

Freedom in Obedience

As the oldest daughter in a Southern Baptist family, I learned early to be obedient, respectful, compliant—and to clean my plate. Daily my parents prepared fried chicken, fried pork chops, rice and gravy—foods well-known in the South.

My father's family members were large, jolly and overweight, so my emerging chubbiness was taken for granted and accepted. In the fourth grade I weighed 110 pounds.

I was always one of the last to run laps in P.E. or be selected for the softball team. I learned the shame of obesity at an early age.

My first attempt to lose weight was in the fifth grade, when I joined Weight Watchers. Though my mother prepared healthy meals, I stayed with it for only three days and begged her to let me eat country cooking again.

Throughout school, I focused on academic accomplishments as I navigated through life as an obese teenager. It wasn't until my senior year that I even tried to lose weight again. After months of starving and excessive nightly exercise, I managed to lose 42 pounds and began junior college at a svelte 128 pounds.

Two years later, I gained back 40 pounds, then I turned to a popular diet and quickly lost the weight. But for the next six years, my weight fluctuated wildly as I tried various diet plans.

My weight was excessive in 1988 when I needed to fit into my wedding dress. I did a stint with a national weight-loss center and lost about five pounds and \$200!

During the next 15 years, I had two sons by emergency C-section and never lost the weight. With a very stressful job,

a younger son with chronic illnesses and a husband in sales with a fluctuating income, I turned to food for comfort.

My excessive weight caused insomnia, and I didn't sleep a full eight hours for about four years. Being depressed, sleepy and stressed out during this time caused my weight to go to an all-time high of 276 pounds. I couldn't believe it!

After hearing the success stories of two friends who had undergone gastric bypass surgery, I began to consider it in January 2003. I vacillated between wanting to have it and feeling like a failure for needing to have it.

In February 2003, I went to a support group for gastric patients and was horrified to see such huge, obese women. I thought to myself: I'm not as overweight as these women. I'm not a loser; I don't need this surgery.

The Lord convicted me of my attitude. He reminded me that whether you're 25 pounds overweight or 200, you could have a problem with food.

I began to consider the surgery more seriously. I realized I needed help. Only I could make the decision for myself. I began to pray and seek God's direction.

In September 2003 I went to a bariatric doctor who explained the pros and cons of the procedure to me. It would be a major lifestyle change, and only the Lord could help me succeed.

I also learned about the risks: One in 250 people die from this surgery. Some people have extensive problems and never eat normally again.

It was a journey only God and I could undertake. I submitted all the paperwork to my insurance company, and their reply on December 31, 2003, included these words: "Gastric Restrictive Procedure, With Gastric Bypass for Morbid Obesity."

I could not believe I was classified as morbidly obese. I knew

I had a lifelong struggle with eating; now I knew I had a problem.

If I chose to have the surgery, I would join the ranks of the losers who had failed to lose weight alone. But I had to do it. Obesity was affecting my life in so many ways.

I wanted to be able to raise my two sons. Though I didn't have major health problems, I knew they were coming if I didn't get the excess weight off.

On February 4, 2004, I had gastric bypass surgery. It was the day my life changed, the day I realized that God's discipline proves His love.

People with eating problems don't realize that God wants to help us in this area of our lives, too. We don't realize what a barrier our weight can be in our walk with the Lord.

Searching to find balance and control in my eating has been a completely different way of life. It is so freeing and wonderful.

Now I have lost 109 pounds, and I have about 40 more to lose. God has improved my life in areas that I never dreamed of. I thank Him for His teaching, and I look forward to the years ahead with Him.