

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROPER DIET

Proverbs 4:23

INTRODUCTION:

Email is a tremendous invention. Before email, you had to be a large company or at least have a lot of money to be able to send out junk mail. But now, anyone with a computer can inflict unsolicited, unnecessary, unwanted impersonal messages indiscriminately on masses of people. Never before in the history of humanity have we been able to spread gossip and lies with such speed and efficiency.

But once in a while, in the midst of that electronic haystack, there is a needle...with a point. I like this one:

- *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth and in it, He placed man.*
- *And God populated the earth with broccoli and cauliflower and spinach and green and yellow vegetables of all kinds, so Man and Woman would live long and healthy lives.*
- *And Satan created hamburger restaurants. And hamburger restaurants brought forth the 99-cent double-cheeseburger. And Satan said to Man, "You want fries with that?"*
- *And Man said, "Super size them." And Man gained pounds.*
- *And God created the healthful yogurt, that woman might keep her figure that man found so fair.*
- *And Satan froze the yogurt, and he brought forth chocolate, nuts and brightly colored sprinkle candy to put on the yogurt. And woman gained pounds.*
- *And God said, "Try my crispy fresh salad."*
- *And Satan brought forth creamy dressings, bacon bits, and shredded cheese.*
- *And there was ice cream for dessert. And woman gained pounds.*
- *And God said, "I have sent you heart healthy vegetables and olive oil with which to cook them."*
- *And Satan brought forth chicken-fried steak so big it needed its own platter, and Man gained pounds, and his bad cholesterol went through the roof.*
- *And God brought forth running shoes, and Man resolved to lose those extra pounds.*
- *And Satan brought forth cable TV with remote control so Man would not have to toil to change channels between ESPN and ESPN2. And Man gained pounds.*
- *And God said, "You're running up the score, Devil." And God brought forth the potato, a vegetable naturally low in fat and brimming with nutrition.*
- *And Satan peeled off the healthful skin and sliced the starchy center into chips and deep-fat fried them. And he created sour cream dip also.*

And Man clutched his remote control and ate the potato chips swaddled in cholesterol.

- *And Satan saw and said, "It is good!" And Man went into cardiac arrest.*
- *And God sighed and created quadruple bypass surgery.*
- *And Satan created insurance companies....*

Sometimes it seems that way. So we go to doctors to receive prescriptions to correct the self-inflicted damage of our lifestyle. Very often, it is the self-inflicted damage of our diet.

As you know, the theme I have chosen for the 2010 is "Fit For Life". From May through July I want to emphasize DIET as an important part of spiritual fitness. Just as it is an important part of physical fitness, so diet is an important part of spiritual fitness. Let me ask you, are you nourishing your soul with a healthy and nutritious diet?

In Proverbs 4:20-23, Solomon wrote to his son:

²⁰ *My son, pay attention to what I say;
listen closely to my words.*

²¹ *Do not let them out of your sight,
keep them within your heart;*

²² *for they are life to those who find them
and health to a man's whole body.*

²³ *Above all else, guard your heart,
for it is the wellspring of life.*

Every time I go the doctor, he seems to spend an inordinate amount of time checking the function of my heart. He uses a stethoscope to listen to my heart. He checks my pulse, my blood pressure and my cholesterol. He seems to be awfully concerned about my heart.

The average human heart only weighs 9 – 11 ounces. It is but $\frac{3}{10}$ of 1% of the weight of the body. But it is a most important part of the body.

Your spiritual heart is most important, too. That is why Proverbs 4:23 says to guard your heart above all else. This morning, I want to talk to you about a spiritual heart-healthy diet.

According to the Mayo Clinic, a heart-healthy diet will:

1. Limit unhealthy fats and cholesterol
2. Increase fruits and vegetables
3. Include whole grain
4. Reduce salt
5. Control portion size

Let's take a look at those five characteristics of a heart-healthy diet to see parallels with a diet that is healthy for our spiritual hearts

I. **LIMIT UNHEALTHY FATS & CHOLESTEROL**

Cholesterol is a waxy substance found in cell membranes and transported in the blood plasma of all mammals. Some cholesterol is necessary but too much is unhealthy and can be dangerous, even life-threatening. Excess levels of cholesterol can concentrate in the gallbladder and become gallstones: PAIN! Excess cholesterol can build up in the blood stream and coat the walls of the arteries. When that happens, the walls of the arteries become hardened and lose their flexibility. The arteries can narrow and restrict blood flow, compromising the health of large portions of the body. Sometimes, pieces of that cholesterol build-up will flake off and float through the bloodstream until they get lodged in the heart causing a heart attack...or until they float into the brain and cause a stroke. High cholesterol is a big deal.

Medical researches estimate that 25% of all Americans have high cholesterol.

If high cholesterol can obstruct the heart and threaten the life of a person, what can obstruct the spiritual heart of a person? In Mark 10, we can read the true account of a man who came to Jesus with a question. He wanted to know what he had to do to go to heaven. This man was young. He was rich. He was influential. He had a lot going for him. But he had something working against him. He had heart disease. His heart was already obstructed and Jesus could tell it. Jesus told him that if he wanted to inherit eternal life, he would have to have surgery to remove his possessions from his heart. Jesus said to him, *“Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”* Mark relates that the man was crushed and he went away sad because he had a lot of possessions. He went away. He did not follow Jesus...because his heart was blocked by possessions. He is not the only person in history who was blocked from following Jesus because his heart was obstructed by material wealth.

