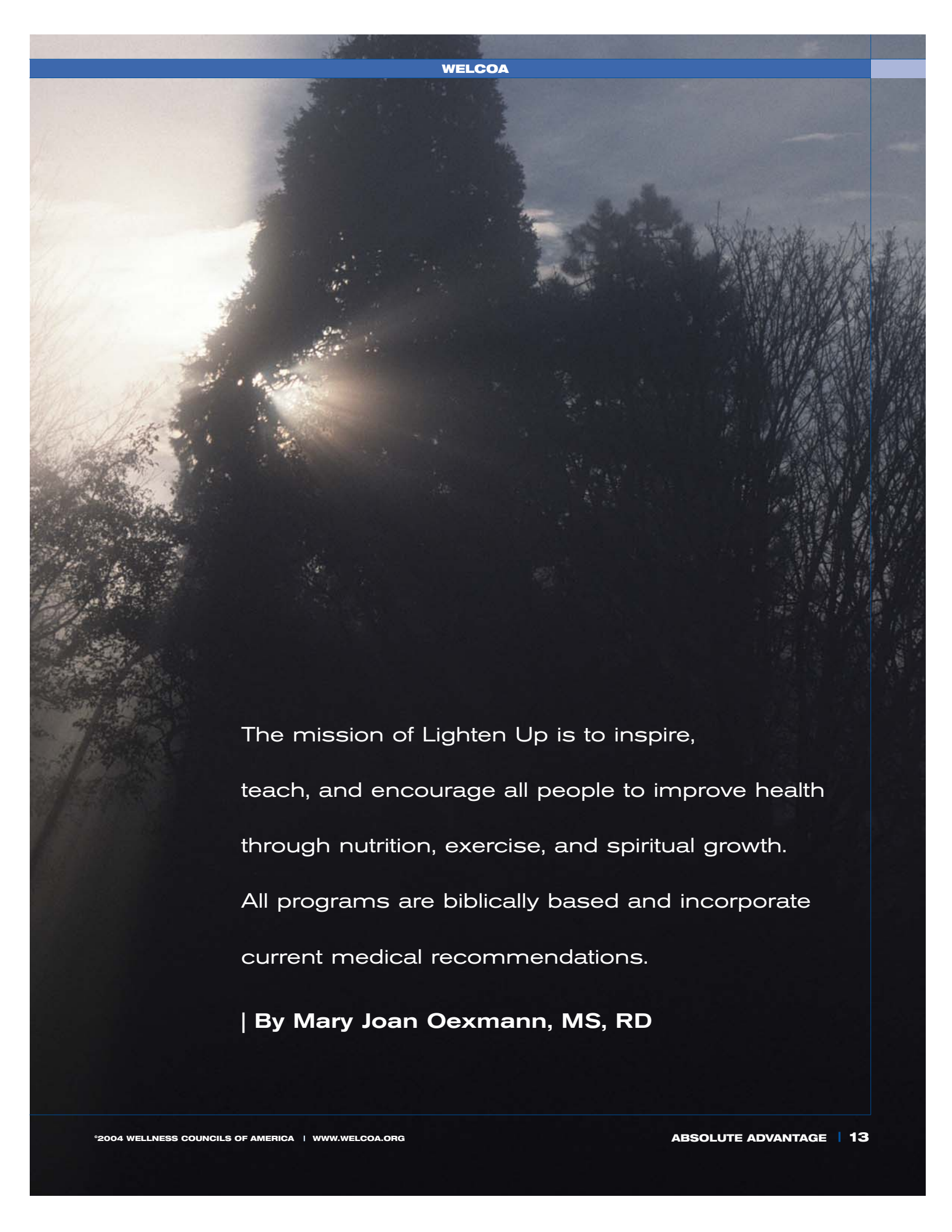




Seeing
The Light

A photograph of sunlight filtering through the branches of trees, creating a bright, hazy glow. The sun is positioned behind a large, dark evergreen tree in the center-left, with rays of light spreading out. Other trees, including bare deciduous trees, are visible in the background against a cloudy sky.

