where everything is already prepared when you get there, most restaurants are happy to modify their dishes by changing the cooking method, leaving out an ingredient or serving part of the dish, such as the gravy or dressing, on the side so you can control the amount you eat.

For the average health-conscious person, there's something for everyone on almost every restaurant menu. Keep these eating-out tips in mind to avoid the major pitfalls of restaurant food:

- ✓ **Learn menu language.** Look for entrees on the menu that are broiled, grilled, poached, steamed, roasted or baked, and avoid foods described as fried, crisp, sautéed, creamy, creamed, au gratin, escalloped or breaded.
- ✓ **Share with a friend.** You won't tend to overeat if you split your appetizer and dessert.
- ✓ **Watch portion size.** If you know you'll be tempted to eat more than you should, ask to have your "doggy bag" prepared in advance, so you'll only get a half order at the table. Some restaurants will even let you order a half order or children's portion of pasta as an entree.
- ✓ **Eat low-calorie foods first.** Order a salad as your first course and when dinner arrives, start with the lowest calorie foods on your plate.
- ✓ **Go for balance.** If you really want a high-fat or high-calorie entree, balance it with lean choices for the rest of the meal.

Here are some healthy choices you can make at different types of restaurants:

- ✓ **At a pizzeria,** choose plain cheese pizza or pizza with vegetable toppings instead of meat toppings. Plain cheese pizza (181 calories) and vegetable pizza (188 calories) both weigh in with about seven grams of fat. By contrast, meat pizza (234 calories) has 12 grams of fat.

- ✓ **In an Italian restaurant,** ask for breadsticks instead of bread, and ask for oil and vinegar on the side to dress your own salad. Order pasta with red sauce such as marinara instead of such creamy white or butter sauces as Alfredo. Choose chicken dishes instead of meat and sausage dishes. Have a cappuccino for dessert.
- ✓ **In a Chinese restaurant,** choose steamed rice instead of fried rice, steamed dumplings instead of fried and vegetarian entrees that include a number of different vegetables.
- ✓ **In a Japanese restaurant,** pass up tempura in any form because fried food should be avoided.
- ✓ **In a Mexican restaurant,** choose salsa instead of sour cream or cheese dips. Choose dishes made with plain, soft tortillas that aren't fried, such as burritos, soft tacos and enchiladas. Have black bean soup as a first course.
- ✓ **In a cafeteria or food-buffet restaurant,** fill your plate with plain vegetable side dishes before you go for the meat. Look for grilled, broiled or flame-cooked chicken, fish and lean meats and avoid anything breaded, batter-dipped or fried. If there's a salad bar, concentrate on crisp, crunchy vegetable and bean mixtures; leave the potato, macaroni and tuna salads behind, and watch out for those calorie laden salad dressings.

Scott Wilson

Crème Fraîche

Serves: about 4-1/4 cups

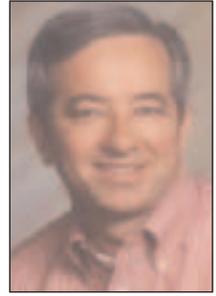
1 cup cultured buttermilk
4 cups plain low fat yogurt

In a large saucepan combine the buttermilk and yogurt. Heat until lukewarm, about 1 minute. Do not over heat. Remove from the stove and let stand at room temperature loosely covered for 24 hours. Refrigerate and use within one week. Makes about 4-1/4 cups.

Exchanges for 1/2-cup Crème Fraîche:
1/2 milk, 1/2 fat



Better Together



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

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."
Hebrews 10:23-25 [Revised Standard Version]

BIBLICAL REFLECTION ON THE POWER OF GROUPS

- ✘ Motivation – We are in this together.
- ✘ Encouragement – If I can, so can you.
- ✘ Accountability – The CR doesn't lie.
- ✘ Discipline – Perfect practice make perfect.
- ✘ Confidence – The Spirit of God in you speaks to the Spirit of God in me.

Making the decision to join a First Place group may be the biggest and most important step. There are many other steps that are necessary.

But as the simple saying goes:

Every great journey begins with the first step.

The encouragement of the First Place journey... we do not travel alone or in our own strength.

Why do we sign up for things we don't really want or need? Because someone out there has the job to determine what motivates us to "join in." These marketing researchers spend unbelievable amounts of money on polling ordinary people like you and me to see how they can separate us from our money and time. And it works! Do you ever watch a commercial and ask how that was going to get you to buy something that had little appeal? Chances are it is working for some target group or the product would not be able to pay for the advertisements.

Why do people sign up for First Place program? There are many reasons and the list below is only a few:

- ✘ They had a friend who had been and recommended it.
- ✘ They had tried almost everything else, so why not?
- ✘ They are so discouraged with their health that they will try anything.
- ✘ They liked the idea of doing a program with others.
- ✘ The combination of Bible study and good health information is appealing.

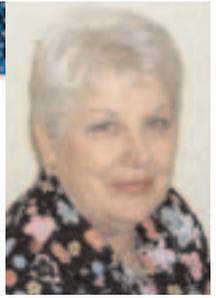
There are many reasons to join, but it does little good if good intentions are not combined with good decisions. The information and studies in First Place could be done at home alone without joining, but it seldom works.

If we could have, we would have!

There is power in joining others in challenging endeavors.

Dr. Bill Heston





Winning Words for First Place Losers

Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

1 Timothy 6:18

So often we think of being generous and willing to share as the giving of our material possessions to those in need, but the sharing God commands us to do is not limited to the material realm. Yes, sometimes we do enrich others by sharing our material wealth, but often enriching others means being willing to share our emotional, mental and spiritual wealth with others too. A traditional English teaching story beautifully illustrates the importance of what may seem to us to be our small, insignificant contribution to our First Place group.

