

“Diet For the Soul”

Let's think about food today! We Americans probably live in one of the most diet conscious societies that ever existed!

The late Andy Rooney once said that the 2 biggest sellers in any bookstore are cookbooks and diet books. Cookbooks tell you how to prepare the food, and diet books tell you how not to eat any of it!

A California scientist has computed that the average human being eats 16 times his or her own weight in an average year, while a horse eats only 8 times its weight. This seems to prove that if you want to lose weight, you should eat like a horse!

I heard a Christian comedian joke about his own serious health issues, and his need to lose weight. He reported that his doctor told him he would have to give up those intimate dinners for 2 unless someone else is with him.

We are very concerned today, aren't we, with what we eat, and how much we eat. One survey indicated that 41% of men and 55% of women consider themselves overweight. Many health leaders regard obesity as a major health problem in the U.S., that many people - including many children - are overweight.

All sorts of diets are recommended: the Dash Diet, Keto Diet, Mediterranean Diet, Paleo Diet, Flexitarian Diet, Vegetarian Diet, MIND Diet, TLC Diet. *The Weigh Down Diet* was hot for a while. This claims to be a *spiritual approach* to losing weight. I knew someone on the Atkins diet – where a person eats meats (including bacon), most cheese, and avoid fruits, bread, grains, starchy vegetables and skim milk. But some critics warn that this diet will kill you!

There are all sorts of pills and injections you can take to reduce your weight.

I came across something called “The Stress Diet”. It goes like this:

Breakfast – ½ grapefruit, slice whole wheat toast, 8 oz. skim milk

Lunch – 4 oz. lean broiled chicken breast, 1 cup steamed zucchini, 1 Oreo cookie,
herb tea

Mid-afternoon snack- rest of package of Oreos, 1 quart Rocky Road ice cream,
1 jar hot fudge

Supper – 2 loaves garlic bread, large pepperoni & mushroom pizza with double
cheese, 2 quarts Coke or Pepsi, 3 Milky Way bars, entire Sara Lee
pound cake

I guess, according to this diet, as you go longer through the day and your stress level rises, you change the kinds of things you eat!

Our nation is obsessed with food...not only dieting, but cooking and preparing food. As you know, we have TV channels just devoted to cooking.

Now, good nutrition, eating the right foods, *is important*. Our body is a temple or dwelling place of the Holy Spirit if we're a believer. It's good that we take care of it. But.....*what about feeding our souls? What about nourishing the spirit side of our nature?*

Let's look at some words of Jesus today that address this matter. John 6:35: "Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'" "I am the bread of life". Earlier in John 6 it tells how Jesus fed over 5,000 people with 5 loaves of bread and 2 small fish. The crowd kept following Jesus around, and Jesus says to them: You're drawn to me, not by My teaching and mighty deeds, but because you got free food! (John 6:26). Then Jesus says to them, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life" (John 6:27). Physical food can satisfy our physical hunger, but there is another kind of hunger in us.

We human beings are more than just *physical, biological, animal* creatures. There is a *spiritual* part of us, created for God, that transcends the physical and material realm. In the oft-quoted words of St. Augustine, "Thou hast created us for thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in thee." There is a part of us that is empty and unsatisfied until we have a relationship with our Creator.

Jesus said, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life" (John 6:27). We all need food. If we're hungry, and eat a meal, it can satisfy us...for a while. But how long does a meal last? For some kids, they have a meal, and half an hour later they're back in the kitchen for a snack. Some grownups aren't much better! I guess this is one reason why I'm not big on eating at expensive restaurants. You pay big bucks for dinner, but by the time I'm home, I'm hungry. I'd rather spend money on something that lasts a little longer!

Lots of things in life will satisfy us.....for a while. We get some new clothes. We love it! But how long before they're out of style, or the newness wears off? We buy a new car. We may keep it all clean and shiny. Maybe we just like to look at it. I love the new car smell! But in a few months, the newness has worn off. And it's just another car. Or we think having a relationship with this person will satisfy us – and it may, to a certain extent. But no one is perfect, and no one can meet all our needs.

The deeper hunger in the human spirit can't be satisfied with temporal or material things – yet we try, don't we! In one of the comic strips, Broomhilda is sitting on the couch watching TV, and she says to her friend, "We get 400 channels. I'm no happier than the old days when we only got 200! As her friend is walking away, he says, "Something is wrong." "Darn right," she replies. "Maybe if we had 600 channels things would be better!"

