



Home

Why Connect with God for Strength

How to Connect with God for Strength

Sources of Strength

CHAPTER 10

Eat for Strength From God's Menu

In the beginning, God served as menu-maker for the human race. His earliest command came bundled with a meal plan.¹ Terms and conditions dictated Adam and Eve's diet. Eating a forbidden fruit warranted the death penalty with a high-impact and long-range outcome.

In contrast, God's command to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth did not state sexual parameters, and it did not assert consequences for noncompliance.² His follow up decree, to subdue and rule the earth, lacked a moral code with discipline measures.

Our food supply was never a trivial issue with God. He used food to reveal heart attitudes and motives. At key season changes, our Creator announced new menus to accommodate advances in our relationship. His commands have more to do with perfecting our love than perfecting our behavior. Obeying God's divine order refines our spiritual disposition and validates our affection. John put it this way:

*whoever **keeps his word**, in him truly **the love of God is perfected**. By this we may know that we are in him (1 John 2:5 ESV)*

The rules may change over time but God's primary objective remains the same—to draw us closer to Him.

For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the

¹ Genesis 1:28-30

² Genesis 1:28 ESV

other hand, **a better hope** is introduced, **through which we draw near to God**. (Hebrews 7:18-19 ESV)

Obedying God's command reflects a relational priority rooted in trust and sustained by love. Jesus said, *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments"*.³ John reaffirms this priority based on our knowledge of the truth about God, both intellectually and experientially:

And by this we know [provides assurance and security] that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. (1 John 2:3 ESV)

By this we know [provides assurance and security] that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. (1 John 5:2-3 ESV)

Conditions and Consequences Associated with God's Menus

1. Eden's Menu: Consisted of seed-bearing plants and fruit-bearing trees

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. (Genesis 1:29 NIV)

Eden's Condition: Avoid fruit from one exclusive tree

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "from any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2:16-17 NAS)

Eden's Penalty: Eating this forbidden fruit meant death

God's initial food supply was perfect and complete. Presumably, it would have sustained Adam and Eve forever had they not sinned. Only one fruit from their vegan diet remained off limits. Nonetheless, when prompted by the serpent, Eve surmised that it too was good for food and profitable for gaining wisdom.⁴

Clean and Unclean Animals

Before Noah built the Ark, God distinguished between clean and unclean animals. Seven pairs of clean (or pure) animals boarded Noah's massive vessel while only one pair of unclean (or impure) animals boarded. God commanded Noah:

³ John 14:15 ESV

⁴ Genesis 3:5

Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate, and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate, (Genesis 7:1 ESV)

On an altar venerating God's prominence as Lord, Noah sacrificed clean animals as burnt offerings.

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. (Genesis 8:20 ESV)

2. Post Flood Menu Revisions

After the Great Flood, God expanded the food supply significantly. In addition to seed-bearing plants, He offered every living thing that moved, i.e., mammals, fish, birds, insects, and presumably reptiles and amphibians. God decreed:

Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. (Genesis 9:3 ESV)

After Flood Condition: May not Ingest Blood

But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. (Genesis 9:4 ESV)

After Flood Penalty: Eating or drinking blood meant alienation from God and separation from His people—disobedience was no longer fatal.

This revised diet transformed lifelong vegetarians into carnivores. It introduced broad practical, social, and gastronomic changes. Like Eden's menu, God established one restriction; rather than a forbidden fruit, He banned the consumption of blood.⁵

3. Mosaic Law Menu Revisions: Food consumption was restricted to animals that divide the hoof and chew the cud, fish with fins and scales, and flying insects with jointed legs for hopping.

Under this meal plan, God classified clean (edible) and unclean (inedible) foods using anatomical and behavioral distinctions.⁶

Of all the animals that live on land, these are the ones you may eat: You may eat any animal that has a divided hoof and that chews the cud. (Leviticus 11:2-3 NIV)

⁵ Genesis 9:3-4; Leviticus 3:17; 7:26; 17:10-14; 19:26; Deuteronomy 12:16; 12:23; 15:23; and Acts 15:28-29

⁶ Leviticus 11

Of all the creatures living in the water of the seas and the streams you may eat any that have fins and scales. (Leviticus 11:9 NIV)

These are the birds you are to regard as unclean and not eat because they are unclean: [birds of prey, gulls, storks, herons, hoopoes, and bats] (Leviticus 11:13-19 NIV)

All flying insects that walk on all fours are to be regarded as unclean by you. There are, however, some flying insects that walk on all fours that you may eat: those that have jointed legs for hopping on the ground. Of these you may eat any kind of locust, katydid, cricket or grasshopper. (Leviticus 11:20-22 NIV)

Mosaic Law Conditions: May not eat unclean animals, fish, or insects and may not eat birds of prey, gulls, storks, herons, hoopoes, or bats.

