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DECEMBER 2007

Dear Friends,



Memories

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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Carole Lewis National Director

Webster's dictionary defines a memory as *the mental process or faculty of representing in consciousness an act, experience, or impression, with recognition that it belongs to time past.*

It has been my experience that one of the huge benefits of knowing Christ personally is that He takes our worst possible experiences in life and filters them into sweet remembrances. In essence, the Holy Spirit, who lives inside of every believer, is able to transform our memories. I believe He uses two things to accomplish this miracle in our hearts: forgiveness and thankfulness.

Last week I had an experience that I hope will explain what I am trying to convey. When I opened the mailbox to retrieve our mail, I noticed a letter with the return address of the "Texas Department of Pardons and Parole." With the sixth anniversary of our daughter Shari's death approaching, I knew without opening the envelope that this was the letter informing our family the time was approaching for a possible parole of the girl that hit our daughter on Thanksgiving night, 2001. Lisa Marie DeLeon was driving drunk that fateful night when her car left the road and came down the sidewalk where our daughter, Shari, stood behind the family car talking to her mother-in-law. As I read the letter, my memory bank pulled up that horrible day when Lisa Marie was sentenced to prison in June of 2002. She pled guilty to vehicular homicide and received a mandatory twelve- year sentence. The sentence dictated that Lisa Marie must serve six years of that sentence before becoming eligible for parole.

As the memory surfaced, it was not what I expected. Instead of the memory of us giving our victim statement or of Lisa Marie saying how sorry she was to have caused Shari's death, the memory that flashed before me was the one when we were leaving the courtroom. My son-in-law, Jeff, our three granddaughters, and Jeff's parents and siblings exited to the left side of the courtroom and Johnny and I exited to the right. The next thing I saw was my husband stooping down to hug the weeping mother of Lisa Marie. Johnny has the gift of mercy and he was able to put himself in that mother's place, watching her eighteen year old daughter being led away to prison. I was overcome with love for my husband as he demonstrated God-like character in the middle of a devastating situation.

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As I have reflected on why that memory was the first one to come to mind, I realized that we all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is no degree of sin with God; sin is sin. All of us have sinned and all of us have been sinned against but forgiveness and thankfulness are the keys that allow the Holy Spirit to transform those bad memories into times of learning great spiritual truths.

God has been so gracious to all of our family these last six years. Our granddaughter, Cara, is now married to Michael Parker and they have a precious baby boy named Luke. Her sister, Christen, is a student at Texas A&M University. The youngest, Amanda, is in her freshman year at Sam Houston University. Their daddy, Jeff, married a wonderful Christian woman, Kathryn, in September of this year proving that life does go on after tragic events in our lives. God loves His kids and has good planned for us all.

Johnny and I are so grateful that God has allowed Johnny to stay with me for 10 years since his diagnosis of stage four prostate cancer in 1997. Yes, Johnny still has cancer with all its' challenges, but he is still here and we praise and thank God for that.

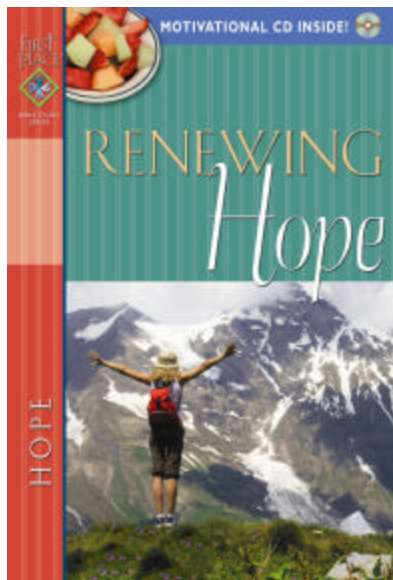
As Johnny and I read the letter from the Parole Board, we both had the same feeling that we would leave Lisa Marie's parole in the hands of our loving Father. I sent Lisa Marie a Bible and prayed for her salvation many times in these last six years. I know that God loves her as much as He loves us and we want His perfect will played out in Lisa Marie's life and in the life of her family.

This Christmas season, is there someone you need to forgive? Is there something in your life that you need to begin give thanks for even though you can't see why? The Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 to, *Give Thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* As I wrote in my book, *A Thankful Heart*, this doesn't mean we give thanks **for** the circumstance. It means that as we remember the horrible event, we thank God for whatever we can surrounding the event.

