

Lou Oliver

When First Place 4 Health came into my life, I was 32 years old and a mother of three amazing kids. My husband was pastoring a mission church and a lady in the church started a new program. She invited me, and I thought, "I'm going to have to be a part of this since I am the pastor's wife," so here I go.

I joined the First Place 4 Health class in 1994, beginning on a Friday night at the church. And the church wasn't just down the street. It was a one-hour drive away, across the countryside and up and down the hills of southeastern Ohio. So back and forth we travelled every Friday night—me, my husband and the kids.

At our first meeting, our leader talked about how this program was going to help us learn to live for Jesus in all areas of our lives. She said, "To begin this meeting we must first weigh in." Oh No! I was so afraid, because no one knew what I weighed, not even my husband. So here I go! I hopped on the scales and I weighed 250 pounds. I couldn't believe it! I cried inside my soul—big time! My first week into the program was a mess. I didn't know much about living for God, even though I had been saved for 10 years. I started—Day one, then Day 2, then on and on, and I thought, "I can't do this." "Oh my gosh! This is too much!" The Nine Commitments were like...What?! God truly helped me because I didn't know how or what to do.

As I began going through the studies, I was amazed! I realized that God would teach me through His Word how to do this. I saw myself changing every day! I set my first goal for 25 pounds of weight loss. I reached the 25-pound goal in 12 weeks, but actually lost 30 pounds in my first 12-week session. I realized as I continually read God's word, I felt stronger and I felt His presence in my life like I never did

before. Wow! I was loving time with Jesus! And I was beginning to love me!

One of our studies talked a lot about letting things go and forgiving others who had hurt you. I was so afraid of this. I did not know how to do it. You see, I had a dark secret that no one knew about. I suffered from child abuse; I was raped as a child starting at the age of eight. As I grew into adulthood, I carried this darkness inside of me and it was destroying me. Because of the continued abuse throughout my years of childhood, I just wanted to die. I hated the perpetrator so much that I wished he could have died as well.

Through my Bible study, God was telling me that I had to let go of the past and forgive others, so I could become all that God wanted me to be. I thought, "There is no way I can do this. That man hurt me beyond anyone can imagine!" That very week my Bible verse was Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me." I read that verse over and over and over again until I believed it with all that was in me! So, a few weeks after knowing this verse, I went to the person who had done this to me. That person, the perpetrator who had violated me, was my father. I looked into the eyes of my father and I said, "I forgive you, because God's Word says I must forgive you for doing such terrible things to me." That day I was set free! I have grown closer and closer to God over the years, and my Scripture I quote daily is Philippians 4:13, along with many others as well. But Philippians 4:13 has been my theme verse through the years.

Because of my past life, I became an emotional eater. I would eat all the time until I literally hated myself. I remember one day I called my husband at his workplace and told him I had made a huge chocolate cake with chocolate icing. He said he could hardly wait until he had a piece. By the time he came home, the cake was gone; I had eaten it all! To me, I was fat, ugly and unhappy because I lived in bondage for so long! But God had a plan for my life. He used this First Place program

to bring change to me on the inside and out. Now, I love myself and I take care of myself.

Through this long lifestyle change, I have lost 100 lbs. It took me 12 to 16 months to accomplish it. I now journal everything I eat and every exercise I do. I walk every day, and some days I run and lift weights. I praise my God and talk of His wondrous love, mercy and grace! I shout to the Lord because my Savior reached down to a broken, young woman that lived a self-destructing life for so many years, and He transformed me by His power.

I lost my parents 13 years ago. They both died within nine days of each other. I experienced much pain and suffering trying to deal with it. But I never forgot First Place! Twenty-three years later, I have still kept track of my eating, Bible studies and exercising every day. I went through a time of depression when my parents died and gained 30 pounds. I sought help, and with a few other ladies we started a brand new First Place program at the church. This time, I was leading the group and led the support group to the best of my ability. Altogether, I lost the 30 pounds that I gained back after my parent's death. God is still using me today.

As life went on, I still never told anyone about my childhood abuse. I kept it inside to protect others. As I have journeyed through my adult life, I have become stronger in Christ Jesus. I trusted Him to keep working and helping me to live totally free.

A couple years ago, I did tell my family about my childhood abuse. I'm so happy that I did. I'm now totally free indeed, and I'm blessed that God loves me and has seen me through all these years. I love God with my whole heart.

As a footnote, I want to share that when I started this amazing First Place 4 Health program in 1994, my clothing size was 24, 26, 28. Today in 2017, my clothing sizes are 6, 8, and

10. At 55 years of age, I'm strong and fit for the work of our Savior. I teach women at church in our small group, and our support groups name is LCDP, which stands for "Lives Changing Daily Philippians." I also have a Facebook page (with the same title) reaching out to any who need God and want change in their lives. Yes, God transformed me physically, spiritually, emotionally and socially. If He can do that for a broken person like me, then He can change you! Keep On Keeping On for His glory.

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