Legend has it that once upon a time in a mythical kingdom far, far away, a king invited all his subjects to a royal banquet. As a sign of solidarity and sharing, the king asked each person to bring a flask of wine to be poured into a large vat. When it came time to serve the wine, the king ordered the servants to draw the blended mixture from the keg and pour a glass for each guest. After a magnificent toast honoring the contribution of each person present that evening, the king gave the signal for all to drink the mixture as a token of their unity. Suddenly the celebratory words turned sour. Everyone was horrified when they tasted the drink! The mixture was pure water! Each guest had the same idea: "My flask of wine is so small that if I fill it with water and pour it into the common vat, no one will be the wiser."

Much like those subjects at the king's banquet, each of us is asked to contribute something to our weekly First Place meeting—and the first thing you are asked to bring to the meeting is you! Yes, Attendance is the first commitment of the First Place program, but that attendance is not limited to just taking up physical space in the meeting room. You are asked to bring the essence of all that God has created you to be. When we are willing to be that, what each of us brings to our First Place group is an important part of the brew! We each have a valuable contribution to make as we share our struggles and victories. We find the

Elizabeth Crews
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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.

true meaning of attendance in the root word "attend": to take care of, look after, wait on, minister to and serve. Your presence in the weekly meeting enriches each person in the group and gives them a sense of unity and sharing with others walking the same path, and striving for the same goal. Perhaps the Holy Spirit has revealed something to you during the week that will minister to the entire group. Perhaps your voice is the one that will show others the way. Perhaps your healing touch is the one that Jesus will use to bring restoration. Perhaps your contribution is the very thing that will allow another to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Unless you are present at the meeting, and willing to be generous and share, you will never realize the plan and purpose God had for you as you serve your First Place group by showing up with the special contribution the King has invited you to bring.

Being faithful to the Attendance commitment is more than being present at the weekly First Place meeting. Not only do we need to show up, we each need to bring something to share with our group. We need to add our fragrance to the bouquet. Together we can do what we cannot do alone. Each member's little flask of wine is valuable to the success of our First Place program. This week I pray you will add your essence to the unity and purpose of your First Place group by being faithful to the first commitment--Attendance!

Elizabeth Crews

Giving frees us from the familiar territory of our own needs by opening our mind to the unexplained worlds occupied by the needs of others.

~Barbara Bush



First Place Success Story

As a new bride wanting to look great for my husband, I asked God to help me lose weight. I expected Him to just “zap” it off. Instead, He chose to put a First Place book by Carol Lewis into my hands. At the time, I was unable to attend any meetings and ate up every word in the book. I read through it more than once and was so encouraged by all the success stories. Especially, that they (like me) had tried everything and finally gave up losing and re-losing weight on their own, and then relied upon God with great success. I just knew that book in my hands was the answer to my prayers. I had no idea the journey I was just beginning. I couldn’t start with a group right away, so I started going through it with a girlfriend as my accountability partner, and kept my commitment record on the front of the refrigerator for all to see.

I was amazed at the excitement God gave me to do this. Each morning I got up a little earlier so I could meet with Him in prayer and Scripture reading, and then surrender my will and day to Him. As I did this, a few minutes were not enough and I got up earlier and earlier with an overwhelming desire for Him. My desires to keep all my commitments and follow the program also grew and as they did, I shrunk! I had been walking for some time and my body was used to it, so I knew I needed to up my fitness level. I needed to jog and to finally quit smoking, which I had also tried a zillion times. The very first time I jogged, I only lasted 30 seconds. With a lot of prayer, I threw out my cigarettes and knew it had to be His way or the highway! I couldn’t smoke and run. With asthma problems, I could barely breathe at times!

I didn’t give up; instead I committed it all to Him daily, and recited to myself over and over, ...*I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.* (Phil. 4:13) In about one month, I was running one to two miles each day, and my asthma actually went away! To this day one of my favorite exercises is to go on a “worship walk” or “prayer run.” I lost 30 pounds in 3 months, going from a size 12 to a size 7! I couldn’t remember ever being a size 7! Funny, one of the reasons I was afraid to quit smoking was that I would gain weight! But through one of the memory verses that first three months, I learned that my body is His temple, and along with unhealthy eating, I knew that I was defiling His temple with my cigarettes. But I praise His grace, for through this struggle, He showed me that any area I need to bring into obedience, He will enable. He doesn’t ever give us a command that He doesn’t enable us to obey! He wants us to be balanced, whole and healthy and He does the “doing” as long as we do the “surrendering and abiding!”



The weight loss has been great, but the most incredible part has been my intimate, growing relationship with our Almighty God. What He has been doing on the outside is just a fragment of what He’s doing on the inside. He took my desire to lose weight to bring me to First Place, to help me find and seek Him. Keeping my daily commitments, He’s growing in me such a love for Him, for prayer, and for His Word that I just can’t get enough. As I allow Him daily to have all of me, He allows me to live out the verse, *Seek first his Kingdom and his Righteousness and all these things shall be given unto you as well.* (Matt. 6:33) He has given me things like healing, that I didn’t even know I needed as I seek first His Kingdom. He has blessed me with a beautiful family, a solid marriage, great friends, church, and ministry. He is doing above and beyond all I could have dreamed or asked or imagined, all because I was taught to daily surrender my will for His good, pleasing and perfect will through First Place.

He still hasn’t “zapped” away my struggles with food and exercise. At the end of my four pregnancies, I weighed a high of 228 of which, Praise God, I have lost 70 pounds, so far! My goal is to lose 100 pounds and I believe I will. I know now this is a lifelong commitment that I have made to First Place, but it is my commitment to Him! *I must glory in my weaknesses, as it is here I have learned to know and rely upon Him and His grace. My grace is sufficient...* (II Cor. 12:9).

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