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I no longer have to carry around the burdens of anger, anxiety, frustration, guilt, or anything else that bogged me down.

May of 2003, found me sitting in a doctor's office for an annual exam with a host of health problems. I had come to this visit with my written list of complaints in dire hope of finding some "fixes" for them:

- * I couldn't breathe when I lay down at night.
- * My female system was out of balance.
- * I had a constant headache; medications would not even phase it.
- * I had no ambition for work, my husband, my children or anything else.
- * I was lonely and floundering...flying by the seat of my pants just to get through a day.

Although I had never seen this doctor before, all it took was for him to ask how I was for me to break down. He was so patient, as I spilled all these complaints to him through tears. I asked for any help he could offer. What he offered was not really what I wanted to hear...that probably some of these things were caused from other issues. He would help me with the physical ones, which should help with the others. He put me on a birth control regimen as hormone therapy and asked me to come back in 4 months. Although he never mentioned my weight as an issue, I was at 209 lbs. I had been as high as 216 about 6 months before, had lost 15 lbs and was regaining.

In that same month, I ran across First Place 4 Health materials at Family Christian Bookstore in Eau Claire. It was intriguing...I went through all the materials to see what it was all about. Then, I neatly repacked it and put it back on the shelf. I did this about every two weeks at the

bookstore...spread the materials all over the floor, went through each piece, repacked it and put it back. Periodically, I would visit the First Place website and look at what they had to offer, while I wrestled with whether I would purchase the materials or not. I was familiar with the live-it plan, as I had used diabetic exchanges on another program 20+ years previous. When I mentioned it to my husband, he asked, "If you know what to do, why do you need to spend more money to do it?"

Not only was I experiencing health problems at this time, but my marriage had gone way down hill...further than ever before. My husband and I were just pretty much co-existing, just trying to get through each day, one at a time. In June 2003, I decided it would be a good time to visit with my family that lives in Florida over the July 4th holiday. In my mind, I told myself that if my husband really loved me, he would go with the kids and me as a family. To my horror, he declined going. The kids and I took the trip and through phone calls home, I was convinced that when we returned, our marriage would be completely over, with no chance for reconciliation.

I came home to a very cold home. There was virtually not even any conversation shared. In August, since finances were an issue, I borrowed the money and bought the First Place Members Kit (in anger and selfishness) just to do something for myself. I began reading the materials and getting accustomed to all the commitments. On the FP website, I found that the closest group meetings were being held 60 miles from my home and they met on Tuesday nights at 7 pm. I work Tuesdays from 7am to 7 pm all year, EXCEPT for September and October. I was able to meet with this group for those two months.

It never ceases to amaze me at how God's timing is always perfect. The only two months that I could meet with this group were the two months following the purchase of the First Place materials

I began my First Place 4 Health journey in September of 2004. This group really did not focus much on the food plan, but really got into the Bible Study. I truly believe that this was God's design to help me understand how much He really cared for me. I learned so much about myself, some of which I would have rather not learned, and healing began.

By the end of September, I had lost about 10 lbs. Already, in one month, my marriage was improving, my energy level was returning, and my desire to move forward was strong. My return trip to the doctor was much different than my first. After 4 months on medication, it was decided that I did not need that therapy any longer and the doctor offered me anti-depressants "just in case." I asked him if diet and exercise could make such an improvement possible long-term and he answered yes, if done wisely. I took the anti-depressants home and put them in my drawer "just in case." My husband had gone with me to this appointment, and for the first time in what seemed like ages, we had meaningful conversations, shared tears of sadness and joy, and I really became aware that God was working on restoring our marriage.

By the end of October, I had lost about 12 lbs. and people were beginning to notice and ask questions. One lady, in particular, pushed me to start a group at our church. I had already felt a nudging spirit to start a group, but as always, I wanted "all the facts." The group that I had met with put me in touch with Jenn Krogh, who is the Wisconsin State Leader, and she was holding a leadership meeting in Fond du lac, WI. Although it was a 4-hour trip, I committed to go. A friend and I left home at 6 am to make it to Fond du lac by 10:00 a.m for the meeting. However, we hit road construction and were detoured a full hour out of the way. We arrived late (just about lunchtime), but were welcomed into the meeting with love, and ushered to the only 2 seats left, in the front row. To be honest, being late embarrassed me. But everyone there was so great in receiving us that it put those feelings

of embarrassment to rest quickly.

I had gone to this meeting to get the nuts and bolts about leading a group, and many of my hesitations were put to rest. But I continued to resist "heading up" this group; I came up with many excuses:

- * Why, I had never worked with adults before. I had always been in the youth programs.
- * There probably wouldn't be many people interested in this.
- * I'm no expert at this "nutrition stuff".
- * I didn't have the money to buy a leaders kit.
- * How would I ever get a "good enough" scale?