The miracle occurs in our memories when we are able to forgive and give thanks. I pray 2008 is a banner year for each of you in our First Place family. I...*thank my God every time I remember you...* Philippians 1:3

Carole Lewis

First Place National Director



New Releases this Month!

Look for the new First Place Bible study titled *Renewing Hope* released this month. *Renewing Hope* helps readers to get back on track toward their goals and to find energy for the daily challenges in the restoring hope that God offers.

First Place will also release a new First Place Journal this month. This 192-page, lined journal contains inspirational quotes throughout and is a resource to record prayers and reflections while walking the First Place journey.





Leadership Training

Merry Christmas Memories



Vicki Heath

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The holidays provide excellent opportunities to make memories. What we want to do as parents and leaders in our homes, churches and communities is to do what we can to make the memories good ones. Most of my Christmas memories growing up are good ones. That's the great thing about our minds; we can remember the good stuff if we want to and forget the rest if we so choose. Being intentional this Christmas with our time, money and energy will help. Here are some suggestions for providing a healthy environment for making memories:

- ✂ Don't over-schedule the holidays. We do not have to say yes to every event. Leave time for simple things at home like baking cookies, decorating and chillin', as my kids say.
- ✂ Buy your Christmas tree early. Then you won't feel so pressured to do all the decorating in a rush and you can ENJOY the Christmas atmosphere of your home instead of thinking, "That mantel needs something ..."
- ✂ Buy a Christmas scented candle. Aroma therapy is a great and inexpensive de-stressor for the holidays.
- ✂ Share. Do something for your neighbors. Bake some healthy nut bread or share some of those delicious cookies. It's a great way to make a new friend.
- ✂ Share the song of the angels. Go to church and sit together as a family. Wow! I love it when my flock is all around me.

✂ **Worship.** Bundle up and take a walk. Many times I take a walk as an extension of my quiet time. I love that prayer time with the Lord as I commune with him in the arena of his creation.

Focusing on the true meaning of Christmas is a tried and true recipe for making the best Christmas memories ever. It's one that has been passed down from generation to generation. Here's a prayer to help keep us focused.

A Christmas Prayer by Robert Louis Stevenson

*Loving Father, Help us remember the birth of Jesus,
that we may share in the song of the angels,
the gladness of the shepherds,
and worship of the wise men.*

*Close the door of hate and open the door of love all
over the world. Let kindness come with every gift and
good desires with every greeting. Deliver us from evil
by the blessing which Christ brings, and teach us to
be merry with clear hearts.*

*May the Christmas morning make us happy to be thy
children, and Christmas evening bring us to our beds
with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for
Jesus' sake. Amen.*

Merry Christmas Memories,

Vicki Heath





Balanced Living – Emotional

Memories: *Treasures of the Heart*



Bill Heston

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We are anticipating the arrival of our first grandchild this December. I am excited, but the “grandmother-in-waiting” is consumed. We have begun to go through boxes in the attic of important things from our children’s early years. Baby things carefully stored for this time, a time that seemed so remote back then, seem such a short time now. Handmade blankets and favorite stuffed animals, all are filled with memories that cause us to sit quietly and reflect on the journey of family. Most are memories of joy, happiness and fulfillment, but there have also been times of great pain. Memories are where we store the importance of the past. Not everything can quickly be recalled, but those that are usually mean something special.

This Christmas season there will be many memories. Christmas seems to be a time that our minds record an unusual number of incidents, both of joy and pain; surprises that caused laughter and some that brought tears. We expect so much from the season. We hope for a ceasing of conflict, both in remote parts of the world and at family tables. We pray for joy for those in desperate situations and our loved ones who continue to struggle with life. We seek blessing for the discouraged on the streets, but also within our circle of family and friends.

Reflecting on past Christmases and former days brings a variety of feelings. It was no different in Bethlehem almost 2,000 years ago.

But Mary “...treasured all these things in her heart.” Luke 2:51b

This phrase is found at the end of the account in the Gospel of Luke where the childhood years of Christ are summarized. I wonder what Mary, the mother of Jesus, stored in her memory.

