

Linda Stone and Beth Johnson

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Beth Johnson was a 47 year old mother of three, who lives in Kittery, ME. When trials developed in Beth's life, she turned to food—causing excess weight gain, knee problems, and other health concerns. Beth, inspired by a desire to become healthy and lose weight for her daughter's wedding, noticed the weight loss and glow of Anne Philbrick. She learned that Anne (who has lost 46 pounds and helped others to do so) was participating in First Place 4 Health at Bethany Church. Beth believed in faith-based weight loss, and decided to join First Place 4 Health in the fall of 2006. Since then, her life has become transformed, and now she is helping others to do the same—including her sister.

As an act of love, Beth invited her sister, Linda Stone, 49, of Haverhill, MA, who is a married mother of one, to join her. As it can happen, Linda gained weight when she became a mother. Both had grown up as Christians and went to church, but amidst the challenges of life, their relationships with God had changed. Beth explained, "Not that I didn't talk to God... but I wasn't relying on Him to help me with these things. I was relying on food to stuff it down. And that's pretty temporary, but the results are lasting. I wasn't happy that I let myself go. When I got into First Place 4 Health, I realized what an addiction it was, and that it was a sin. Our minds have been opened to the fact that this was clouding our thought processes and not bringing us close to God, but taking us way from the relationships that we once had." Linda added that her relationship with God had become "somewhat neutral, lukewarm, and that daily personal walk was missing."

Through learning to give Christ First Place 4 Health, both sisters have experienced tremendous success with weight loss

and lives that have been transformed from the inside out. Beth, as of the time of this writing, has lost 48.5 pounds and Linda has lost 57.5 pounds and reached her healthy weight goal. They credit the 106 pounds total loss, and all related gains to the power of God. Beth explained, "God cares about every aspect of your life, even losing weight, and that's what really blows me away! It is not just the weight either. It is the anxiety, feelings of loneliness, any kinds of things that you are just dealing with in your inner being. He just wants to walk alongside and help you. If you don't draw on that power then you are just doing it on your own, and it is not going to last and sustain you."

According to Linda, "Being in the program allows me to rely on God a lot more. Now when I have a situation or problem, I turn it over to God instead of trying to work the whole thing out myself." Linda continued, " It's that personal relationship with God. I have felt His power working in me more in this program than any time in my life. You feel the weight loss. You are transforming. When you start thinking about the body as a holy temple (1 Corinth. 6:19-20) it is about restoring God's holy temple again. My husband says my attitude has changed—my whole perspective and how I am handling things now". In the first session Linda realized, "Yah, this is a lifestyle change. A lot of people that just make a change for losing their weight don't realize that it is a major lifestyle change. Or you've been trying to do the quick fixes. These nine commitments really hold us accountable. You really don't want to shirk on a commitment made to God."

Beth continued, "Things did not happen all at once obviously, and some of the commitments were a little harder than others. Once you realize the benefit in the abundant life that you are receiving, you just want to keep doing more. Not to say that it was a piece of cake. I had completely refrained from sugar and had such a low for the first few weeks, I was dragging. Once you rid it out of your system, then you really don't care

about putting it back.”

As a result of the weight loss, the sisters have experienced physical healing. Arthritis, heart disease, and knee problems run in the family. Linda and Beth had knee issues, and additionally, Linda suffered with acid reflux. Beth exclaims, “I am doing things that I NEVER thought I would get back to with the knees—being able to squat even! You get down and pick up something. Wow. We go out for walks out in the woods, take the dog out there...”

Linda was taking prescription medication for the acid reflux, and thought about stopping the medication after hitting a certain weight goal to see if the weight was causing it. According to Linda, “It has been almost five weeks since I have taken one of those pills! I like spicy foods and am now testing foods. I am now able to eat onions and spices again. I even tried a little Tabasco sauce!” Linda’s knee problems have also subsided. She exclaimed, “I can move!” In fact, Linda can move so well that she has coordinated a well-attended video exercise program after class at the church to help all participants to start off the week exercising.

Both Linda and Beth have become an inspiration to other First Place 4 Health members, and have recently stepped forward into class leadership roles, using their gifts and knowledge to help others. These experiences are bringing them closer as sisters. In thinking about the overall program, Beth touched with appreciation, expressed, “He has allowed peace and joy to come back to my life...” and shared her love of the verse that is at the core of First Place 4 Health, Matthew 6:33: Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you. She explained, “If you don’t seek Him first, then you can’t have all these wonderful things added to you.”

Beth added a final note sharing, “Linda and I both feel like we have been resurrected into a new life centered on Christ, who gives new life to those that seek Him...” Linda shared this

sentiment quoting a favorite verse of hers found in Isaiah 43:18 & 19: Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. Linda related, "I am making way in the desert, forgetting the past and moving on to new things. It spoke to me about not holding on to the past and past behaviors. When you let go, they don't have that hold on you. It frees you to move forward. We are moving forward in First Place 4 Health, getting rid of the old behaviors and on with new patterns, new ways of being healthy and exercising, and learning good proper self care that God wants for us." Linda concluded, "It is spring. I am a new creation. Look, I am doing a new thing! I perceive it!"

This spring, it is clearly a time for new beginnings for Beth Johnson, Linda Stone, and those around them—thanks to God and the First Place 4 Health program.

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