Isn't that descriptive of life today? What does it take to satisfy us? We get 250 channels on TV and complain, "There's nothing good on TV tonight!" We have this idea that we will be satisfied and contented if we just have more money, more friends, a better job, better health, a bigger house, a nicer car, etc., etc. But does all of this satisfy...in the deeper part of our being? Long ago the prophet Isaiah asked people of his time, "Why do you spend your money for that

which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? (Isaiah 55:2). Jesus said, “Don’t work for the food that perishes.” Then He went on to make this great claim about Himself: “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35).

When Jesus first spoke these words to the multitude (Jews), they were offended. How can you claim to be the bread of life, bread from heaven? We know your dad, Joseph! We know your mother, Mary. You’re just one of us! Jesus further emphasizes the Truth about Himself: “I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:48-51). Jesus is making a bold claim. I can give you something that will satisfy you forever. You’ll never be hungry again!

When Jesus said, “I am the *bread* of life”, this meant something different to those who first heard His words than it does to us today. For many of us, bread isn’t that important. We may not even serve bread at our meals. But for those in Jesus’ time, bread was a staple. It was often the only food a person would get in a day! So, it’s like Jesus is saying, “I am the *food* of life!” We can live without bread; we can’t live without *food*! Jesus says I will give you something that will satisfy your soul, and sustain your life forever!

Often, when a person first comes to faith in Christ, he or she may say something like this: “I’ve found meaning and purpose in life that I never had before.” “I’ve found an inner peace and contentment that I’ve been missing.” I like how someone has described it:

“This Bread (Jesus) is freedom from the distress of life. It is sustenance in the wilderness of life. It is grace in the pain of life. It is God’s presence in the loneliness of life.

“This Bread is rest in the demands of life. It is peace in the disruptions of life. It is community in the isolation of life. It is security in the uncertainty of life. It is bread that nourishes the soul. It is the Bread of life.

“The only diet that can feed our starving spirits and fill our empty insides is a diet consisting souly of the Bread of life, ‘the food that endures for eternal life.’”

Let’s pause for a moment, and consider these questions. How much do we hunger for Christ? Is having a close relationship with Him the driving force of our life? Or, are we distracted by the “stuff” of the world? The things we’re spending our time on...the stuff that we are seeking or accumulating – how much is that satisfying us? How long will it last? There’s *nourishing food* for our deepest self (our soul). There’s something (rather Someone) who will satisfy forever. You know who it is, don’t you? It’s *Jesus*!

How do we get this Bread of life? Well.....we eat it!

(Take bread, hold it). We can talk about this bread. We can discuss its texture, describe its shape, analyze its ingredients. We can even take a tour of the bakery where it's made. We can look at someone else eating it, or listen to them describing how good it tastes.

Many people are like that with Jesus. They can talk about Him. Discuss His life and teachings – who He was, what He claimed. They can listen to other people talk about Him and describe how He has affected their lives. They can visit places where people talk about Him the most – churches! But in all of that, they *don't actually eat the Bread of life!* But if we're hungry, if we're starving, the only way bread will do us any good is if we *eat it!*

Jesus said something startling to the crowd described in John 6: "So Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day, for my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them'" (John 6:53-56). Many scholars think the gospel writer John is using symbolism here for communion. I think He is. But Jesus is saying something more – you have to take Me inside, into your innermost self, and allow Me to become part of you! See, we go to church, be a good person, believe certain things about Jesus, but never take Him as bread and eat of Him.

In one church I served I conducted the funeral of a devoted Christian man who was the Lay Leader of that congregation for many years. Late in life he felt called to be a pastor, and was appointed to a small church. One of his former pastors spoke at his funeral. He mentioned how this man way back was the Lay Leader of the church, but he didn't really know Jesus. It was only when he knelt at the altar and surrendered himself completely to Christ that the Lord became part of everything this man did. He ate the Bread!

You and I can have food for our soul today if we will surrender ourselves and our will entirely to Christ and ask Him to live in us.

Shortly before his death, tennis star Arthur Ashe wrote these words to his daughter Camera: "Camera, have faith in God. Do not be tempted whether by pleasures and material possessions, or by the claims of science and smart thinkers, into believing that religion is obsolete, that the worship of God is somehow beneath you. Spiritual nourishment is as important as physical nourishment and intellectual nourishment."

Yes it is, Camera. Yes it is!

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