

FIVE-STAR DINING

how to avoid a malnourished spirit



BRENDA COBB MURPHY

Are you feeding your spirit?

My husband Terry and I loved to eat. We would plan our vacations around food and lie in bed at night watching the Food Network and drooling over the luscious dishes swimming in sauces, garlic, or sugar as we lived vicariously through our TV screen. Forget movies, our dates were sitting at a table eating and talking. We had a trip planned once to Ashville, NC, and 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 very night her show *was* on Ashville and we took notes. Following her lead, we had a deliciously rich breakfast at the Tupelo Honey Café of Sweet Potato Pancakes with Spiced Pecans and Peach Butter, and then a late lunch at the Early Girl Eatery of Sautéed Rainbow Trout with Green Tomato and Blackberry Sauce. 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, however you view politics, or whatever shade your skin is—no food eventually equals no life.

I have found this principle true in another application—if you don't feed your spirit it will also eventually shrivel up and fade away. It's easily possible to spiritually survive on a diet of oatmeal or Brussels' sprouts (and I like them both) or a tasteless-but-healthy meal of tofu and couscous (I don't like those) but 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. The wonderful thing about spiritual food is that the richer and more delicious it is the better it is for you! There are no trans-fats or calories to worry about. Our spiritual life LOVES the delicious things of the Spirit, and to feed off them keeps us energetically dancing our way through life.

Spiritual food is what stimulates and delights your spirit.

I think we often perceive spiritual food to be bland and the eating of it a chore because we don't realize there is more food out there than the "disciplines." Few of us physically eat food merely for the sole purpose of staying alive, we eat because God has created us to be able to enjoy our food—it tastes good and eating is a pleasure. Spiritual food should also be eaten for pleasure, not for duty. Trade your spiritual blandness for chocolate and spices and flavor. Add variety to your spiritual meals, don't get locked into one dish that you prepare over and over until you're burnt out on it. In our early years of marriage Terry and I went through some lean times and during one of those we ran out of food. All that was left was a yellow cake with chocolate icing. I really liked yellow cake with chocolate icing but after several meals of nothing but cake we were ready to sell our birthright for something else.

Here are some "recipes" for spiritual food, or better yet, you might get in the kitchen and cook up something of your own. Feeding ourselves spiritually can be delicious fun, whether we're eating with others or alone.

Eat with others who like the same food you do.

One of the best (and easiest) ways to feed yourself is to have a spouse who is in the same spiritual place you are, but unfortunately that's often not the case. After Terry died that was one of the things I missed the most, that continual sharing of ideas, thoughts, and encouragement. We kept each other hyped up spiritually as we feasted together. Now, while I miss my spiritual meals with Terry, I've learned to eat with my friends.

Be sure to eat with friends who like similar food as you, because trying to feed yourself from a relationship that is frustrating or 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 had several couples that we enjoyed pigging out with spiritually. We'd come away feeling like we'd 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). With friends we would talk about what was going on in our lives but also about what God was doing and what He was saying to us. We'd talk about dreams and ways we were walking the adventure. We'd pray for each other, because real friends hold each other up.

One night, after a great spiritual feast with two other couples in a beautiful home out in the country, 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. However, at the end we dissolved into laughter as it had every dog in the countryside barking furiously, and somewhere nearby a herd of cows got involved, mooing and causing a huge ruckus.

Ministering to others is like a hazelnut cappuccino, because you can't minister to someone else without getting hooked.

We feed our spiritual life by ministering to others, not only in a group setting with other Christians but out where real life happens. It's a great pick-me-up spiritually, and once you experience it you just want more. 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 a real human being.

Giving money to others fills our hungry bellies with warm, satisfying fare.

We love a generous God and we want to model His nature, because every penny we have belongs to him and he loves to show us ways to bless others with it. Whether it's a generous tip to a server to sow into their lives or paying for coffee for the car in line behind you, 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. There have been times when I've purposely gone out looking for someone God wants to bless. One day I woke up and was getting ready for my day when I felt Holy Spirit ask me to take three hundred dollars out of the bank and he was going to show me who I was to give it to. That took some courage (all I had in the bank was four hundred dollars) but I was also excited to see what God had in mind. By the end of the day he'd had me spend fifty cents of it! It was an act of obedience and he blessed me with a powerful gift and a fun day I'll never forget.

