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Fighting fat with faith

April 29, 2008 ¦ Tara Maxwell

Pastor Steve Reynolds was once an addict — an ice cream addict. Now 100 pounds lighter, he helps motivate his congregation and beyond to shed weight by dedicating themselves spiritually and physically to God.

Reynolds, a 1980 Liberty University graduate, struggled with weight from an early age and was able to trim down by focusing on fitness in high school and college.

The Northern Virginia pastor, who hails from Lynchburg and attended E.C. Glass High School, played football for Liberty from 1976 until 1979 and graduated from Liberty Theological Seminary in 1982.

“I was very active and in good shape and I had made a resolution to stay fit, but I started a brand-new church and quit exercising,” Reynolds said. “I ended up being 340 pounds and diabetic.”

Throughout the years Reynolds said he announced from the pulpit of Capital Baptist Church in Annandale that he was going to lose weight, but he never followed through.

Eventually, by creating his own plan and seeking guidance from the Bible, Reynolds was able to lose more than 100 pounds and cure his diabetes through proper diet and exercise.

“The Bible has the word ‘body’ in it 179 times and I studied those passages,” he said. “I started implementing what I understood from the Scriptures and decided to do a sermon series to tell people about it.”

Reynolds developed “four keys to a better body,” or D.I.E.T., which stands for dedication, inspiration, eat and exercise, and team. He labeled his program Bod4God, after a passage from Colossians 1:16 that states man is made by God, for God.

Concerned over research touting Christians as the most overweight religious sector, with Baptists leading the pack, Reynolds said he wanted to see the church help people improve their health.

“I thought, ‘Why can’t the church help people to get healthy?’” Reynolds said. “We help people with divorce and grief. Why can’t we help them with health?”

Out of Capital Baptists’ 800-member congregation, 250 parishioners joined the “Losing to Live” weight loss competition and lost a total of 2,100 pounds.

“Somehow the Washington Post heard about it and I ended up on the front page,” Reynolds said. “The story got sent all over the world and I ended being on Fox News, CNN and CBN and got labeled the ‘anti-fat pastor.”’

Reynolds said he had no idea his sermons and weight loss challenges would draw national attention.

“Frankly, this is a God thing for me all the way; I would never have postured myself this way, never said I want to do this. I just feel like it’s a calling now, because this is such a miracle; He pushed me out there.”

Now Reynolds is taking his program beyond his congregation to other churches in hopes of spreading his message of hope for overweight Christians seeking healthier lifestyles.

What sets Bod4God apart from other weight loss programs, according to Reynolds, is the emphasis on spiritual needs and merging “belief and behavior.”

“We’re more than physical, we’re spiritual. A lot of the reasons we’re overweight or obese are needs in our lives. If we can grow ourselves spiritually in these areas it can help us be healthier,” he said.

Reynolds, who has been married for more than 25 years and has three children, said for him food has been a big temptation; he said he even prays at the grocery store for God to help him make wise food choices.

“I was digging my grave with a knife and fork,” he said. “The Bible says walk in the spirit and you won’t fulfill the lust of the flesh. The lust of the flesh for me wasn’t pornography or alcohol, it was food. The Bible says you have to walk in the spirit. That means you need to give God control of your life.”

When Reynolds began his weight loss journey, he could only walk for about 10 minutes before getting tired. He increased his activity slowly, over time. That is his philosophy toward setting weight loss goals.

“It’s all about crafting a Bod4God lifestyle, it’s not some short-term ‘I need to lose these 10 pounds quickly,’” Reynolds said. “It’s saying ‘What can I do for the rest of my life?’ and crafting your own deal.”

For more about Bod4God visit: www.Bod4God.org or call (703) 568-7484.