

## FIVE-STAR DINING

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Terry and I love to eat. We plan our vacations around food and when we're out we're always searching for a new place to try. We lie in bed at night watching the Food Network and drooling over the luscious dishes swimming in sauces, garlic, and sugars as we live vicariously through the magic screen. Forget movies, we'd rather sit at a table eating and talking. We had a trip planned once to Ashville, NC, and on the day before we left Terry said it was a shame we'd not seen a Rachel Ray show on Ashville so we'd know where to eat. That night her show WAS on Ashville and we took notes. Following her lead we had a huge breakfast at the Tupelo Honey Café of Sweet Potato Pancakes with Spiced Pecans and Peach Butter, and then a late lunch of Sautéed Rainbow Trout with Green Tomato and Blackberry Sauce at the Early Girl Eatery. YUM!

It's a simple fact—if you do not feed your body it will die. Whether you're in the Congo or the Alps, whatever shade your skin is, or however you view politics this fact doesn't change—no food eventually equals no life.

I have found this principle true in another application—if you don't feed your spiritual life it will eventually die. I'm talking about feasting so that you live the daily, fun spiritual life that is joyful and exhilarating. The spiritual life that is full of energy and zest for living! Feeding your spiritual life isn't a diet of oatmeal or Brussels' sprouts (though I like them both) or a tasteless-but-healthy meal of tofu and couscous. God wants us to be freely eating a feast like this one from Emeril's New Orleans restaurant: Saffron-Chili Dusted Jumbo Shrimp with Sweet Potato, Smoked Corn Grits, Skillet Beans, and Benton's Bacon and Mango Chow Chow. He wants us to enjoy the chocolate mousse cake drizzled with raspberry sauce that is there for the taking. And here's the wonderful thing about it—the richer and more delicious spiritual food is the better it is for you! There are no trans-fats and calories to worry about. Our spiritual life LOVES the delicious things of the Spirit, and to feed off them keeps us dancing our way through life.

Spiritual food is what delights you spiritually. Why is it that we perceive spiritual food to be drab, a chore to eat, a "discipline." Few people eat food just for the sole purpose of staying alive, we eat because it tastes good and eating is a pleasure! So

spiritual food should be eaten for pleasure, not for duty. Trade your spiritual blandness for chocolate and spices and flavor. Add variety to your spiritual feasts, don't get locked into one meal that you eat over and over. In our early years of marriage Terry and I went through some lean times and during one of those times we ran out of food. All that was left was a yellow cake with chocolate icing. I love yellow cake with chocolate icing and it's still one of my favorites, but after several days of nothing but cake we were ready to sell our birthright for something else.

Here I'm including some "recipes" for spiritual food or you can get in the kitchen and create your own. Feeding ourselves spiritually can be great fun, whether we're eating with others or alone. **A huge way to feed yourself is to find people who like the same food you do.** Pick people who are positive because trying to feed yourself out of a relationship that tears you down is like trying to fill a hungry stomach with cotton candy, you'll come away hungrier than when you started.

Terry and I have several couples we enjoy pigging out with spiritually. We come away feeling like we've stuffed ourselves with Alsatian Onion & Apple Soup, Mascarpone Mac and Cheese, and Nutting Farms blueberries baked and topped with a crispy nutty streusel and served with cinnamon ice cream (Berghoff's Café in Chicago). As friends we talk about what's going on in our lives, but we also talk about what God is doing and what He's saying to us. We talk about dreams and ways we're walking the adventure. We pray for each other, because real friends hold each other up.

One night we were with two other couples and after a great spiritual feast we decided to go out on the deck and have the men blow their shofars. (A shofar is a ram's horn used for Jewish religious purposes). Blowing a shofar is a way to make a spiritual statement to the heavenlies, to celebrate God, and to have some spiritual meat and potatoes. Standing in the quiet darkness under buckets of stars it was a powerful time, raising goose bumps to the symbolism and sound of the shofar. But at the end we dissolved into laughter as it set off every dog in the countryside barking furiously, and somewhere a herd of cows got involved, mooing and causing a huge ruckus.