You'll be fed as you walk in the supernatural.

God *wants* to be actively involved in your daily life so watch and expect him to speak to you and show you things. At times when Terry and I needed to hear some encouragement or direction we'd start our day specifically looking for what God was saying. He speaks through billboards, pictures, signs, and junk mail. He's constantly speaking to us, we just have to learn to hear. He spoke to me once from an empty bottle of Nestles Quick—"I'm giving you a new name." I've heard him through a text message (yes, God texts), a dropped puzzle piece, and a fortune cookie. Living the adventure with Him is so delicious that once you start it's hard to go back to eating your unsalted baked potato.

Your friends will come knocking with plates of delicious treats for you to eat.

You'll find that friends who understand where you are and what God is doing in you will bring you treats.

Our first morning after moving to a house in Georgia I opened the door to a knock from our new neighbor Ros (short for Rosalind), bringing us a plate of hot chocolate-chip cookies! We were immediately fast friends because it takes a special person to do something as generous and thoughtful as that.

You'll find that you can also do that spiritually! On a visit to see my friend Marilyn we were talking about how easily fears overwhelm us in the night. Terry and I were going through some major things involving our business and she was both preparing to start back to school as a teacher and facing the possibility of buying a house and moving. Together we made a plan: when I woke in the night and began to feel fearful I'd pray for her, and when she'd wake she'd pray for me. The Bible says to pray for each other so that YOU may be healed. (James 5:16) My

fears were destroyed as I prayed for Marilyn because with my mind tied up praying for her there was no room to let my fears multiply, and without fears pumping adrenaline I easily fell back asleep. How awesome to wake in the night knowing that Marilyn was also praying for me.

One day as I was thinking how God had been speaking to us about magnifying things, showing us what to focus on and helping us to see clearly, I thought how that had been manifested in the physical in several ways. There was our daughter Jessie's gift to me of a small magnifying glass that hangs on a necklace and the way Terry had suddenly wanted to pull out the magnifying glass that had belonged to his father. In the same week I'd bought a pair of magnifying glasses to wear at the computer. Later, 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.

Try getting in your own, spiritually outfitted kitchen and creating unique recipes.

Maybe you struggle to find others near you to connect with, so how do you feed yourself when you're basically alone? There are limitless ways but you'll need to get in your kitchen and get creative. There are restaurants (meetings), cookbooks (any food-for-thought book), cooking channels on TV (GodTV, etc), and websites. You have before you unlimited ways to prepare feasts for yourself, like this one from the Seelbach Hilton in Louisville, where Terry used to know the head chef. "Ostrich Tartar, sweet potato and beef chutney, and pumpernickel curry celery root." Spiritual food is so varied and endless that you can order up whatever delights your soul, even if it's just good ol' down-home cookin', 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 worship music, reading your Bible, and prayer, below are a few recipes for some spiritual sweet and savory dishes I've created in my own kitchen.

I once took all the verses I could find in the Bible where God speaks of his Bridegroom love for us, printed them, cut them apart, and folded each one into a beautiful box so that I could draw one every day. It was Jesus personally speaking his love to me.

I keep a "Food for Thought" folder of things that quicken me spiritually (I've also made a box of those to draw so that I can pull out something interesting to think about). They're everything

from revelations I've had to quotes to book excerpts, and they don't have to be "Christian" in content to be spiritual food. For example, here's a good one from Mike Bickle's book, "The Pleasures of Loving God":

God wants you to be a lover. And He wants you to be a working lover. Who you are is the lover, and what you do is the work. You are not to be only a worker who struggles to love God. Instead, you are a lover of God. Being lovers is our very identity. It's who we are. We are lovers of God who happen to work, not the other way around. God wants us to be something before He wants us to do something. In a fallen world, we want to do something in order to be someone. With God, exactly the opposite is true. God wants us to be lovers so that we do work. It is extremely important that what we do flows out of who we are. It is also important that we do not live from the self-centered motivation of trying to be something and seeking to achieve more. With minds that are not renewed, we work to feel important and to appear significant in the eyes of others. God expects just the opposite of that. We are not first warriors; we are first a bride. We are first lovers, and then we do the acts of war.