- ✗ The drama surrounding the birth with angels, wisemen and a manger
- ✗ The escape with Joseph and the baby to Egypt
- ✗ The teachings Jesus did in his young adult years
- ✗ The miracle of the turning water to wine at the wedding feast
- ✗ The adoring crowds
- ✗ The angry crowds
- ✗ The cross and the loving appeal to the Apostle John to care for Mary
- ✗ The resurrection and the upper room appearance

So many treasures of the mind; how did she survive such a range of events and keep them stored in any meaningful order? We focus on the manger. The drama of the birth would help her interpret what came later. Such is the nature of treasured memories.

Memories can encourage, paralyze or inform.

Encourage

Many memories of the past bring feelings of joy. Worn tree ornaments remind of earlier Christmases. Stories of our grandparents tie us to a strong past. We often find renewed energy and increased affection during holiday times.

Paralyze

For many, there are also hurtful memories. These are often the result of difficult situations with the people that are the most loved. Often what should be a time of happiness is tainted with dysfunctional relationships that are compounded by how out of place they seem in a time that is to be harmonious. The season may be just painful enough to push toward a plan of help by a professional counselor or a trusted pastor.

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Sometimes the hurt is caused by those who are no longer with us. Finding ways to remember and honor them and still seek joy takes creativity. Ideas, such as giving a gift to a Christian cause in their honor, may be appropriate.

Inform

We can learn from the past.

- ✂ We can see what helps us move forward and what keeps us back. It may take some rearranging of traditions to circumvent troubling and recurring negatives. This may include shorter visits at painful gatherings or making preparations prior to events, such as a healthy eating plan.
- ✂ Creating new positive traditions can bring added meaning for the season, as well as restructuring personal relationships. This may include attending a Christmas Eve service as a family, or helping serve a meal at a homeless shelter. It could include inviting a lonely adult to Christmas lunch.
- ✂ We can be informed by our own personal past, but even more importantly, we can benefit from the past of authentically spiritual people that God puts in our lives. These may be individuals who themselves have had great difficulty, but through it all they found the joy of faith. A faith that sustains and helps to order memories in such a way that God uses them for good.

After the holidays, evaluate your memories. Commit to use the days to come to grow in grace for you own personal peace and as a blessing to others. Use the positive “memory builders” of the First Place commitments to be a vital part of what you *treasure in your heart*.

Merry Christmas from Granddad Bill!

Dr. Bill Heston

Dr Bill Heston is Associate Pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Houston and is Licensed in Marriage and Family Therapy.



Mark Your Calendars!

Area Leaders Meeting

January 19, 2008
Central Assembly of God
Green Bay, Wisconsin
Contact: Jenn Krogh
Phone: 920-388-3531
Email: wifirstplace@hotmail.com

First Place Leadership Summit

July 25-26, 2008
Houston's First Baptist Church
Houston, Texas
Contact: Lisa Lewis
Phone: 800-727-5223, x403
Email: llewis@firstplace.org

First Place Christian Health Spa

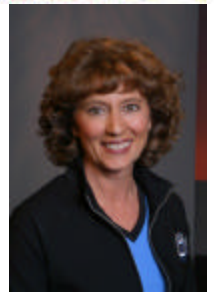
October 9-16, 2008
Round Top Texas
Contact: Lisa Lewis
Phone: 800-727-5223, x403
Email: llewis@firstplace.org



Balanced Living - Physical

Active Memories

Jeannie Blocher
jeannie@bodyandsoul.org



Do you remember as a child all the running and jumping and playing that you did? How many of you ever woke up on Christmas morning to find a shiny new bicycle waiting for you and you set out immediately for a test ride? Do you remember walking over to your friend's house to play? I can see a vivid picture in my mind of the neighborhood I lived in as a little girl. One of my best friends lived at the top of a steep hill near my house and I would think nothing of running up that hill to find her each day. We sledded down that hill in the winter, in the daylight and in the moonlight—it was both exhilarating and scary, but we loved it!

And what about those active teenage years? Did you go to dance classes or the Saturday night dance? Did you cheer at the football games as a cheerleader or as a fan in the stands jumping up and down with excitement? Did you do a sport or just walk everywhere on campus when you were in college? As we live our lives, there are many times of fun activity to remember!