We feed our spiritual life by ministering to others, not only in a group setting with other Christians but out where real life happens. Doing this is like a hazelnut cappuccino, because you can't minister to someone else without getting addicted. It's a great pick-me-up spiritually, and once you experience it you're hooked. As I

walked around the block recently I passed an elderly woman out walking her dog, who told me that her name was Helen Louise and that she'd broken her tailbone. She was delighted when I asked if I could pray for her. Another day I stopped in at a beauty shop to buy some hair gel and the woman ringing me up told me she had a terrible headache and I was able to pray for her. I told the garbage man I'd been praying for him and he stopped a moment to talk, appreciating that someone noticed he was doing it all alone.

Giving money to others feeds us, every penny you have belongs to God and He loves to show you ways to bless others with it. He is a generous God, telling us to model His nature. There are numerous small ways you can bless someone by sharing what you have, and it's like snacking all day on chocolate-nut toffee or soft garlic pretzels. Sometimes we purposely go out looking for someone God wants to bless.

You feed yourself spiritually when you walk in the supernatural, watching and expecting God to speak to you and show you things. He WANTS to be actively involved in your daily life. Living the adventure with Him is so stimulating that once you start it's hard to go back to plodding through mundane life. Then, as you WRITE the things that God is speaking and doing TALK about them, because talking about them not only blesses others and gets them excited but it helps you REMEMBER them.

**You'll find that friends who understand where you are and what God is doing in you are constantly knocking at your spiritual door with plates of delicious treats for you to eat.** Last week my friend Marilyn and I were talking about how easily fears overwhelm us in the night. Terry and I are going through some major things involving our business and she is going through both starting back as a teacher and the possibility of buying a house and moving. Together we now have a plan. When I wake in the night and start to feel fearful I pray for Marilyn, and when she wakes she prays for me. The Bible says to pray for each other so that YOU may be healed. (James 5:16) My fears are destroyed as I pray for Marilyn because with my mind tied up praying for her there's no room to let my fears multiply, and without fears pumping adrenaline I easily fall back asleep. And it's awesome to wake in the night and know that Marilyn is praying for me.

This week I was thinking how God has been speaking to us about magnifying things, showing us what to focus on and helping us to see clearly. I thought how that was manifested in the physical by several things, like our daughter Jessie's gift to me

of a small magnifying glass that hangs on a necklace and the way Terry had gotten out the magnifying glass that belonged to his father. In the same week I'd bought a pair of magnifying glasses to wear at the computer. Then, in the way we're all familiar with, my mind took over and I told myself that I was making it all up. Without having said a word of this to anyone I emailed my friend Jan C. the next morning asking her to pray about an important meeting Terry had. I got this reply:

*I pray that God's hand is upon your business dealings and that his ultimate goal is fulfilled - and that your path is clarified. I see these huge eyeglasses, and I was looking through them into Georgetown and the trees and downtown area were greatly magnified. So, I pray that your path is clarified to the extent that what needs to be seen is greatly magnified and it will be hard to miss what is sitting in front of you.*

I was stunned, if there was ever handwriting on the wall to us that was it!

There are limitless ways we can feed ourselves spiritually as individuals. There are restaurants (meetings), cookbooks (any food-for-thought book), cooking channels on TV (GodTV, etc), websites, and a whole spiritually outfitted kitchen where you can come up with your own recipes. You have before you unlimited ways to prepare feasts for yourself, like this one from the Seelbach Hilton in Louisville. Terry used to know the head chef there. "Ostrich Tartar, sweet potato and beef chutney, pumpernickel curry celery root." **Spiritual food is so varied and endless that you can order up whatever delights your soul, and there's plenty for everyone!** Are you a salad person? Whip up a spiritual parallel to mixed greens with snap peas, shaved fennel, pickled mango, almonds and a spicy strawberry vinaigrette like they serve in the Russian Tea Room in NYC. Besides the obvious spiritual food, like music, below are a few recipes for some spiritual sweet and savory dishes I'm currently enjoying.