I include in my "Food for Thought" folder things I've thought of myself, like, *"If we can't use our physical eyes to see God, and haven't learned or known we could use our spiritual eyes, no wonder God is vague! It's like having a relationship with someone in a fog--no reference point. We need our eyes, one way or another. Otherwise we're just two voices in a fog!"*

Here's another one: *"On my way to work today I was thinking 'All right Jesus, how can I make this day count?' It counts just because of Jesus in me, it counts because I'm healthy and alive and strong, but it would count even if I weren't. This day counts because I'm alive. Period. Whatever I do, however I live it, however unfulfilled I feel like I've lived this day, it still counts. New motto: Today counts."* Rereading things like this is like snacking on spiritual walnuts and almonds—it gives you energy to make it through your day.

So many movies and books have spiritual applications that it doesn't matter where you get your "Food for Thought" 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.

Putting together slips of paper to draw from a bag is one of my favorite ways 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'll stop to 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 feminine, white, lacy dress. 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 him. 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!!!" It's fun to sit with Jesus and look through this book. It's a book about us and the good times we've had together.

For some good comfort food like biscuits and sausage gravy go back and read what God has done in your life in the past, and you'll not only see how he's orchestrated your life but it'll get you excited over the experiences that you've forgotten. This is a great way to pig out! (After writing this I went upstairs to breakfast and made myself some biscuits and sausage gravy for my *physical* body!)

Cook up some celebrations, the ideas are limitless!

God loves us to celebrate the things he has done for us. You can 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 (*The Message Bible*) and read, "Gifts from me! Joy and gladness today! Let's have a party." So we did. Each year on my birthday I put ten verses referring to my birth on individual slips of paper and throughout the day, when I'm alone, I draw one just to remind myself that Jesus is there celebrating with me. One day I asked Jesus to pick a date when he and I could celebrate his birthday, so now every year on that date we celebrate him. It's not that I don't celebrate Christmas but during the holidays it's busy and friends and family want more of my time, so it's fun to have a different day where it can be just Jesus and me together.

Put candies and treats of things that remind you of what God has spoken to you around where you can snack on 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 red, 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 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. My sister Jan has a figurine of Alice in Wonderland that represents how she 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 human realm, and that's the way life in the spiritual realm is, for example, in the spiritual realm you can get tax money from a fish's mouth!

Don't forget to salt your food!

Nothing can add flavor to your spiritual feast like writing it down. Write about God, even if it's

just journaling a date and a couple of sentences of what you did or felt God saying. That focuses you on Him and causes you to listen and to think. It also gives you something to read later, reminding you how involved he is in your life.

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 an 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. WRITE down the things that God is speaking and doing and TALK about them, because talking about them not only blesses others and gets them excited but it helps you REMEMBER them.

Bon Appetite!

To learn more about my ministry visit:

<http://brendacobbmurphy.com>

Other Books by Brenda Cobb Murphy

[The Wild Romancer](#) – The Lover of your soul deeply desires to romance you. Learn what it looks like and how to develop an intimate relationship with your Bridegroom, Jesus. He is calling you into intimacy with Him to taste of a love beyond anything you have ever imagined. Learn what the key is to His inner chambers, and how to use it to enter into the Love story to end all love stories.

[The Journey Guide](#) – A companion volume to *The Wild Romancer*, this is a 12-week personal guide to your own intimacy with Jesus. For those of you who, after reading *The Wild Romancer*, wanted me to tell you “how to get this relationship for myself” here it is—*The Journey Guide*!

[Jesus Space](#) – By creating a physical and spiritual place to hang out with Jesus you can learn to not only experience Him using your spiritual senses but you can have amazing adventures in the spiritual realm!