God countered all of those excuses by sending adults my way that encouraged me. I presented the materials to the church leadership, and though our group is self-supporting, they gave permission for the group to meet in our youth center and I committed to get started. The one lady that had pushed so hard to get started backed out and I had to be dependent on God. I received a coupon at the Family Christian Bookstore and was able to purchase the leader's kit at 25% off. And the scale? What a story. I called our small town hospital to see if they had any old scales that were not being used that could be purchased at a reasonable price. The maintenance director told me that they had just thrown all their old balance scales into the dumpster about two months ago when they went to all digital. My heart sank, but I began looking for other options and purchased a digital bathroom scale to use. Then, during the week of Christmas, the maintenance director called me back to let me know that while searching for something, he had run across a scale in the basement and asked if I was still interested. I was so excited, but worried about the price. When I asked him about cost, he told me that if it was being used for a weight/health program, they would just DONATE IT! WOW! This was a \$450.00 plus scale. Expecting it to be an old, old gray/green scale, I was amazed to find it to be a brand new one, bright white, with absolutely no scratches. God takes

care of every detail...He provided us with the best.

In anticipation of starting the first session of our First Place 4 Health group, I prayed that God would provide just 2 or 3 people that I could help and that would also keep me accountable. The first session was started in January 2004, with 13 members. I think God was helping me to see just how really big He is (or I needed more accountability than just 2 or 3 people could give me). There have been major changes in people's lives in all four areas, physical, spiritual, mental and physical. Our second session had 18 people, our third had 20 people and this current session has 21 people.

I started my own First Place 4 Health journey in September of 2003. Since that time, I have gone from 209.5 lbs to today's (Nov. 2004) 161 lbs., a loss of 48 lbs. I have gone from a size 20 to a very comfortable size 12. Our group has flourished and grown from 1 (me) to 21.

God has been gracious and these numbers are very impressive. But what I really want to share is the 4800 lbs of anger, anxiety, frustration, guilt, and many other things that I have lost over this last year, and the many things I've learned.

* That my heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, so much so that I cannot understand it (Jeremiah 17:9). My temptations and evil desires are sparked from within (selfishness). If I leave my heart "unchecked", it will lead me down the wrong path every time.

* That my body is a temple of a most high God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Nothing belongs to me in this world; it is a gift from God. He dwells in me and I am therefore filled with power and might. When He lived in the ark, Uzza was killed for just touching it. What kind of power is that?

* That nothing I have done or will do is ever hidden from God (Psalm 69:5). He knows all there is to know, from before I was ever created.

* That nothing I will face in life is new. Someone else has

been tempted and tried in the same way and that God will never leave me without strength to get through it or a way out (1 Corinthians 10:13).

These are just a few things I have learned. I no longer have to carry around the burdens of anger, anxiety, frustration, guilt, or anything else that bogged me down. But what got my attention the most was at that First Place 4 Health conference in November 2003, when Jenn Krogh shared a video presentation on Passion. She did not know the impact this video had on my life until our conference in October 2004, when she asked me to share my story. I really can't remember all there was to that video, but there was one remark that really took me by the collar and got my attention:

" We lose our passion when we allow things that are precious to become familiar ."

That statement played over and over in my mind. That is exactly what I had done.

* I had allowed my relationship with and salvation through Christ to become all too familiar. It had become very easy to waltz in and out of church and never even be moved by God's Word.

* I had taken my marriage for granted. It was all too easy to gripe and complain and dismiss the love and support that God had provided me in my husband. In our circumstances, there is no doubt that God brought us together.

* I had neglected my children. I could only see it as one more demand, when they really just wanted my attention and guidance.

I have learned to take God's Word for what it really is, which is Truth. I have learned that even though I have been in church all my life I had not worked on my relationship with God, because I had not spent time in his Word. I have learned the power of praying God's Truth, that it has power to remove

strongholds.

My favorite verse is Psalm 51:12, "Restore unto me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me. I learned to pray this verse in the circumstances listed above, and God has been more than faithful to fulfill his Word:

Restore to me the joy of your salvation ...and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.

Restore to me the joy of my marriage ...and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.

Restore to me the joy of my children ...and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.

God has restored my relationship with Himself, with my husband and with my children. I am filled with joy and peace like I have never experienced before in my lifetime. When I face trials and troubles, I can do it now without being overwhelmed, because I know without a doubt that He is there for me with all his strength, might and power to help me along.