Every day I draw a verse about Jesus' Bridegroom love for me and write it into my little red notebook.

I keep a FOOD-FOR-THOUGHT folder of things that quicken me spiritually. They're everything from revelations I've written to quotes to book excerpts. They don't have to be "Christian" in content to be spiritual food. So many movies and books have spiritual applications that it doesn't matter where you get it as long as

it focuses you on God. Anytime I want a spiritual snack I can pull out my folder and read something. It includes everything from buttery salted popcorn to heavier snacks like Pepper Jack cheese on Fire Roasted Tomato Triscuits.

**God loves celebrations and the ideas are limitless!** Celebrate things God has done for you, celebrate because it's the first of the month, or that it's the weekend. Celebrate what Longfellow refers to as "the secret anniversaries of the heart," those times that God has done something special in your life. Making a day special for you and Jesus keeps Him uppermost in your thoughts. The verse I drew this morning was from Psalm 5:11 and read, "Gifts from me! Joy and gladness today! Let's have a party." So we did. This year on my birthday I put ten verses referring to my birth on individual slips of paper and throughout the day, when I was alone, I'd draw one just to remind myself that Jesus was there celebrating with me.

A huge feast for me is to write about God, even if it's just journaling in my notebook. That focuses me on Him and causes me to listen and to think. It also gives me something to read later, reminding me how involved He is in my life.

Putting together slips of paper to draw from a bag is a fun way to focus on God, and the possibilities are endless. So many times I see God orchestrating what I draw. I have a bag of THINGS TO DO WITH JESUS for when I'm too tired to be creative or I want to do something out of the ordinary. Some mornings I'll draw a slip from a choice of colors and then throughout the day every time I see that particular color I stop, focus on Jesus, and listen.

I've put together what I call my INTIMACY BOOK, a fancy spiritual tea party with beautiful plates, pastries like baklava, and me spiritually wearing a white lacy dress that's all feminine and beautiful. This book is a three-ring binder of sheet protectors holding pages of pictures, clippings, and things I've written that are personal between Jesus and me. One page is a card I bought for Jesus. The front of it says: "I try to be normal, but smiles break out all over my face. I try to keep quiet, but I'm singing all the time. I try to be calm, but I spring into joyous dance whenever I least expect it. I just can't help myself ..." Inside: "I'M IN LOVE WITH YOU!!!" When I sit down to look through my book Jesus comes and joins me, because He loves to look at it too. It's a book about us.

Collect things that remind you of what God has spoken to you, and put them around where you can see them. **The physical represents the spiritual.** God spoke to my

friend Kacey once using a rubber duck, about laughing more and to "lighten up." So she took a rubber duck and put it where she could see it every day to remind her. On my desk is a Matchbox semi truck cab, a plastic white tiger, a large glass diamond, and an astronaut flailing in space. I have a straw Explorer's hat that I wear sometimes when I'm writing (thanks Jenn!) because it reminds me that I'm a spiritual explorer, that I want to always be listening to Holy Spirit and letting Him take me places with Him. Jan has a figurine of Alice in Wonderland that represents how Jan fell into a whole new world through Jesus. Everything in Alice's Wonderland worked differently, the key didn't unlock the door, mushrooms changed her size, and her tears got her through the keyhole. Wonderland was illogical according to our realm, the way life in the spiritual realm is, for example, in the spiritual realm you can get tax money from a fish's mouth.

And, of course, the best food in the whole world is to hang out with Jesus, one-on-one, feasting on His wonderful company!

We have the choice of feast or famine, and the difference in the choices is radical. A hungry, dry-desert life or oasis with a smorgasbord of food, take your pick. You can live on stale crackers and water or you can cook up some fried green tomatoes and homemade lasagna. And I don't mean a healthy vegetable lasagna, I'm talking meat and lots of gooey cheeses that string when you eat it. It just takes some prep work and some good knife skills. If you need to follow a recipe then find one. The results will amaze you! Your whole outlook on life will change, and you'll become passionate about not only eating but about WHAT you eat.

Bon Appetite!