

Are You Whetting Your Appetite?

Have you ever had your mom tell you, "Don't eat that now; you'll ruin your appetite"? Or have you ever smelled something awful and felt like it had ruined your appetite? Just as there are things that can decrease your appetite for a good meal, there are other things that can make you hungry. These are often described as "whetting your appetite." This figure of speech refers to a whetstone (a sharpening stone used for knives and other cutting tools). Ecclesiastes 10:10 speaks of the importance of whetting, or sharpening, the edge of one's ax. How important is it to whet your appetite?



To whet your appetite is to sharpen your appetite as a whetstone sharpens a blade. Consider the following: a movie trailer, the dust jacket on a book, food samples at the grocery store, a food or drink commercial, a billboard, and fast food ads. What do all these things have in common? Each of them is trying to make you want more—to watch the entire movie, read the whole book, buy a full-sized product, or eat a meal at a certain restaurant. By providing a picture, video, description, or a small taste, your appetite is being whetted for more. Likewise, many catchy slogans have been created. What do you think of when you hear "Finger Lickin' Good" or "Eat Fresh" or "Snap, Crackle, Pop"? These oft-repeated phrases cause many people to instantly think of fried chicken, a sub sandwich, and breakfast cereal. They are whetting one's appetite for these foods.

Just as we can whet, or sharpen, our appetite for literal food, there are some things that we can do to whet our spiritual appetite. The Bible tells parents to diligently teach their children about God (Deuteronomy 6:7) and to do it in such a way that it makes them hungry for more. Parents are responsible for making sure their children are fed both physically and spiritually. However, as you get older, the responsibility begins to shift. You must begin to take responsibility for your own eating habits. When I was growing up, my father drew up a Bible reading chart and posted it on his bedroom door. My siblings and I were expected to write down what we had read each day. This was to help us establish regular Bible reading habits. Yet, as we became teens, we were not held accountable by our parents to record exactly what we had read. We had to take personal responsibility for our spiritual eating habits.

Do you struggle to find time to read your Bible? Do you find yourself dreading it or not understanding what you are reading? Is there anything you could do to make Bible reading more enjoyable? Let us compare whetting one's spiritual appetite to whetting one's physical appetite by considering this question: Are you filling up on junk food? Zero nutritional value foods are defined as foods that contain only calories. They often have little or no protein, minerals, and vitamins (the nutrients needed to stay alive). A diet that is primarily made up of these foods will, in time, bring sickness and quite possibly death. These can include candy, ice cream, potato chips, and soft drinks. Have your parents ever said things like, "If you want desert, you have to finish your dinner"? They were trying to make sure you ate plenty of healthy foods first.

Have you ever considered that there might also be spiritual zero nutritional value foods? Just as the body needs to be fed, the soul also needs food. What kinds of food might the soul need? Foods that help you grow, keep you alive, make you strong, and prevent illness are healthy, nutritious choices. These can include Bible reading, prayer, meditation, listening to Gospel music, and church attendance. What might be considered spiritual junk food? These would include time wasters (empty calories), things that have little or no worth, things that accomplish nothing worthwhile. These are not necessarily sinful things. You might enjoy reading a book, playing a video game, or checking your social media. However, what do you think will happen to one's spiritual appetite if this is the only spiritual food consumed all day, or if one spends only five to ten minutes in prayer and Bible reading, while feeding on spiritual junk food the rest of the day? Compare this to eating candy bars and potato chips all day long, but then eating a bowl of broccoli before you go to bed. Will this build and strengthen your physical body? Is your spiritual body any different?

If you are eating too much spiritual junk food, the first thing you must consider is changing your eating

habits. This is similar to changing one's physical eating habits. Healthy eating habits involve including more vegetables, which might taste a little strange at first. When our children were very young, there were many new foods that they would spit out. However, we kept trying them, and in time they grew to like them. Another healthy eating tip is this: eat all the healthy foods first before eating any junk food. A good eating habit to establish might be: (1) not checking social media before you have had prayer; (2) listening to Gospel music at the start of your day instead of other music choices; (3) not watching videos or reading anything until you have read your Bible.

Another way to change your eating habits is to identify junk food. Spiritual junk food is often addictive, changes your behavior (your way of thinking or talking), and ruins your appetite for the things of God. Have you ever watched a video or checked your social media and then thought, "I would really like to read my Bible right now"? Have you ever spent a lot of time on the internet and then thought, "Now would be a great time to have prayer"? Probably not. Spiritual junk food makes you less (not more) interested in spiritual things. Ask God to help you either limit these foods or completely eliminate them, if necessary.

Matthew 5:6 says, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." When you begin to work on reducing or cutting out spiritual junk food and eating more healthy foods, you will begin to hunger after the right things. You will start to recognize spiritual hunger pangs (hungering "after righteousness"). These might present as questions (Why is this important?) or needs (I was too irritated; I need prayer) or criticisms (being spiritually undernourished often makes us critical of others). Consider what might be the outcome of feeding spiritual hunger pangs with worldly music, books, or videos. While you might not feel hungry anymore, you will not "be filled" with "righteousness."

What are some other ways to whet your spiritual appetite? Just as thinking about certain foods can make you hungry, much of your thought life determines how spiritually hungry you are. What are some ways you can begin to think about healthy spiritual food? You might meditate by thinking of a Scripture or the words to a hymn or by remembering an answer to prayer or a recent testimony that encouraged you. It is important that you do not skip meals. Have you ever been too busy to eat? Did you feel weak and lightheaded? It is the same spiritually. Do not be too busy to go to church, to attend Sunday school, and youth services.

What are some ways you can tell that your appetite needs to be whetted, or sharpened? Have you ever been told, "Don't play with your food"? Did you know that many people only "play" with their spiritual food? They are just moving the food around, not really eating it. When the pastor is preaching, they are thinking about other things. When the Sunday school teacher is teaching, they are talking to their friends. During testimony service, they are checking their social media. The food is there, but they are not eating. Other people are considered picky eaters. They only like a few select foods. Spiritually speaking, there are people who only like some parts of the spiritual diet. They might say, "I don't mind Bible reading, but I don't like praying" or "I don't mind attending church, but I don't care for Sunday school." Something is wrong with their appetite.

Many support groups have been formed to help people develop healthy physical eating habits. What might happen if you spent more time with healthy spiritual eaters? Perhaps they might share a spiritual recipe with you, such as: "I have started keeping a prayer journal. Let me show you how." The encouragement and accountability that come from hanging out with God's people can whet your appetite. Exercise is another thing that can increase your appetite. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 4:7 to "exercise thyself unto godliness." In other words, do the things that make you more like God. Learn who God is and what He likes through Bible reading and prayer and then put those things into practice in your life. The more you exercise, the greater your hunger will be for the things of God.

Young person, how is your appetite for spiritual, healthy food? Are you eating too much spiritual junk food? Are you ruining your appetite? By incorporating some of the healthy eating tips in this lesson, you can whet your appetite and say, as David wrote in Psalm 42:2, "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God."

–Sheri Strelecky