

By Michael W. Michelsen, Jr.

a weigh to lose

When a pastor with a ministry to those struggling with addictions was confronted about his own addiction to food, he called on God to help. Today, 250 pounds lighter, he shares his story of God's sufficient grace.

Pastor Robby Dawkins grew up with the desire to help others. But at the age of 8, while his family lived in Atlanta, Robby discovered a special calling to help those suffering from addictive behaviors. This began when his missionary parents took in a 17-year-old heroin addict.

"He was actually in my room when he was going through the withdrawals," Robby says. "I remember the scene. It was a terrible to watch."

Yet on the third day of the young man's battle with drugs, Robby entered his room to find the man standing, looking out the window. When Robby asked, "What's going on?" The young man explained, with tears streaming down his face, 'Jesus came in the room this morning, and He took it all away.' He said all the sickness, the addiction, the struggle was completely gone."

Unable to control his excitement in the wake of the event he had just witnessed, Robby went to his parents' room and recounted the changed life that he had just witnessed.



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The Addict

What Robby didn’t know at the time was that his ministry to those with addictions would eventually cause his own life to change.

Robby’s struggle with weight began when he was only a child. “I remember being in five-year-old kindergarten and being the heaviest one in the room,” he says. “When I was nine years old, my mother sat me down and told me that if I didn’t lose weight, I was going to die!”

His struggle continued, and by the time he was an adult, his weight eventually rose to the point where his size adversely affected his whole life, including his ability to use public places such as washrooms and airplane seats.

After a lifetime of overeating and lack of exercise, his weight had ballooned to more than 425 pounds. Although, for a time, Robby didn’t actually know his true weight since even his doctor’s office had no scales that could measure a patient as heavy as he was. In order to find out what he weighed, Robby says, “I went to the zoo, and outside where they have the elephants, there is a huge scale where people can stand on the scale and, with enough people on it, they can reach the weight of the elephants. That was the only scale that I could use to see my real weight. I was totally humiliated.”

Despite his weight, Robby continued to minister to those with addiction. By this time Robby, his wife, Angie, and their five boys had moved to Aurora, Il-

linois, a diverse and multi-ethnic suburb of Chicago. There he began to pastor a church and reach out to those in need.

“We really had a heart to help people who were going through a lot of struggles,” Robby explains, “and we wanted to see a coming together of the classes in the area to heal the brokenness in their lives.”

It was during this time that Robby had a sort of epiphany that would change his life. This came the night he and a small group of men from his church went to a bar to find people to whom they could minister.

“I saw this businessman,” Robby recalls. “I asked him if he had an addiction I could pray with him about. Finally, he turned, looked at me, and said, ‘You’re talking to me about my addiction, but you’re fat. You obviously have a serious addiction that you’re not addressing in your life.’”

This was the wake-up call that Robby needed. “I remember that really gripping me. I looked at him and I said, ‘You’re right.’ I couldn’t argue with it and I couldn’t put up any defense. I was really struggling.”

Pastor, Heal Thyself

Ironically, as embarrassed and humiliated as Robby was about his weight, his problem was an addiction—just like those he and his ministry team were working with others to overcome, except in his case it was with sugary foods and the pleasure he derived from eating.

“The trouble was, I had this huge need, but I never had asked God to help me with it,” he explains. “Since God created the universe, I knew He had the power to help me, but what I didn’t real-



ize at the time was that He was offering me the opportunity to step out in faith and respond to what He was offering.”

Robby’s friends and family realized the struggle he was having with his weight seemed to him to be insurmountable, but after a visit to his doctor, he emerged more determined than ever to reach his goal weight—250 pounds—in fewer than 14 months.

“The first thing that I realized was that I had to get in control of what I was eating,” says Robby, who had initially gone

to the doctor to explore gastric bypass surgery and stomach stapling. However, what he learned was that the surgery cost thousands of dollars, and once it was done, he would still be very limited on what he could eat—a boiled egg or perhaps nine grapes.

Armed with this knowledge, Robby told his doctor, “If I’m just paying you \$10,000 to tell me I can only eat this much, why not just address that?”

One of the first important changes he made wasn’t changing what he ate

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but taking control of the way he was thinking.

“I had seen my parents and my sisters go on diets, hit their goals, and then think, Now I can eat normally.”

Having seen this didn’t work, Robby knew he would have to change his eating forever. He realized that his weight was going to kill him if he didn’t do this. He was already having chest pains, so he told himself, “This has to be my life.”

One Step at a Time

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For Robby, this was a drastic change—most difficult was the fact that there wasn’t access to sweets. And just like the addicts

he was used to working with, he had terrible cravings—especially for sugar.

“I had flashbacks on conversations and recalled praying with people about their addictions. I began to realize I’m going through the same thing that they were going through.”

During this time, he began thinking of Paul and all the physical abuse he had endured, and how had God spoke to him, saying, “My grace is sufficient for you.”

“Every day, I would pray and say, ‘Lord, take this away from me. I know that you’re dealing with the character in my life, and this is bigger than my comfort.’”

After this, things began to change. “I was really driven,” Robby recalls. “I stayed away from sugar completely, and naturally I started to lose weight. In fact, I lost that first 80 pounds in just a few months. Although I was not exercising at first, the

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weight started coming off. I started functioning better and had more energy. Then I started to exercise.”

At first, Robby could only do one push-up and found he was sweating profusely even after that. Today, however, he does about 75 push-ups twice a day, in addition to around 100 sit-ups. He has also implemented weight training to help him tone up after losing so much weight.

Unlike many reformed couch potatoes who quickly learn to like exercise, Robby admits that he hates it. What he learned to love, however, is discipline. In fact, Robby started implementing practical disciplines that helped him maintain a healthy lifestyle.

His diet, too, has also radically changed. “When I first started, I had much more protein in my diet. And I worked really hard at breaking the sugar addiction. I had no sugar for months and months. I didn’t eat any fruit, and then I slowly began to work in melons and things like that. But, I really had to get in control of the sugar addiction.”

Now, three years later, Robby has developed a different eating plan. “I typically have a salad in the morning. It’s my own version of coleslaw—a shredded cabbage with nuts and a few raisins to sweeten it.”

Lunch is usually another type of a salad with a lot of raw vegetables. For dinner, Robby has protein and vegetables. He also never eats past 6 p.m.

“A lot of diets give you a snack in the evening, but for me, this gets back to the discipline issue. I really feel I need to do something sacrificial. I say, ‘I’m not going to go past this point.’ I just feel better when I do that.”

... And a Funny Thing Happened

In addition to the physical benefits of his increasingly healthy and fit body, Robby has enjoyed a benefit he had not initially considered when he began: a strengthened relationship with the Lord.



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“As the weight came off my body, I began to realize more and more that it wasn’t me who was accomplishing this significant goal on my own,” Robby confesses. “It was a joint effort between me and the Lord.”

Having tried and failed diets many times and finally finding success, Robby offers important advice to those who are also struggling with their weight. “Stay the course,” he advises. “Since I’ve become a pastor, I’ve sinned, but I don’t quit. The whole of the Old Testament is

about failures who didn’t quit. God can use a failure, but a quitter is someone He can’t use.”

Robby readily admits that his struggles with his weight offer the side benefit of helping others in similar situations. “Sitting down with people and praying with them and then talking about their addictions, I began to realize that some of their problems were the same things I am going through. We can succeed because of the grace of God, because His grace is sufficient.”