

Prayer

Great and Mighty God, we love the world You have made; the truth of Your love which is there for all to discover, the beauty of creation in its finest detail and magnificent splendour, and the integrity of natural moral justice based on right and wrong which is woven into the fabric of Your world. May we treasure this world and journey within it according to Your will and purpose, and together with You, forever. We ask this in Jesus' name; AMEN.

Other Prayer Suggestions

- *Pray for people who are ill but find it hard to admit and seek help*
- *Pray for people who are in hospital and dependent upon others*
- *Pray for people who are chronically ill and have given up hope*
- *Pray for people who are sick in mind and struggle to receive help*
- *Pray for people who are tired of life and need constant support*
- *Pray for people who are terminally ill and fear their death*

Meditation

Challenge me as I worship You today, Lord God, in spirit and in truth:

Give me a spirit of joy to give You my love and praise;
Give me a will to repent and confess all of my sins;
Give me a heart that receives Your words of forgiveness;
Give me an ear to appreciate deeper Gospel truths;
Give me a mind that earnestly prays for those in need;
Give me a desire to give to others as You have given to me;
Give me a heart that seeks to find the truth from Your Word;
Give me a soul that is always eager to act upon Your call;

And lead me on this path of life, I pray, both strengthened and renewed.

Bible Study - 2 Corinthians 9:8-11

⁸ God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. ⁹ As it is written, 'He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.'

¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us.

Reflections

Food and drink is important. We eat meals two or three times a day, sometimes more, and as we are repeatedly reminded these days, we must be careful about what we eat. There are a variety of eating or drinking problems to avoid; over-eating, under-eating, and becoming addicted to certain very tempting foods such as chocolate, let alone the addictive problems associated with too much consumption of alcohol.

In general, few people are not affected by these issues, and it is relatively easy to start a conversation on the subject of food and its considerable temptations. Within the church, you will find people who eat too much and too little, and you will in general find the same range of attitudes towards eating and drinking and related food issues such as size and weight, as found in society. Yet as I read God's Word it seems to me that God is concerned about the matter of food and drink.

To begin with, the people of the Old Testament were required by God to offer a sacrifice of some of their 'food' to God, as a major feature of their worship. The main regular worship events in the life of Israel were not Sabbath gatherings, they were harvest gatherings, indeed, the more the merrier! If you read through the whole of the Old Testament you will probably find yourself confused as to exactly how many harvest festival services were held by Israel, certainly three each year and maybe more. We read about barley harvests and wheat harvest, and the in-gathering of crops including grapes, and each harvest was accompanied by a great feast. The people were also required to bring their sacrifices to God at the festivals, and share either in large communal 'fellowship' meals or festive meals in the family, such as the annual 'Passover' meal. Food was integral to the worship life of God's Old Testament people.

By comparison, the eating of food has little to do with the life of God's people and their worship today. The major exception to this is the 'Lord's Supper', in which a tiny amount of food is eaten and a small drink is drunk in a symbolic manner, in order to represent the body and blood of Christ. However, the manner in which this sacrament is practiced sets it apart from what we might call normal eating and drinking, and it plays no part in the basic physical requirement of all people to eat food and drink liquids to satisfy normal bodily needs.

It is a great shame that the 'Lord's Supper' has become so ritualised that it is now unrecognisable as a meal in the usual sense of the word. Jesus asked the disciples to 'eat my flesh' and 'drink my blood' (John 6:55f.) in the context of a full meal, and his words had special meaning for the disciples because they had eaten with Jesus and shared His life for three years before He died. There is something very special about food that is shared, and the fellowship of such sharing, a fact that has been taken up very successfully by 'Alpha', the programme for evangelism that uses the idea of hospitality and friendship as a basis for sharing the Gospel.

It seems to me that many of us eat and drink in a way that suggests we think of it as merely functional, or a matter of habit, taste, preference, and sometimes personal privacy. And although people in society at large seem to be rediscovering the social importance of eating out and sharing the experience, few Christians have taken this on board.

Is it time for us to rediscover the origins of the Lord's Supper in a truly regular shared meal? Is it time for us to rediscover the true meaning of 'grace', said before meals, and offering both thanks to God for His provision and also 'blessing' the food? Is it time for us to re-consider the opportunities for fellowship and friendship offered by meals, whether shared within the church fellowship, or used as a non-threatening evangelistic tool? Is it time for us to bless each other in our eating, so that we do not succumb to the world's ills of obesity, under-eating, or the dire consequences of excessive drinking? Is it time for us to re-discover the truth that our life is indeed dependent upon God, and this very fact is closely related to the food we eat and the industry of agriculture?

There are many questions to ask here. I am nevertheless certain that food and drink is important, and there is a need for God's people to submit their eating and drinking to the Lord. All too often, we have meals with barely more than a sense of sensual gratification, when in truth, it is a deeply spiritual matter. Our eating fundamentally affects our living, and if we seek to live as disciples of Christ, then what we eat, when we eat it and with whom we share it, all matters.

When I was a teenager, I loved to relax in front of the television with a plate of my favourite food as provided by my mother, and eat it in pure relaxation and selfish enjoyment. Now I am in my later years, I have found that eating means so much more, and if I indulge my teenage fantasies, my waistline will bulge and compromise my health. Yet I love to share a meal with friends and I long for God's people to share food together in yet more meaningful ways. The clues are all there in the Bible and the history of the church!

God bless you

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