Let your mind wander back to a happy *active* memory that you have and ponder it for awhile. God made our bodies to move! He created us to be active! And our happy memories of movement can motivate us even today. We need to trust God to help us create new active memories with our loved ones! This Christmas season, be intentional about planning active things to do together as you visit with family over the holidays. Encourage the whole group to bundle up and go for a walk in the afternoon after that Christmas dinner! Go sledding if you live in the north, or swimming if you live in the south. Do what you enjoy doing! The main thing is to “just do it”! Determine that you will be an active person and let those active memories from your childhood or teenage years spill over to today!

Mailbag

With 11 attendees representing 4 churches --three being from Massachusetts churches - we prayed together, had a teaching on leadership from Linda Graves, shared a healthy continental style breakfast, and stories not only about the ministries -- but also of amazing weight loss and transformed lives. It was so clear how His hand is all over First Place and all were blessed by that. The group wants to get together regularly, so a seed has been planted.

We have received feedback that people were encouraged, inspired, and that it initiated area leader fellowship.

It was such a wonderful team effort. I appreciate Marilyn's work in seeking out First Place people and initiating the process to make the dream of a New England Area Leader meeting a reality! I am also thankful for Vicki Heath and Kathlee Coleman for help with the agenda. It is so exciting to see First Place growing in New England! Your continued prayers are most appreciated as God calls us together!



Just as there are many parts to our bodies, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of it, and it takes every one of us to make it complete, for we each have different work to do...Romans 12:4 TLB

New England Area Leader's Meeting
Delilah Dirksen.



Nutrition Notes

Make Some New Memories This Christmas



Erin DuBroc
erin.dubroc@firstplace.org

“*It’s the most wonderful time of the year...*” Oh, aren’t Christmas carols like that one just infectious? When they start playing on the radio (in mid-November), I can’t help but get swept away by giddiness and anticipation of the Christmas season! The earlier, the better for me!

Over the next few weeks, sweet memories will flood my mind regarding handmade stockings from my grandmother that continue to hang on the mantle with care, leisurely drives through neighborhoods full of Christmas lights, fellowship with friends and family at all the annual get-togethers, and the Candlelight Service I’ve attended most years of my life. Other prominent ones include my dear Dad filming my sisters and I as we’d come down the stairs on Christmas morning (with bed-head in all its glory), hugging each giver of gifts after each one is opened, and watching our cat, Tabby, play in all the empty bags and tissue paper. Nostalgia is a wonderful thing, isn’t it? Who wouldn’t want to reminisce over the most cherished memories of their childhood and adult life?

There are a few memories of the Christmas season, however, I know many of us would like to forget! Holiday weight gain, for example, is definitely not something any of us think of fondly. Allow me to unpack that a bit. Examples include new clothes that no longer fit, dropped jaws when we dare to step on a scale (God bless those brave souls who do), and an all-around softness that makes us yearn for a few weeks prior when we were still working out and relishing the way it made us feel - the fabulous “after the work out” feeling! So why continue the traumatic dietary drama of the holidays? Skip it this year and make some new memories!

There are plenty of ways you can circumvent the post-Christmas bloat. First, resolve and set goals to do things differently! If you have always made the richest dessert ever created and in amounts sufficient to feed an army, try making a lighter recipe (that can be JUST as delicious), giving half of it away, or simply making a smaller batch! If you have always taken off from exercising and have a gazillion excuses as to why it’s impossible to exercise during the holidays – put in a new mental tape and play it loud! You *can* exercise with resistance bands while watching all the bowl games, you *can* do jumping jacks in your house if it’s too bitterly cold to do them outside, and you *can* have a push-up and abdominal-crunch goal to meet each day. You *can* do anything you truly *want* to do! And I promise, you *don’t* want to gain back all the weight you’ve lost this fall in a mere week!

...focus on what’s really important during this season: faith, family, and friends – not food!

Secondly, ask a friend or First Place group member you’re close with to help you stay accountable if you’re taking a break from weekly meetings. Share your goals with that person and ask them to share theirs with you. Chances of you getting out of your cozy, warm bed to work out are slim if you don’t have someone to give you a wake-up call, cheer you on, or even meet you there. You’ll make some sweet memories with this person that will be delightful to think upon the following December!

