

The Creator God of the Bible has provided an awesome array of provisions for our tables. He invites our participation. That is why He gave the Management Mandate (Genesis 1:28-30). The Bible is not a cookbook. There is one recipe (not particularly recommended for gourmet dining) and some food lists that might suggest menus. Writing recipes, composing menus, growing and preparing food is our responsibility. Let's accept the challenge with joy as we are invited to become "co-creators" working in the "image" of the One and only Creator God.

Is food a matter of spiritual concern? Max Lucado thinks so:

God is not a mountain guru only involved in the mystical and spiritual. The same hand that guides your soul gives food to your body. . . In the school of life, God is both the teacher and the cook. He provides fire for the head and food for the stomach. Your eternal salvation and your evening meal come from the same hand.⁵

An Introduction to Whole Foods Cooking by Rich & Sue Gregg © 2009 141 pages. Includes "Food in the Bible"--two pages of Scripture references on different food categories, hospitality, home management and teaching children, the purpose of food, food cost, feeding the hungry, unworthy meals, miracle meals, meals with Jesus and the water of life. Provides the "Truth Test about Food," with chart on "A Creator-Redeemer Based World View" of food. The "Food to Faith" section introduces our six Bible studies in the gospels of John and Luke for individual and group use, and a list of 21 "Noteworthy Meals," including the three biblical annual festivals for further study. Explains Jesus as the "Main Menu," "Praying Authentically at the Table," "Inviting Jesus to the Table," and "Bringing" song, beauty, and books to the table. Shares how "Rima-The Life Giver" serves physical and spiritual food in Gaza, combining the Martha work ethic with a Mary heart for God. The accompanying PowerPoint CD includes "Food for Discussion Questions," taking a more indepth look into many Scriptures concerning food.

¹*Transforming Children Into Spiritual Champions* by George Barna. Regal Books, © 2003, chapter 2, "The Spiritual Health of Our Children."

²Barna, Chapter 4, "What Kids Need." p. 53

³Barna, Chapter 1, "The State of American Children," p. 20

⁴Here is the cause and effect logic: Happy hearts caused by plenty of food, plenty of food caused by rain, rain caused by the cause beyond all causes, the "theos" God. Credit for this insight goes to Don Richardson author of *Peace Child* and *Eternity in Their Hearts*.

⁵*The Great House of God* by Max Lucado, (Word Publishing, ©1997, p. 97)

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Food--A Spiritual Matter?

Religious pollster George Barna asks the question "Are All of Our Decisions Spiritually Based?" He writes:

Many Americans believe it is an intellectual stretch to suggest that every choice we make is spiritual at its foundation. For instance, some might wonder how something as commonplace and seemingly unspiritual as the entrée they choose at dinner affects their spiritual lives. They fail to see that the content of the food ordered affects their ability to fulfill God's calling and purposes for their lives. Additionally, the entrée will cost them money. The expense of the meal affects the amount of money they will have to apply toward the priorities they have established in their lives, whether that entails spending in ways that maximize their personal comfort, donating funds to meet the needs of the poor or any of the thousands of other ways the money could be spent. In fact, the choice of whether to eat in a restaurant or at home, as well as the selection of which restaurant to patronize, is a reflection of their sense of responsibility to God, family, community and culture.¹

One can take Barna's reasoning further. Poor food choices may lead to poor health. Poor health means more doctor bills, more prescription costs and more hospital costs--money diverted from building God's kingdom and serving others.

Barna continues:

The one thing I correctly understood is that human development is a complex mixture of growth in five core areas: the moral, spiritual, physical, emotional and intellectual dimensions of life. What I did not recognize is that the basis of each of these areas is one's spiritual foundation.²

He cites a discouraging statistic:

While government agencies posit that only 25% of children ages two to five have a consistently healthy diet, that already low percentage shrinks to just 6% among teenagers.³

Is it possible to think "Christianly" about diet, not merely culturally? If so one needs a spiritual foundation upon which to base one's reasoning and choices. We see one example of a biblical view in the Apostle Paul's defense to the Lyconians in Acts 14:17 using cause and effect logic to demonstrate that food and the satiating pleasure of a full stomach ultimately connect to a Creator who really cares about humankind.⁴

To think “Christianly” we need to know what the Bible says about food and apply that knowledge. When we set diet (or any other aspect of our lives) outside the truth of God’s Word, we fall prey to fads and fashions the same as anyone else--without any spiritually authoritative base for evaluating what’s good and what’s not.