The mission of Lighten Up is to inspire, teach, and encourage all people to improve health through nutrition, exercise, and spiritual growth. All programs are biblically based and incorporate current medical recommendations.

| By Mary Joan Oexmann, MS, RD

LighTen Up is a 10-week health education program started in Charleston, South Carolina in 1998 with funding from the Healthy South Carolina Initiative at the Medical University of South Carolina. The goal was to provide healthcare to the underserved in an attempt to close the racial and economic gap.

Today, 65 percent of all American adults are either overweight or obese. African American women have the highest rates at 85 percent. Extending healthcare to church members is a logical way to reach those in need. This is particularly true in the South where the church is the center of communities.

LighTen Up began as a research driven protocol. A health check was conducted at baseline, after the 10-week program, and one year later to evaluate both short-term and long-term safety and effectiveness. The health check as described below is a powerful way to identify those at greatest cardiovascular risk. The average age of LighTen Up participants is 54 years; 84 percent are women and 54 percent are African American. At baseline, only 16

percent are of normal weight, 30 percent are overweight, and 54 percent are obese. Further at baseline, 55 percent have high blood pressure, 49 percent have high blood cholesterol and 18 percent have diabetes. Our research demonstrates we are reaching a high-risk group and decreasing risk for stroke by 30 percent through reduction in weight, blood pressure, and blood lipids. Today, LighTen Up is a service model, which can be conducted using the program guide, video, leadership training, and/or consultation.

We are willing to match your resources and needs. I encourage you to simply roll up your sleeves and begin. It demonstrates the value you place on your health and the health of your family, friends, employees, and community. It is important. Let's get started!

The Health Check

The LighTen Up health check includes measurements of height, weight, body mass index, body fat, blood pressure, and fasting blood measurements for triglycerides, total cholesterol, HDL, LDL, VLDL, and glucose. Participants sign a

health screening release form, which assures them that the information is confidential and that the screening is not a substitute for a full medical exam. Through the health check, over 100 people with high blood pressure and 60 people with diabetes, discovered for the first time that they do indeed have these risk factors. This new knowledge offers participants a glimpse into the future.

Body Mass Index (BMI)

The measuring of BMI is also an important aspect of the LighTen Up program. A BMI chart is shown below in *Figure 1*. Here's how it works. First, find your height on the left. Then move across the row to match the number closest to your weight in pounds. Your BMI is the number at the top. An appropriate BMI is in the range of 20 to 25. Cross the 25 mark and you are overweight. Cross the 30 mark and you are obese. Morbid obesity begins with a BMI of 40. Weight is not just about how you look. Overweight? Your risk for diabetes just went up four fold. Obese? Your risk for diabetes just went up ten fold. The higher your BMI, the greater your risk.

Figure 1

Body Mass Index (BMI)																			
In	Normal (20-24.9)					Overweight (25-29.9)					Obese (more than 30)					Extreme			
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	40	45	
4'10"	96	100	105	110	115	119	124	129	134	138	143	148	153	158	163	167	191	215	
4'11"	99	104	109	114	119	124	128	133	138	143	148	154	158	163	168	173	198	223	
5'0"	102	107	112	118	123	128	133	138	143	148	153	159	164	169	174	179	205	230	
5'1"	106	111	116	122	127	132	137	143	148	153	158	164	169	175	180	185	212	238	
5'2"	109	115	120	126	131	136	142	147	153	158	164	170	175	180	186	191	219	246	
5'3"	113	118	124	130	135	141	146	152	158	163	169	175	181	186	192	198	226	254	
5'4"	116	122	128	134	140	145	151	157	163	169	174	181	186	192	198	204	233	262	
5'5"	120	126	132	138	144	150	156	162	168	174	180	186	192	198	204	210	240	270	
5'6"	124	130	136	142	148	155	161	167	173	179	186	192	198	204	211	217	248	279	
5'7"	127	134	140	146	153	159	166	172	178	185	191	198	204	211	217	223	255	287	
5'8"	131	138	144	151	158	164	171	177	184	190	197	204	210	217	224	230	263	296	
5'9"	135	142	149	155	162	169	176	182	189	196	203	210	217	223	230	237	271	305	
5'10"	139	146	153	160	167	174	181	188	195	202	207	216	223	230	237	244	279	314	
5'11"	143	150	157	165	172	179	186	193	200	208	215	222	229	237	244	251	287	323	
6'0"	147	154	162	169	177	184	191	199	206	213	221	229	236	243	251	258	295	332	
6'1"	151	159	166	174	182	189	197	204	212	219	227	235	243	250	258	265	303	341	
6'2"	155	163	171	179	186	194	202	210	218	225	233	241	249	257	265	273	312	351	
6'3"	160	168	176	184	192	200	208	216	224	232	240	248	256	264	272	280	320	360	
6'4"	164	172	180	189	197	205	213	221	230	238	246	255	263	271	279	287	328	369	
	Risk for Diabetes					4x					10x					20x			