Lastly, focus on what’s really important during this season: faith, family, and friends – not food! Don’t get me wrong, I fully encourage you to enjoy some of the tasty treats that only make an appearance on your table during the holidays, but do so in moderation. Honestly, what is the point of enjoying something to an extreme that makes you feel miserable later? Food is not the enemy – frivolous eating is! So, enjoy it in healthy moderation and move on to better things – like making snowmen with your kids or grandkids (if you have snow), serving a meal to those who are truly hungry, or participating in a Jingle Bell run in your area. Whatever the memories you make, make them be healthy, happy, and truly worth remembering!

To good health,

Erin DuBroc, MPH, RD, LD





Success Story



My history in First Place goes back over 12 years. I originally joined to shape up for my 1995 wedding. Dieting wasn't new for me; I had struggled with the same 10-25 pounds for years. However, this time I really liked the concept of learning how to attain a healthy weight with Christ in First Place.

Over the years, I've continued to turn (and turn again) from the idol of overeating. It's something I have to do daily, and I've come to see that I will probably be a lifetime First Place member. I know that left to my own devices I will let my flesh take over and make wrong choices. But with the Lord's help, I'm learning that *He* is the only one who truly satisfies.

At my heaviest in May of 2000, I carried 248 pounds on my 5'7" frame. Although I knew better, I used my first pregnancy as license to completely overindulge. When I returned from the hospital after giving birth, I wasn't just overweight, I was obese and miserable. It took quite a while to get back to normal, but again the Lord was there for me in First Place. He is faithful when we are not!

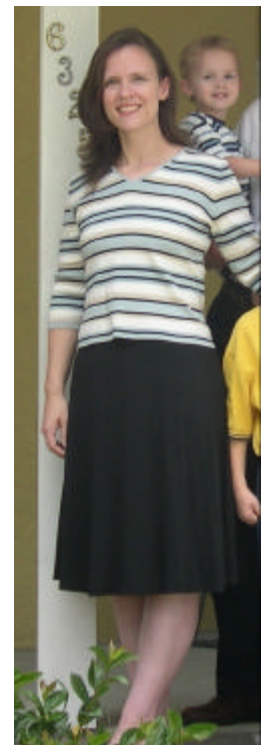
During my second pregnancy, I really practiced the lessons I'd learned in the program. I couldn't attend a group, but the Lord brought me a partner and we practiced the Nine Commitments together. This time I only gained 40 pounds and was able to continue exercising for most of the pregnancy. I felt *so* much better inside and out, and when it came time to work on the post-pregnancy weight, it was a lot easier to do with good habits already in place.

It's taken a lot of work, but I eventually lost about 90 pounds and have returned to a healthy weight of 156. I would eventually like to lose 10-20 more pounds, but right now I feel it's important to work on learning to maintain a healthy weight. The Lord has given me so much strength during this process. There are some days when I simply didn't want to follow the plan—I want to do what my flesh wants to do (Romans 7). But our Bible studies and memory verses lead me to remember the truth, and there are many times when the Lord simply holds me up in times of struggle.

My battle with food will probably be a lifelong one. Perhaps this is a "thorn in my flesh" (II Corinthians 12) that the Lord has given me to rely on Him. I'm so thankful He's provided a way out for me (I Corinthians 10:13) in First Place. With the tools He's given, I have the opportunity to live a life of victory and freedom. And through the testimony of my struggles and victories, I can be a witness for Him to others.

Laura Hartness

Vero Beach, FL



Laura will be appearing in the January issue of Diet 2008 magazine. For more on her ongoing testimony, visit her website at <http://FirstPlaceVictory.blogspot.com>.



Devotional

God Things

*This is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son
as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

1 John 4:10

Christmas is my favorite time of year. I love all the twinkling lights, the joyful music about the birth of our Savior, the atmosphere of love and giving of gifts, home and family, the midnight Christmas Eve service at the church and all the traditions that we have come to know and associate with the Christmas season. One of my favorite childhood memories is of the Christmas Eve program at our church. There was a large Christmas tree that all the church members helped decorate, little shepherd children, angels with cardboard wings, Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus, plus all the traditional Christmas carols. In the audience were those who had traveled home to spend Christmas with their families. It was an exciting and memorable event for me as a child, especially during a time when my parents were unable to lavish us children with many gifts.

