



LUTHERAN
CHURCH OF **HOPE**

By Pastor Merv Thompson

Pastor's Update

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"Grace and Peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Sojourners Magazine had an article this past month on the subject of food, what we eat and how we get it. They don't use this terminology but what the article is trying to articulate is truly "a theology of food." What does God say about food, what is a Christian approach to diet? With the levels of obesity reaching alarming levels, the question becomes more urgent. As I reach for my peanuts and popcorn, I continue to realize how self-destructive some of my own eating habits tend to be.

The Bible has more to say about food than we might think. For instance, in the famous Romans 12 chapter we are told unequivocally to "*present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.*" That certainly qualifies as a theological statement which can be directed at food. Later in I Corinthians 3, Paul writes that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Of course such a temple should only be protected and nurtured, not debased.

What makes the issue of food so difficult is that we simply cannot avoid eating, we cannot just go "cold turkey" (pun intended). In addition, our lifestyles contribute to eating "on-the-run", almost guaranteeing that we will eat the wrong food in the wrong place at the wrong speed. While I am positing these ideas I am reaching for Value Meal #3, and well aware that my ideal weight is so far in the rear view mirror as to have become indistinguishable.

For some reason or another I have been reading a spate of books about retirement. Not surprisingly, most of them have extensive chapters on the issues of health and food. Eating and drinking are examined as closely as social security and Medicare. Consistent claims are made that those who eat healthy and exercise regularly will live longer and have a much more rewarding and energized retirement.

Decisions about food begin early in life. For instance, our seven year old granddaughter, Annika, has announced quite publicly that she will not eat anything which once was alive, except for pepperoni. But while I laugh at her rationale, I probably would also need to acknowledge

that she is more consistent than I am in what I will eat.

Dr. Gary Smalley has written a most instructive book entitled The Amazing Connection Between Food and Love. I really enjoyed Smalley's book The Blessing, so I was anxious to read what he had to say about food and the theology of health. He examines the very close connection between food and emotional health, even asserting that the more we give love to others the healthier we will eat, and the more we eat healthy foods the more love we have to share. He says much more than this, of course; it is a very good read.

The two chapters I focused on were entitled "Foods Which Threaten Our Emotional Health, and "Foods Which Strengthen Our Emotional Health." Beginning with the threats, Smalley says that many foods bring harm to our bodies and consequently to our spirits, even negatively impacting our emotional well-being. He writes "you feel what you eat." You feel what you eat. Others say that "we are what we eat."

Four kinds of foods are most destructive, Smalley writes:

White and Refined Sugars Sugar has at least 87 ways of being harmful to our health. Sugars harm our immune system and it goes downhill from there. The almost epidemic of diabetes demonstrates what happens when the body's response to sugar wears out the pancreas. Sugar has a direct impact on behavior, attention span and learning abilities, notice any group of children before or after lunch.

White and Refined Flour Such flour is created by taking whole grains, pulverizing them and sifting out the germ and fiber content. 26 essential nutrients, plus bran, have been removed to produce white bleached flour. Such flour is more quickly absorbed into our bloodstream and thus it affects our brain chemistry and moods. We can even become numb and mentally confused.

Hydrogenated Oils and Animal Fat Such oils have been processed with heat, removing most nutrients and

making them empty if not destructive. Foods high in saturated fat will almost always contribute to poor health. Increased fatty buildup in arteries can lead to high blood pressure and a higher risk of heart disease and heart attack. They also lead to a quick drop in blood sugar level, making us more irritable, impatient, pessimistic, anxious or depressed.

Chemically Laden Foods Processed food lasts longer because it is filled with chemicals, including such items as frozen entrees, luncheon meats, boxed foods. They also include preservatives, artificial flavors and colors. Processed foods also provide the lowest levels of appetite satisfaction so that we have to eat more foods to create a feeling of fullness. Also many of these processed foods are addictive. Two of the most common chemical food additives are artificial sweeteners and caffeine. Both of these can be quite harmful to our bodies.

In summary, Smalley suggests a list of poor foods to avoid:

Candy, brownies, pastries, doughnuts, coffee, cakes, cookies, potato chips, oiled and salted nuts, ice cream, meats with fat content above 7%, chicken skin, fried foods, white flour products (bread, tortillas, etc), produces with high sugar (dextrose, maltose, high fructose corn syrup), packaged foods such as crackers and cookies made from sugar or flour.

Well, now, is there anything left that we can eat? Do we have to eat only zucchini and asparagus? Smalley goes on to look at foods which strengthen our health. He begins with three overriding principles.

1. Eat only foods and drinks God created for food.
2. Eat foods only in the state in which they were created to be eaten. The more food is processed or chemicals are added, the less benefit it is.
3. Avoid food addictions. Do not let food or drink become your god.

Raw Honey and Sweeteners from Raw Fruit God provided the most natural sweetener of all—honey—five times sweeter than sugar. (Too bee or not too bee). Other natural sweeteners can be extracted from raw fruit. Fruit juices can be used as a sugar substitute to sweeten foods.

Whole Grain Flour and Whole Grains Grains include foods such as barley, rye, oats, brown rice and wheat. These contain nutrients and fiber God intended us to eat. These are digested more slowly, causing a steady release of blood sugar, regulating brain function and emotional well being. They are rich with fiber, protein, good fats and enzymes and do not lose nutritious values when cooked. These will likely contribute to a release of energy and will help cut down on mood swings.

Cold Pressed Oils and Healthy Fats These include flax seeds, olive oil, canola oil, soybean oil, avocados, olives and peanut butter.

Natural Foods These are the closest to the way God made them, including fruits and vegetables, legumes, nuts and seeds, seafood, poultry and eggs and meats. There are many nutrients in vegetables and fruits which elevate moods and regulate blood sugar. A diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables will almost always help us to lose weight. Legumes are beans or lentils. Nuts and seeds include foods such as almonds, walnuts, pecans, peanuts, sunflower seeds, sesame seeds, which add fiber, nutrients and protein to our diet.

Smalley concludes by suggesting there are six benefits to healthy eating:

1. You will become sick less often.
2. You will become healthier emotionally.
3. You will think more clearly and behave more consistently.
4. You will experience physical benefits, control weight, have better self image.
5. You will sleep better.
6. Your skin and eyes will look healthier, as your body is being cleansed.

In summary, our bodies are gifts of God, temples of the Holy Spirit. Many of us do not take care of our bodies as we should, I resemble that description. Heredity is important as well, but what we eat affects who we are. So eat what strengthens you and avoid what threatens you.