Because of increasing obesity rates, it is projected that one of three children born today will have diabetes. If you have diabetes, your healthcare costs are approximately five times higher than people without diabetes.

Body Fat

Measuring body fat is another part of the Lighten Up program. It can be easily measured using the Omron Body Logic body fat analyzer. A very small current goes from hand to hand to provide results within seconds based on the individual's height, weight, gender, and age. Recommendations are 12 to 20 percent body fat for men and 18 to 28 percent for women. The instrument costs about \$100. While it may not match the gold standard of body fat by

underwater weighing, it is ideal for the community setting and allows people to track their progress. It is a starting point!

Blood Pressure

High blood pressure (hypertension) is called the "silent killer" because the first symptom may be a heart attack. The first heart attack kills one out of three people. The systolic blood pressure (upper number) is the force when your heart beats while the diastolic blood pressure (lower number) is the force when your heart relaxes between beats. The lower the numbers, the better (see *Figure 2*). The Joint National Committee of Prevention, Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Pressure established the criteria shown in *Figure 2* in 2003. The

committee encourages all of us to consume less salt, increase exercise, and decrease our weight to reduce the serious consequences of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and kidney disease.

Triglycerides, Cholesterol, HDL, LDL, VLDL, and Glucose

It is important to be fasting (no eating for 10 hours prior to your appointment) when you arrive for your health check appointment to get the most accurate results possible. This test is relatively easy and inexpensive to do in a community or work setting. I use the Cholestech LDX system. After the purchase of equipment, each test cassette costs about \$10. As with blood pressure, recommendations are routinely evaluated. When I first began

"Overweight? Your risk for diabetes just went up four fold. Obese? Your risk for diabetes just went up ten fold. The higher your BMI, the greater your risk... If you have diabetes, your healthcare costs are approximately five times higher than people without diabetes."

Figure 2

Blood Pressure Chart		
BP Classification	Systolic BP	Diastolic BP
Normal	Less than 120	Less than 80
Prehypertension	120 - 139	80 - 89
Stage I Hypertension	140 - 159	90 - 99
Stage II Hypertension	More than 159	More than 99

Figure 3

Triglycerides, Cholesterol, HDL, LDL, VLDL, and Glucose		
Measurement	Normal	Example
Triglycerides	Less than 150 mg/dl	100 mg/dl
Cholesterol	100 - 200 mg/dl	160 mg/dl
HDL high density lipoprotein	More than 60 mg/dl	60 mg/dl
LDL low density lipoprotein	Less than 100 mg/dl	80 mg/dl
VLDL very low density lipoprotein	Less than 40 mg/dl	20 mg/dl
Cholesterol/HDL Ratio	Less than 3.0	2.7
Glucose	Fasting 65-110 mg/dl	100 mg/dl

Relationships	Example
VLDL = Triglycerides divided by 5	100/5 = 20 mg/dl VLDL
Total Cholesterol = HDL + LDL + VLDL	160 = 60 + 80 + 20
Cholesterol/HDL Ratio	160 / 60 = 2.7

working as a nutritionist, normal cholesterol was up to 300 mg/dl. Today, the recommended range is 100 to 200 mg/dl (see *Figure 3*). A fasting blood sugar of 126 mg/dl is diagnostic of diabetes.

