

Rev. Jason A. Stevens – Pastor

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Most of my life I have struggled with a weight problem. I guess you could say that I was born wearing husky diapers. I always knew that I had a food addiction, but I just wasn't sure how to go about making the necessary changes in my life. I probably tried about every diet you can imagine, but all to no avail. Time after time, I would once again give in to my food addictions.

Just over two years ago, I was called to serve as the pastor of a wonderful church, Church of the Nazarene, in Waynesville, MO. The Church of the Nazarene is a holiness church. Throughout the years, as a church, we have been very outspoken against things like smoking and drinking. We've pointed to passages of Scripture like 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 which says, Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body, and we've reminded our listeners of the sinfulness of doing damage to our physical bodies. Yet, one thing has always bothered me. The question I have struggled with for years as a pastor is, "If overeating does harm to my body, just like smoking or drinking, then doesn't that make it just as sinful?"

In my spirit, God had really convicted me that if my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, then it's not just alcohol and cigarette addictions that are sinful, but eating addictions that are just as evil. So here I was an overly obese preacher calling the kettle black. There's just something wrong about a fat preacher calling a skinny smoker a sinner. According to

the BMI charts, I was "morbidly obese." My food addiction was destroying God's temple and I knew it. There was no denying that I was headed to an early grave, thanks to heart disease, cancer, or some other obesity-related disease.

Seven months ago, my life was changed forever. The previous pastor's wife of our church (Sharon Bushey) asked me if she could start a First Place 4 Health group in our local church. She mentioned that it was a Christ-centered weight loss program. I didn't quite understand the program completely, but I knew God had laid this on Sharon's heart. I saw the passion in her eyes for this ministry and I gave her my blessing to move forward. Little did I know that I would be the one who would be challenged and changed the most.

As the weeks went by and as I started embracing more and more of the First Place 4 Health program, I saw a change happening in my life. I began to see the power of God at work in my life in ways that I hadn't experienced before. I began to see God break down strongholds that were still in my life that somehow I had managed to overlook even as an ordained preacher of the Word. Passages of Scripture like Matthew 21 :22, "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" and Proverbs 16:3, "Commit to the LORD whatever you do and your plans will succeed," began to take on brand new meaning for me.

As the pounds started coming off, my testimony grew stronger and stronger every week. And God began to give me opportunity after opportunity to share my testimony. The interesting thing is how He's used me to testify to fellow ministers of the Gospel. One such time I will never forget. I am the Secretary of our local Christian Ministerial Alliance. Due to the holidays, it had been several months since we had last met. When we finally got together to discuss community issues, I had lost 30 or 40 lbs. As I walked into the meeting, which is held monthly at a local breakfast buffet restaurant, several of my preacher friends started commenting on how much weight I had lost and how good I looked. As one of them, who's a rather

husky fellow as well, went to take another bite of his biscuits and gravy he asked, "Man, how'd you do it?" I smiled and said, "I've finally learned to really put Christ first place in EVERY area of my life." I guess something I said must have touched a nerve, because his smile disappeared and he put his fork down.

To date, God has helped me lose 75 lbs. but more than that, He has given me a brand new testimony to the power of His hand at work in our lives. I can now honestly say that I know this Scripture to be true, The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. (2 Cor. 10:4). Thank you, Jesus, for giving me the victory over my food addiction. Thank you for helping me demolish the stronghold of my food addiction. Thank you to my wife, Kiley*, for being my daily support system and the best helpmate a man could ever ask for. And thank you, Sharon Bushey, for your willingness to heed God's call to start this ministry and change your pastor's life forever! To God be the Glory!

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