



My statements don't carry As much weight as they used to

For years I've watched my fat friends lose weight then condemn the rest of us fatties for not being as spiritual as they are.

A couple of years ago the book stores were glutted (appropriate word) with books on how to lose weight. Unfortunately, many of the people who wrote those books are now fat again.

That makes for a poor witness.

Several years ago I lost 15 pounds on a fast. I immediately went into the pulpit and "called the body to slimness."

A lot of fat people left the church.

Not to be outdone, I wrote an infamous magazine column which I illustrated with a specially designed suit of armor for fat people over the caption, "Put on the whole armor of God."

More criticism—this time from folks saying I was making fun of pregnant women and people with glandular problems.

In retaliation to their criticism I went out and ate a lot of ice cream—and gained 25 pounds.

For 26 years I have been fat. However, with all my huffing and puffing when I climbed stairs, and my bulging eyeballs every time I bent over to tie my shoes, I knew there was something inherently sinful about being overweight.

To be fat in a world that is starving to death is inconsistent with the spirit of Jesus.

Yet nothing—no amount of fasting—seemed to change my shape or weight.

While my body was supposed to be the temple of the Holy Spirit, I had turned it into a cathedral—complete with flying butresses and expansive porticos.

Last spring our home church—the small group to whom I relate and submit—(most of whom were overweight and some of whom were fat) decided it was time to get in shape. We began bringing a set of bathroom scales to our Monday night meetings. One night we even took the scales to the Chinese restaurant when we went out to eat as a group. We fined ourselves huge amounts of money for each pound gained.

At the end of the period I was not only fatter. I was poorer.

One morning in June I got up and looked in the mirror. My face was puffy. My eyelids drooped. I needed a brassiere, and my tummy was so big I couldn't see my knees.

To sum it up—I was dying. Perhaps, more accurately, being crushed to death.

How could this be since just a few months before I felt I had heard God say He would give me another 50 years of productive life?

I found myself studying a verse of Scripture in Exodus 15. God had told the Israelites, "I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you."

I needed a healing. But that promise, like most of God's promises, was in the

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subjunctive mood. It was preceded by certain conditions before it was valid. "Listen carefully to the voice of God, do what is right in His eyes, pay attention to His commands, and keep all His decrees."

God had told me, a long time ago, to lose weight. Now, because I had disobeyed, I had become the American version of an Egyptian fleshpot.

"I am the Lord who heals thee" does not apply to those who are deliberately self-indulgent. Butter-soaked waffles for breakfast and strawberry shortcake before going to bed will bring on the plagues of Egypt just as quickly as the disobedience of a stiff-necked pharaoh.

As I examined my false starts into slimness across the years, I realized my failures stemmed from wrong motives. I

wanted to look good, wanted to brag, wanted to lord it over fat folks, wanted to impress people, wanted to live longer. All were insufficient motives.

There is only one valid motive—the desire to please God through obedience.

Last June I put a chart on the door of my refrigerator and ran a line from my weight of 215 to my goal of 170.

I had never been on a diet before, having lost weight the "macho" way by fasting. Our daughter-in-law was a distributor for the Cambridge Plan, and my wife and I decided we'd go on the diet together.

The result was a weight loss of 45 pounds in 90 days.

During that time I totally changed my eating habits. I am determined never, never, never to return to where I was.

What are the secrets for my success?

- I did it "unto the Lord," and for no other reason.

- I made losing weight my top priority. Jackie and I put the scales in the front foyer of our house. I weighed myself every morning as soon as I got out of bed and marked my progress on the chart.

- Jackie and I did it together. (She lost 26 pounds.) That meant we could encourage—and badger—each other.

- Our home church cooperated, not with all those wild concepts as before, but by everyone determining God was calling us to a radical change of lifestyle.

- As soon as I reached my goal, I had my clothes taken up, giving away those too big to re-fit. It had the effect of burned bridges. I cannot go back to being fat. It would cost too much.

- God said I could not talk about my weight loss for six months—until I had proved I could keep it off.

The time is now up. I weigh in at 171. That's 10 pounds less than when I graduated from high school. And while I know better than to brag, it sure feels good to rise in the morning, flex in front of the mirror, and wink at myself.

Even though my statements don't carry as much weight as they used to, they come forth with a lot more conviction: It feels good to obey. <—>