Metabolic Syndrome

If you answer, “yes” to any three of the risk factors shown in *Figure 4*, you’ve got it! You can significantly reduce your risk for cardiovascular disease through lifestyle change.

You may not be able to conduct a complete health check; but everyone can afford to purchase a scale to measure weight. Metabolic syndrome can be predicted from body mass index. For women, risk for metabolic syndrome is six percent for normal weight, 28 percent for overweight, and 50 percent for obese. For men, risk for metabolic syndrome is five percent for normal weight, 22 percent for overweight, and 60 percent for obese. Do you have metabolic syndrome? Lighten Up will help you get the facts!

Is There Anything New Under The Sun?

In the March 1953 issue of the *National Geographic*, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company shared the story of two fat men. “One acted unwisely...he always ate too much; he tried to lose weight quickly through strenuous exercise, self-prescribed drugs, and other short-cuts to weight reduction. One reduced sensibly... he consulted his doctor, and followed a properly balanced diet to bring his weight down gradually, and keep it at a desirable level.” The article went on further and described the weight problem fifty years ago. “Overweight is our country’s number one health problem today.” It estimated that there were about 25 million Ameri-

cans who were burdened by excess pounds. In 2003, it is estimated that 120 million Americans are either overweight or obese. The solution is the same: Eat less and exercise more.

Through the health check, I have personally identified hundreds of people who have high blood pressure and/or diabetes and thousands of people who are either overweight or obese. Many had “no idea.” Armed with truth, people begin to con-

sider the benefits of change. If your risk is low, that’s great. You are part of the minority and have a responsibility to set an example and to encourage others. If your risk is high, form a specific plan, which includes people who will support you by sharing your belief that you can indeed change your lifestyle (see *Figure 5*). This is critical for your long-term success. The church is ideal for creating a safe place where healing can begin.



Mary Joan Oexmann demonstrates the Omron Body Logic Body Fat Analyzer, which helps determine percent body fat and BMI.

