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Freedom! That's the word that comes to mind when I think of my First Place 4 Health testimony. Like "*Shackles off my feet so I can dance¹*" freedom. Like "*My chains are gone, I've been set free, my God, my Savior has ransomed me²*" kind of freedom. I don't think I grasped the freedom salvation brings until God used FP4H in my life.

When I was 10 or 11, I raised my hand in Sunday school to say, "Yes, I wanted Jesus in my heart" My parents did not know the Lord, and I never grew from that one moment. I went on to live for myself in sinful misery until I was 28 years old, which was just a couple of years before discovering FP4H in our church bulletin.

Up to this point, I had stacked up years of one unhealthy choice after another. I had dieted since age 14 and had been 60 lbs. heavier than now. I have a family history of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and cholesterol. I was fully in bondage to food and sugar addiction.

So enter Nancy Smith (15 years ago), my FP4H Leader and one of our Texas networking leaders. Nancy began to teach me how to rely on the Spirit in action. Through the elements of the program, session after session and year after year, I learned how to recognize Jesus as my Lord and authority in the process of surrender and obedience. "Leaders, don't ever underestimate how God can use you in the lives of your members to disciple them." It's a responsibility and privilege. Nancy was only with me two sessions before she moved! So I began leading the class with her mentoring me by phone and visits. We have continued encouraging each other through all these years.

Through my learning, I would test obedience by kicking, screaming, complaining, and digging my heels in, only to find out that God was ever-faithful to equip me, to fulfill me, to

satisfy me, to soothe me, to comfort me, to show me balance His way and to empower me with His Word.

I had never memorized a Bible verse, or had a consistent quiet time, or a desire to study God's word. I had never read my Bible through, which took me three years on the one-year plan! But I did it. So throughout this incredible, heart-wrenching breaking of the will, dying to self process, I fell head over heels in love with the person of Jesus!

Well, I am hooked, and I want to keep living this way. I realize that somewhere along the way, I have traded my food addiction for the best addiction we can ever have, and the only One we're created to have! And there's joy unspeakable that accompanies obedience. I know—shocking! It shocked me too.

My journey has been long to this point and I have a lot of years where I stayed in the desert. I JUST reached a good healthy goal weight about four years ago. The biggest shift in perspective came for me when I began to connect my choices to my gratitude for my Savior and view my actions as an act of worship:

- Because I love you, Lord, I will put on my tennis shoes and go walk outside with you
- Because I love you, Lord, I will chop up this apple and have a healthy breakfast with you.
- Because I love you, Lord, I will let you comfort me instead of going into the kitchen right now.

In Honest Repentance:

- I'm sorry, Lord, that I didn't trust You to satisfy me like I thought that candy bar would.
- Please forgive me that I really didn't think You'd be strong enough to soothe me like that dessert.

It always came back to what I call a "trusting God" issue. I

finally realized who I needed to rebel against. Not my God and His ways – but the enemy who wanted to destroy me and keep me believing lies that I would never be free! 2 Peter 1:3-4 tells us “We have everything we need for life and godliness through the knowledge of God, and through his promises we actually get to participate in His divine nature!” (Paraphrased). The victory is ours!

I will be 46 next week and prior to my FP4H journey. Every pound and stretch mark I had was from gluttony and distorting my body with food. I began to pray “Lord, if I had never abused my body with food, could you just show me what you had in mind when you created me? Just show me what I can healthfully maintain the rest of my life.”

And I believe I am living out that answer to prayer. God has allowed me to break a legacy of poor health, and escape the bondage of food addiction. Now, we get to keep learning new things together as we navigate the challenges of maintenance.

1. Shackles by Mary Mary, 2000
2. Amazing Grace by John Newton

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