

**"GETTING THE PROPER NOURISHMENT"**

A Sermon By

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### INTRODUCTION

Since we are talking about getting the proper nourishment here today, I thought I'd share with you eight dieting tips that someone put into my hands recently. This is a good time to be thinking about them, so get your pencils out and take them down.

- Tip #1: If no one sees you eat it, it has no calories.
- Tip #2: If you drink a diet soda with a candy bar, they will cancel each other out.
- Tip #3: Calories don't count if you eat with someone and you both eat the same amount.
- Tip #4: Food taken for medicinal purposes does not count. This includes toast, hot chocolate and Sara Lee chocolate cake.
- Tip #5: If you fatten up everyone around you, you'll look thinner.
- Tip #6: Snacks consumed at a movie do not count, as they are a part of the entertainment.
- Tip #7: Pieces of cookies contain no calories. The process of breaking causes a calorie leakage.
- Tip #8: Late night snacks have no calories! The refrigerator light is not strong enough for the calories to see their way into the calorie counter.

I hope you find these eight tips helpful; they've worked beautifully for me....which reminds me of one man who said that his mother gained weight because of shame. She would often say,

"It's a shame to let this go to waste. It's a shame to throw this out. It's a shame to see this food spoil!"

And speaking of nutrition, I read something interesting somewhere about Olga Korbut, the Olympic athlete. Seems that Olga, a gymnast, has always had a weakness for cake, even though she knew it was a "NO-NO". One day her coach sat her down in front of a giant cake. He informed her that for the next three days she was to eat nothing else but CAKE! Morning, noon and night....the only thing she could eat was cake. And after three days of this, Olga Korbut was so sick of cake that she didn't desire it again for many years.

We may try to ignore it at times, but we all know the importance of eating the right foods, of having a sensible and proper diet. You are what you eat, someone has said....which puts some of us in trouble.

### JEREMIAH AND NOURISHMENT

In today's scripture lesson, Jeremiah is talking about nourishment. He tells us that the person who trusts in man is like a shrub in the desert...he shrivels up and dies. But the person who trusts in God is like a tree planted by the water. He is nourished, refreshed and in continual contact with the source of life and renewal. He doesn't have to fear drought or heat, for he is "connected up" to a never failing source of sustenance.

The people to whom Jeremiah was speaking could easily relate to his message. There's very little rainfall in Palestine. It is very hot and dry, so in some areas only small, scrubby bushes survive. These little shrubs seem to serve no purpose at all. They are looked on with disdain. However, every once in a while you will happen upon a tree in that generally barren land, a tall, leafy tree....an oak, perhaps, or an almond, or an olive or a fig tree... and right away you know that somewhere close by there is "life-giving" water.

Now, the difference between a shrub and a tree, says Jeremiah, is nourishment. Thinking about spiritual nourishment, where does the person of "tall" faith find his or her nourishment? The answers are obvious and yet so vital. Let me suggest three sources to you to consider and take out of here with you.

#### WE FIND NOURISHMENT IN GOD'S WORD

First off, we find nourishment in God's word. In the Bible. The Bible is like a stream....a stream that flows from Eden, then on to the Red Sea where God saved the children of Israel, then on to the Jordan River where Jesus was baptized, and then on to the Sea of Galilee where Jesus preached and healed and called people to follow Him....and then into our lives as we drink its "life-giving" waters. How sad it is that so many followers of the Christ have ceased going to the Word to drink and to be refreshed.

Colleen Townsend Evans tells about a moving dream that a friend shared with her. This dream began in a large, open room, filled with depressed, distraught and hurting people. As the people milled around in that room, the door opened and in stepped Jesus. He turned to a man nearby and asked him, "What is the matter...my child?" The man replied that he had wasted his life in chasing around after business success and that all of his workaholicism had left little time for a healthy relationship with the Lord. "But didn't you get my letter?" asked Jesus of this troubled man. The man seemed taken back that Jesus had written him a letter. Jesus said to him,

"Oh, yes...yes, my friend. I wrote you a letter. I said, 'consider the lilies of the field and how they grow..they toil not, neither do they SPIN....seek you first the Kingdom...MY KINGDOM, and all the things you need I will give to you.'"

The man's anguished reply was something like this...."My pastor told me of this letter, but I never realized that You had written it and sent it to me."

Then Jesus moved over to speak to a woman who was sobbing. She confessed to Him that ever since her husband had died, that she had spent her life in worrying....always fretting about the future and what it may hold for her.

"But...My child" said Jesus..."Didn't you read my letter?"  
"You wrote me a letter, Lord? Why surely if you had written me a letter, I would have certainly read it... right away!"

And Jesus answered her, saying,

"But I know I wrote to you and said, 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.' And "do not be anxious for tomorrow...I will give you whatever you need!"

The woman recalled with a start that those were the very words that her pastor had quoted at her husband's funeral. Did Jesus really mean for them to apply to her life?

"Yes...oh, Yes....I certainly did....I wrote that just for you."

And Jesus continued to move around that large room filled with hurting, and unhappy people...talking to each one and in each case, He heard tales of people turning away from God to pursue riches and ambition and lusts and pride and power. And in every case, Jesus answered them with a letter meant specifically for their lives. And Colleen Evans asks, "Have you ever stopped to read...and ponder the letter that Jesus has for you?"

How sad it is to live like shrubs in a parched land when help is so close at hand. Put down then as the first source of spiritual nourishment God's Word. And this week, make a point of sitting down with your Bible and read some of it.