A few years ago I heard of a group of people who determined that celebrating Christmas, giving gifts and decorating a Christmas tree was associated with paganism and that Christians should not participate in this celebration. One day during that Christmas season, I was driving to a friend's home and was talking to the Lord about Christmas and how much I enjoyed the time of year. I asked Him what He thought about Christmas. He spoke to my spirit and said, "Christmas is a time of love," adding that He loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son that whoever would believe in Him shall not perish but have eternal life (see John 3:16). God loved and He gave. That's why we can joyfully celebrate the Christmas season by loving others and giving gifts as an outflow of that love. Giving is a natural outflow from a heart that deeply loves. It is not important if the date of Jesus' birth is exact, but it does matter to God that we love and sacrifice our lives for one another, not only at Christmas but also all year long.

Let the light of the love of Jesus twinkle in your heart and shine in your countenance as you celebrate the Christmas season. Observe how Christ loved us. His love is not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of Himself to us. Love like that!

Pat Lewis
Houston, Texas

Taken from *Healthy Holidays*, a 6-week resource that provides staying power during the tempting holiday season and encouragement to reflect on the true reasons for the holidays. To order, call 1-800-4GOSPEL.





Cinnamon-Apple Pork Tenderloin

Serves 4

- 1 lb. pork tenderloin
- 2 apples, peeled, cored and sliced
- 2 tsp. cornstarch
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 2 tbsp. raisins

Preheat oven to 400° F. Place the tenderloin in roasting pan or casserole dish with a lid. In medium bowl, combine apples, cornstarch, cinnamon and raisins; stir. Spoon apple mixture around tenderloin. Cover and bake 40 minutes; remove lid and spoon mixture over top of tenderloin. Bake uncovered 15-20 minutes longer, or until tenderloin is browned and cooked through.

Exchanges per 3-oz. serving: 3 meats, 1 fruit

Fresh Asparagus with Toasted Nuts

Serves 4

- 1 cup water
- 2 tbsp. fresh lime juice
- 2 tbsp. diced pimiento
- 1 tbsp. toasted pine nuts or walnuts

Rinse asparagus and snap off tough ends. In a large skillet, bring water to a boil and add asparagus. Cover and steam asparagus until bright green, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from heat, drain and arrange on a platter. Sprinkle with lime juice. Garnish with pimiento and pine nuts or walnuts. Serve warm or chilled.

Exchanges per 1/2-cup serving: 1 vegetable

Orange-Glazed Sweet Potatoes

Serves 4

- 3 cups sweet potatoes (about 2 1/2 lbs.), peeled and thinly sliced
- 1 small lemon, thinly sliced
- 2 tsp. reduced-fat margarine
- 2 2/3 tbsp. orange juice
- 1 tsp. grated orange rind
- 3 1/2 tbsp. firmly packed brown sugar (or brown Sugar substitute)
- Nonstick cooking spray

Preheat oven to 400° F. Arrange potatoes and lemon slices in 13x9-inch baking dish coated with cooking spray; set aside. Melt margarine in small bowl. Add orange juice, orange rind and brown sugar to melted margarine; mix well to blend. Drizzle mixture over potatoes; cover dish with foil. Bake 35 minutes; uncover, stir and bake 30 minutes more.

Exchanges per 3/4-cup serving: 2 breads, 1/2 fat

Chocolate Cheesecake

Serves 8

- 2 8-oz. packages fat-free cream cheese
- 1 1/2 cups skim milk
- 2 packages sugar-free hot chocolate mix, dry
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 1 3-oz. sugar-free chocolate pudding mix, dry
- 4 ozs. Cool Whip Lite?
- 1 reduced-fat graham cracker pie crust

Cream softened cream cheese with 1/2 cup skim milk, using back of spoon. Add hot chocolate mix and vanilla. Beat remaining 1 cup milk with pudding mix. Add to cream cheese mixture. Fold in Cool Whip Lite? . Place in pie crust. Refrigerate several hours before serving.

Exchanges: 1 meat, 1 bread, 1/2 milk, 1/2 fat