Mosaic Law Penalty: Whoever eats unclean food becomes unclean, or ineligible to participate in a religious ritual or ceremony before God.

4. Menu Revisions Suitable for a New Covenant Relationship

While teaching His disciples, Jesus declared all food created by God to be clean and therefore potentially edible. His take away message distinguished between performance based human traditions and relationship based divine imperatives. Jesus said,

“Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?” Thus, He declared all foods clean. (Mark 7:18-19 NAS)

Love dominates the ruling passion of Christ—not dietary compliance. Deviating from Mosaic Law, Jesus implied that unclean foods were in fact edible. He illustrated how much our Heavenly Father wants to cleanse every unclean heart poised to connect with Him. Love determines God’s motives and should determine our motives. He does everything within His power to connect us permanently with His passionate love.

New Covenant Condition: Maintain a receptive and grateful heart, consecrating God’s provision by the word of God and prayer.

*For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, **if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.** (1 Timothy 4:4-5 NAS)*

New Covenant Penalty: Not clearly stated

Since everything created by God is good, His provision merits acceptance. One stipulation remains essential—a thankful attitude. *“The Kingdom of God”* emphasizes *“righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit”* rather than eating and drinking specified ingredients assigned for legalistic consumption.⁷

Obligated to the Holy Spirit

Before Christ, God regulated our menu with obligatory laws and commandments. After Christ, the Holy Spirit governs our menu with wisdom and revelation.

*So then, brethren, **we are under obligation**, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are **being led by the Spirit of God**, these are sons of God.* (Romans 8:12-14 NAS)

Paradoxical Menu Changes

The Lord encountered Peter during a daytime vision to stress an unusual season change. Three times, He offered Peter unclean animals as food.⁸ As Peter regarded his options, the Lord spoke two clear but challenging commands. He said, *“Arise, Peter; kill and eat”* and, *“What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy”*.⁹ God used a dietary imperative to convey the passion in His heart for unredeemed humanity.

As the church began its struggle to emerge from a cultural cocoon tainted by legalistic Judaism, God used food to enlarge the heart and mind of its principal leader. In a vision, the Lord commanded Peter to kill and eat unclean (forbidden) animals. Initially, Peter boasted of his compliance to Mosaic Law.¹⁰ Filled with unwavering self-righteousness, he refused to eat God’s provision because he refused to rely on the Lord’s counsel and albeit puzzling command.

After fulfilling the Law of Moses, Jesus invaded a long standing and domineering religious tradition. Dietary correctness had become a full-grown sacred cow. Jesus placed the divisive bull on the altar and commanded Peter to kill and eat.

The Lord challenged Peter with a legal paradox. When Adam and Eve ate forbidden food, they forfeited the Tree of Life, died, and disconnected all humanity

⁷ Romans 14:17

⁸ Acts 11:4-10

⁹ Acts 11:7 and 9 NAS

¹⁰ Acts 11:8 NAS

from God. Yet, Jesus told Peter to eat unclean food clearly forbidden in the Hebrew Torah. Unclean food had remained off limits for nearly 1500 years. Nonetheless, our Heavenly Father had instigated another sovereign menu change.

Previously Peter had operated under a pharisaical tradition, which forbade Jews from associating with uncircumcised foreigners or visiting their home.¹¹ Mosaic Law imposed no such restriction, yet when Peter arrived in Jerusalem, *“those who were circumcised took issue with him, saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them”*.¹² Adherence to this custom prevented entire people groups from hearing Jesus’ invitation to feast with Him on righteousness, peace, and joy.

During this season change, Jesus emancipated His church to operate at a practical level of dynamic fruitfulness. Jewish believers, which populated most of the early church, entered non-Jewish homes to share food and to share the Gospel. Jesus anointed His disciples with the Holy Spirit to feed malnourished souls with life giving words. God’s Word supplements the menu of this redemption feast— hearts are yearning to be transformed as they share meals together.

In Christ, cross-cultural unity transcends race, ethnic tradition, and dietary custom. Through Peter's empty stomach, the Lord reminds us of His desire to transform the heart of every person—without exception. Acceptance in God’s kingdom does not depend on the consumption of clean food or abstinence from unclean food; it depends on God's grace to purify unclean hearts.