In Mark 4, Jesus told the parable of the farmer who went out to sow seed. Some of that seed fell on hard-packed soil of the dirt path. Some fell in the shallow soil that barely covered the rocks. Some fell among thorns and some fell on good ground. Later, explaining the parable, Jesus said that the seed that fell among the thorns represented those for whom the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of riches and the desire for other things come in and choke out the Word of God. A heart obstructed by the desire for material wealth can lead to spiritual death.

II. INCREASE FRUITS & VEGETABLES

The good folk at the Mayo Clinic advise us that a heart-healthy diet will have lots of fruits and vegetables. Research from the United States, United Kingdom, and The Netherlands suggests that the role of fruits and vegetables in preventing heart disease is a protective one. A diet rich in fruits and vegetables can reduce the risk of heart disease by as much as 20 – 40 percent. Furthermore, people who were already diagnosed with coronary heart disease were able to reduce blockage modestly through exercise and low-fat diet rich in fruits and vegetables. The reason for that is because fruits and vegetables are a good source of vitamins and minerals as well as the fiber we need to absorb and remove cholesterol from our blood stream.

Now there is nothing new in that information. For more than a century we have known that fruits and vegetables are a part of a healthy diet. So what is a part of a diet that is healthy for our spiritual hearts?

1. Feed on the Word of God. Read your Bible. Think about what it says. Ponder the message and consider how to apply it to your life.
2. Worship: tell God you love Him.
3. Witness: brag on God; tell other people about Him.
4. Pray: you know...talk to Him.
5. Spend time with other Christians who are trying to faithfully follow Jesus. Their example will encourage and nourish you.

I know there is nothing new in what I've just told you. There wasn't anything new in what I told you about the importance of fruits and vegetables either. But that doesn't mean we are all eating like we know we should and it doesn't mean we are feeding our hearts and souls like we know we should, either.

III. INCLUDE WHOLE GRAIN

The doctors at the Mayo Clinic say a heart-healthy diet includes whole grain. As you are probably aware, whole grain refers to cereal grains that include the bran and the germ. Refined grain only uses the starchy part of the grain. That is the least healthy part. Whole grain flours and whole grain cereals are balanced and nutritious.

In Acts 20, we have the account of the apostle Paul preparing to go to Rome to face imprisonment, trial and possible execution. Along the way, he met with the elders of the church in Ephesus and sought to encourage them. Among other things, he reminded them that he never hesitated to proclaim the whole will of God.

As you surely know, I plan my preaching a year at a time. Part of the reason I do that is so that I can make sure I am preaching the whole will of God. I don't want to preach just the New Testament or just the Old. I don't want to only go for the low-hanging fruit that is easy to pick and easy

to preach. I want to have balance in my preaching. I want variety in my sermons. I don't want to simply ride my hobbyhorses and cuddle my pet peeves. For me, planned preaching is a way I can develop balance and variety and make sure I am preaching the whole will of God.

Likewise, if you attempt to read through the entire Bible, whether in a year or in two years or six months, however long it takes you...if you will read systematically and consistently, it is like whole grain bread and it will nourish your heart.

IV. REDUCE SALT

Salt raises blood pressure and is one of the most unhealthy things we can ingest. It is like granulated poison. But do you know what else raises blood pressure and is unhealthy for you? Anger, bitterness, self-pity and a sense of entitlement are very unhealthy and will raise your blood pressure. Your spiritual heart will suffer if you don't reduce these toxic emotions. And believe it or not, these poisonous passions will also take a toll on your physical heart

V. CONTROL PORTION SIZE

The Mayo Clinic is not big on big. They don't want you to super size your meals. They believe that most of us eat way more than we need to. And they are right. The internet site, WebMD, reports that 31% of Americans are obese. The extra weight that many of us carry around is hard on our hearts. One way to reduce our weight is to reduce the amount we eat. We need to control portion size and learn moderation.

In the King James translation of Philippians 4:5, Paul writes, "*Let your moderation be known to all men.*" The NIV uses the word "gentleness". The Greek word means reasonableness or good judgment.

Our spiritual hearts will become healthier if we will learn to exercise good judgment, reasonableness or moderation.

CONCLUSION:

All of these are guidelines for a diet that is healthy to our souls, our spirits, our spiritual hearts.

People, I have some bad news for you: sin has damaged your heart. That damage is irreparable. You have no hope except to receive a heart transplant. I have some good news for you: we have a donor heart.

Little Pig With a New Heart

*Mary had a little pig and it was white as snow,
That is when it had had a bath, as you of course might know.*

*But Mary had an awful time to keep the piggy clean,
For it was just the dirtiest pig that one has ever seen.*

*She'd wash him and she'd scrub him, till he would squirm and
squeal,
As if he wanted her to know it was an unfair deal.
And then inside his green backyard he'd plan from morn to night,
Unless he happened to sneak out and lose himself from sight.*

*And then when Mary found him he'd be blacker than ere before,
So Mary'd get the soap again and scrub the pig some more.
Poor Mary thought and wondered much what she could ever do
Until she figured out a plan, and this she carried through.*

*She took him to a doctor who put the pig to sleep, and then he
Took his heart right out, but not of course to keep.
And then he took a little lamb and took his heart out too
And put it in the little pig before the piggy knew.*

*When little piggy did awake he had no more desire
To wallow in the mud again or ever in the mire.
And try as hard as ere he could he never understood,
How such a pig as once he was could ever be so good.*

*And so you see, dear friends of mine, you need a new heart too,
Just like the little piggy did, the old will never do.
If you'll receive a brand new heart, well, here is how you may.
Accept God's son as savior now and let him in today.*

-Author unknown

Sin has damaged your heart. The damage is irreparable. Your only hope is a heart transplant. Jesus has one for you: his. If you accept it, your life will be saved. Will you receive it?

INVITATION: #654 – “Change My Heart, O God”