#### WE FIND NOURISHMENT IN WORSHIP

Our second source of nourishment is found right here in this place...we find it in

worship.

After all of the assaults on faith from science and philosophy and the merchants of narcissism, why do so many Christians all over the world still make their way each week to the House of God? It is because here is where we meet God. It is here where we are renewed in God's grace and given a bit of hope and meaning and forgiveness and faith...to help us through another week. It happens here and in places like it. Time for a story...

This one is taken from a recent Reader's Digest and submitted by a man named Osborne Jera. He remembers how as a child he studied in a Catholic parochial school. A 7th grader teacher by the name of Sister Ursula asked him to run an errand, one that would take him through the school and into the adjacent church and he chose to go the "long way" around. Coming up out of the church basement as he neared the top of the steps, he was startled to hear an unfamiliar male voice singing High Mass in Latin in the church....sung with such power it stopped young Osborne in his tracks. Opening the door into the church sanctuary, he noted all pews were empty...no one there...and no one up in the altar area. But still the man's baritone voice filled the Church.

Young 7th grade Osborne moved out from below the church balcony and made his way up a winding, narrow staircase that led to the choir loft and the bell tower, walking softly and carefully to keep the old wooden stairs from groaning. Soon he spotted a somewhat disheveled middle-aged man....facing the altar... with his eyes closed....standing all alone by the organ bench...singing High Mass for all he was worth! No one else around.

He was wearing a heavy black coat almost long enough to be a cassock, and he held a woolen sailor's cap in his hands. And when he came to the benediction at the end, he opened his eyes as if to watch the last notes rise. Suddenly the floor squaked beneath Osborne and the man turned quickly in his direction, as if caught. Osborne summoned up his courage and got his voice and asked, "Are you the new priest?"

"No", answered the man. "No....I just felt like singing to God....if He's still here...."

And as he started to move toward the stairwell, Osborne could see that his eyes were read and his beard was stubby.

"Such awful things been happenin' on God's good earth" said the man, walking past young Osborne. "Felt a little song might cheer Him up...." The man then stopped and turned back and with his hands raised and his palms up, he told Osborne...."Everything's as it was.....I haven't touched a thing."

And when the man was gone, Osborne began thinking to himself...just how wrong the man was....wondrously wrong. For the man's song offered to God in honest praise had brought God alive in that place for a few moments. And that, my friend, is what happens when we come into a place like this...in honest and forthright adoration. God comes alive in our hearts. And we are renewed and refreshed. And we stand taller...like trees, not shriveled up like little shrubs. We find nourishment, first, in God's word and secondly, in worship.... in this experience....in spite of our human imperfections and we have them. It happens. God gets through to us and it makes a difference.

WE FIND NOURISHMENT IN PRAYER

And then third: we find nourishment in prayer.

How can we possibly expect to be all that God is calling us to be...if we don't spend some time each day in communion with him. This may be why the church of Christ is at times so ineffective. I read somewhere recently that the average pastor spends only about three minutes a day in prayer. No wonder the church is floundering....if those of us who are called to lead - both clergy and laity - aren't keeping the lines of communication open to God...how can we hope to hear God's voice.

Many of us need to get to our knees more often than we do. I read a humorous item in a magazine about Neil Marten, a member of the British Parliament. Neil Marten was once giving a group of his constituents a guided tour of the Houses of Parliament. During the course of the visit, the group happened to meet Lord Hailsham, then the Lord Chancellor. Lord Hailsham was all dressed up...wearing all the regalia of his high office. Hailsham recognized Marten among the group and called out to him, "Neil!" And not daring to question or to disobey the "command" of the Lord Chancellor, the entire band of visitors promptly fell to their knees and knelt!

Well, you and I probably need to spend more time kneeling. I know we are busy people, but my guess is that time spent asking for God's guidance will ultimately give us more time than less time. Back in the seventies, I remember being quoted in the NY Times in an article about busy pastors...that I was spending more time kneeling in front of the church safe than I did kneeling in front of the church altar. It was our friend, Bill Proctor, who quoted me! Once our church got a business manager, the situation changed drastically for me.

CLOSING

There are lots of people in this city wandering through the wilderness, not of woods and forests, but rather the wilderness

of doubt and fear and their starved souls suffer from malnutrition, hunger and starvation. And to me, the sad thing is that help is nearby. Ask yourself... spiritually are you a bit of a shrub, or a majestic tree. I've always liked those lines from Psalm One which we read for our Psalter selection:

"He is like a tree planted by the streams of  
water,  
That yields its fruit in its season, and its  
leaf does not wither.  
In all that he does, he prospers....."

If you are not standing as tall spiritually as you would like to, maybe it's time to evaluate our sources of nourishment.

First: are we spending time each day meditating on God's word.

Second: are we faithful in finding our way into God's house....and do we come to worship with an open and honest desire to meet God and have God refresh and renew our weary spirits? "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength..."

Third: And do we spend time each day in communion with God, making our requests known to God and listening to God speak through the quietness of our own thoughts about His (or Her) plans for our lives.

PRAYER

Make us sensitive to Your nearness and to Your presence in these moments, O God...remind us once again that more things are wrought by prayer than this world has ever dreamed. Wrestle with us in the hidden corners of our lives where doubt and fear and lack of faith so often persist.

"Drop thy still dews of quietness, till all our strivings cease. Take from our souls the strain and stress, and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of thy peace."

In the name and spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen.

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