Here is a survey of statements and incidents from the Bible to consider in building a framework to think “Christianly” about food.

- God caused hunger and gave food to teach that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4
- All seed-bearing plants and trees that have fruit with seed are good for food and given by God to man. Genesis 1:29.
- Dairy, meat and fish were given by God to man for food. Genesis 9:3; Deut. 32:13-14
- Water is essential. Exodus 17:1-3
- Grains are a blessing from God. Psalm 65:9
- Wine (vineyards) was a blessing from God, but not to be over indulged. Ps. 104:14; Jn. 2:7-10; Eph 5:18
- The promised land was described as a land flowing with milk and honey. Numbers 14:7-8
- Honey was a good food, but not to be overindulged. Proverbs 24:13; 25:16, 27
- Don’t gorge on meat or wine. Gluttony (eating more than you need) is a sin. Proverbs 23:20-21; 28:7
- For Israel, certain animal foods were declared unclean and unfit for food. Leviticus 11
- God commanded the Israelites not to eat the fat or blood of sacrificial animals. The Jerusalem Council wrote to the Gentile believers not to eat blood. Leviticus 3:17; Acts 15:20
- In Israel, the mainstay of the levitical priesthood’s diet was the sacrificial meat, grain offerings and bread. Leviticus 2:10; 7:31; Exodus 29:32
- A dry crust of bread or a dish of vegetables with love is better than meat with strife. Proverbs 17:1; 15:17
- Food events celebrated God’s glory and provisions and brought people together in social relationships. Ex 23:13-19; Leviticus 23
- Olive oil, fine flour (whole grain) and water were used abundantly and in the sacrificial system. Numbers 28:4-5
- Hebrew women prepared yeast doughs with wild yeasts from the air (sourdough). Genesis 18:6
- Unleavened bread played a prominent role in Israel. Ex 13:3-10
- In the wilderness the Israelites were sustained for 40 years on a grain-based food--manna, the bread of angels. Deuteronomy 8:3-4
- The Israelites’ craved meat more than their freedom from Egyptian

slavery. That angered God. He stuffed them with quail and struck them with a plague. Nu. 11:4-6, 18-20, 31-34

- For seven years in Egypt the people were sustained on stores of grain, saving the Hebrews (Jacob’s family) from starvation. Grain for food before livestock. Genesis 47:16; 41:49; 45:23; 50:19-21
- Elijah was sustained on meat and bread during prolonged drought. 1 Kings 17:1-16
- Jesus declared all foods religiously “clean” --eating or not eating food is not essential to a relationship with God. Mark 7:18-19
- Jesus fed people barley loaves and fish. John 6
- Jesus cooked and ate fish and bread. John 6; John 21
- Jesus ate lamb, unleavened bread and drank wine, at least at Passover feasts. John 26:17-30
- The management of food is a human responsibility. Genesis 1:28
- “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, and the glory of kings to find it out.” Proverbs 25:2 Management includes finding out the value of food through observation and research in order to maximize its value. Gen. 1:28; Prov. 25:2; Ex. 15:26
- All things are permissible, but not all things are beneficial. This calls for making wise food choices. You might be able to eat what others can’t or not what they can. Wisdom is needed more than ever because of the drastic alteration of the nutrient value of foods through processing. Cor. 6:12-13; 10:23
- Daniel and his friends thrived on a short term vegetarian diet and were rewarded by God with strength and wisdom. Daniel 1:8-20
- Eggs are good. Luke 11:11-13 Salt is good. Matthew 5:13
- Paul used food on the table as evidence of God’s existence, love and power. Acts 14:17
- Older women are to teach younger women how to love their husbands and children and be busy at home, practicing hospitality. This includes caring for what goes into their bodies, and not keeping the good stuff to themselves, but sharing it. Titus 2:3-5
- God provided for the care of the poor. Share your wealth with the poor: the widows, the orphans, the hungry, the lost and the missionary. Exodus 23:11; Deut. 10:18-19
- Don’t judge how other people eat, but in wisdom share what you’ve learned when they ask. Romans 14
- Neither meat eating or not meat eating by faith is wrong. Romans 14. Whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do all to the glory of God. 1 Cor. 10:31
- Don’t forbid any real foods (i.e. don’t make a law of this for everyone). 1 Timothy 4:1-5
- Jesus used bread to illustrate that He is the bread of life--eat of him and not die. John 6. God’s divine nature is seen in the food he has created. Romans 1:20