Figure 5

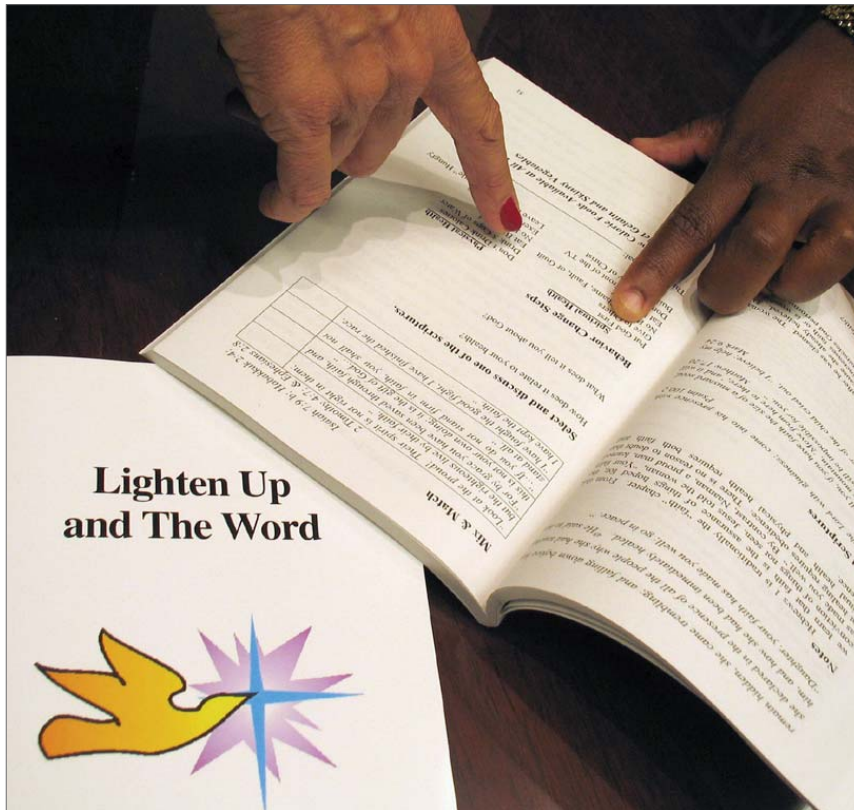
Multiple Strategies To Lifestyle Change

- Put God first
- Say grace before meals
- Stop eating in front of the TV
- Leave the table a little hungry
- Stop drinking calories
- Drink plenty of water
- Eat small frequent meals
- Eat more fruits and vegetables
- Exercise
- Love one another!

Figure 4

Metabolic Syndrome Questions			
Risk Factors	Men	Women	Yes/No*
Blood Pressure	More than 130/85	More than 130/85	
Triglycerides	More than 150	More than 150	
Fasting Blood Sugar	More than 110	More than 110	
HDL good cholesterol	Below 40	Below 50	
Waist	More than 40 inches	More than 35 inches	

Source: National Heart Lung and Blood Institute **Answer Yes To Three Or More Risk Factors*



“Lighten Up And The Word” is the primary text from which Mary Joan Oexmann delivers the Lighten Up program to numerous faith-based groups.

Figure 6

Lighten Up And The Word Program Guide			
Week	Bible Study	Sour Grapes	Health Information*
1	Fruits	Barriers	The Health Check
2	Love	Indifference	The Behavior Change Checklist
3	Knowledge	Ignorance	Reading Food Labels
4	Peace	Chaos	Carbohydrate Counting
5	Faith	Doubt	Exercise
6	Kindness	Selfishness	Food Composition
7	Joy	Sorrow	Mindful Eating
8	Self-control	Temptation	Potato Rules Of Thumb
9	Godliness	Materialism	All Things Are Not Equal

*The Lighten Up video (8-12 minutes each week) compliments the program guide.

This program guide to “Lighten Up And The Word” outlines the nine-week program designed to connect spirituality with daily challenges of life..


Spiritual Growth

The Lighten Up program is based on the spiritual fruits of love, knowledge, peace, faith, kindness, joy, self-control and Godliness. In contrast to the spiritual fruits, our lives are filled with the sour grapes of indifference, ignorance, chaos, doubt, selfishness, sorrow, temptation, and materialism. Sour grapes are the source of many of our excuses for not exercising and eating sensibly because it takes more energy to live in chaos than to live a disciplined life. Part of the solution is to figure out what is important.

Life is filled with paradox. Eating less and exercising seems so easy but is so hard. Likewise, it is weakness, not strength, which binds us together. Lighten Up participants discover strength or support from being bound to others who share their weakness. The group dynamic supplies the power to embrace health information from the framework of love. Guilt is not an essential nutrient.

Throughout all time, people have searched for the key to eternity. This quest can lead to potions which promise to make you into that person you wanted to be 30 years ago. Guess what? The latest “fountain of youth” doesn’t work! Idolizing stuff is just a temporary fix for the emptiness of living without a purpose. Eternity begins with living life with a purpose. Spiritual growth is the key to fulfilling your God given talents. From this, your legacy is created. Healing begins as people create a safe place to share time and speak the truth. Based on love and respect for each other, people begin to replace despair with hope.

Through our relationship with God, we find the grace we are so desperately seeking. We find forgiveness for the way we mistreat our bodies and each other. Blame, shame, and guilt are replaced with hope. We can be reconciled with God, others, and ourselves. Our spirit is filled by the peace, which goes beyond our understanding. It’s called transformation. It takes energy and we must face our fears, but the benefit is wholeness.★



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