Four Distinctions for Success in the Early Church

Teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer characterized the devotions of the early church.¹³ They continued *“with one mind in the temple, and **breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart**”*.¹⁴ As a result, *“the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved”*.¹⁵ Food facilitated the salvation of lost souls. Spiced with gladness and sincerity, it redirected eternal destinies toward the Kingdom of Heaven.

¹¹ Acts 10:28 NAS

¹² Acts 11:2-3 NAS

¹³ Acts 2:42 NAS

¹⁴ Acts 2:46 NAS

¹⁵ Acts 2:47 NAS

Essential Abstinence—Food Forbidden by the Church

As God added non-Jewish believers to the church, disputes erupted concerning Hebrew traditions and religious law. During an epic council meeting, Jerusalem's elders and apostles issued a four-fold decree regarding abstinence. They instructed non-Jewish believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia to abstain from sexual immorality, from eating blood or anything strangled, and from food or drink defiled by idolatry. With James presiding, they announced:

*“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than **these essentials**: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell.”* (Act 15:28-29 NAS)

Food Speaks a Powerful Message

Deported from Israel, Daniel and his companions Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, maintained their composure by connecting with God. This band of noble expatriates set their hearts on pleasing the Lord. Despite vigorous appetites and inquisitive cravings, they refused to compromise their Hebrew identity by indulging in food or drink associated with idolatry. Daniel *“would not defile himself”* with royal delicacies or Babylonian wines.¹⁶

Far from parental controls or rabbinical oversight, Daniel and his friends distinguished themselves on a self-restricted diet.¹⁷ They feared God enough to risk royal scrutiny and personal inconvenience. This unconventional diet of vegetables and water proclaimed a powerful message in a pagan culture; it honored God's priority for holiness based on sacred tradition. Using food and drink, these four young men proclaimed their devotion and unmistakable loyalty to God. The outcome spoke louder than words.

At the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food. (Daniel 1:15 NAS)

This testimony from their youth added strength and courage to their faith as they withstood the threat of a fiery furnace and the lion's den. Their authentic devotion and spiritual loyalty paved the way for God's miraculous intervention.

¹⁶ Daniel 1:8

¹⁷ Daniel 1:12-16

Adding Faith to Wisdom

Some plants, animals, insects, fish, and birds are not fit for consumption because they are contaminated, poisonous, or prone to infection by pathogens. Some ingredients are toxic and may be harmful when ingested, especially for an unborn baby or developing child. Credible danger informs dietary prudence as we draw near to God and consult His wisdom.

Paul clarified the abstinence decree issued by the Council in Jerusalem. He stressed responsible eating habits for the sake of an ongoing spiritual influence. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul asserts that abstinence from certain foods may not be essential for everyone—depending on the faith of the eater. Paul wrote:

One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only [as opposed to meat sacrificed to idols]. (Romans 14:2 NAS)

Faith governs and adjusts personal preferences. It helps regulate our diet as we ask our Heavenly Father for “daily bread” and gratefully eat His provision.

*Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not **eat from faith**; for whatever is not from faith is sin. (Romans 14:22-23 NKJ)*

I [Paul] know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. (Romans 14:14 NAS)

Each person carries a solemn responsibility to evaluate what he or she eats and drinks in the context where they find themselves. Abiding under God’s scrutiny, it’s a matter of conscience based on personal insight and spiritual maturity. We feed our body as the temple of the Holy Spirit and as we influence others.

So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. (Romans 14:12 NAS)

With that said, abstinence from food and drink may or may not be necessary, depending on the circumstance. This issue is not regarding right and wrong eating standards; it is a matter of helping others who may be weak. We each have a responsibility to abstain from anything that will:

- Cause others to stumble
- Offend others
- Weaken others

Paul reframes the focus on God’s grace rather than Hebraic law. He wrote:

Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. (Romans 14:20-21 NAS)

Both strong and weak exist in the church. The strong possess:

- Faith in God’s ability to cleanse food tainted by idolatry
- Confidence in God’s word to activate dietary freedom
- Wisdom from above for discerning healthy options
- Faith in God’s power to overcome a temptation to over eat or drink
- Assurance in God’s love regardless of dietary performance

The weak may possess:

- A tendency for gluttony or drunkenness (fears temptation)
- An insecure body image (fears rejection)
- Misinformed nutritional preferences

This weak-strong tension requires ongoing evaluation. Preventing a weaker believer from stumbling is far more important than dietary liberty.

*Therefore let us **pursue** the things which make for peace and **the things by which one may edify another.** (Romans 14:19 NKJ)*

As always, God scrutinizes the motive of the eater more than the ingredients in their diet. May our choice of food reflect faith not fear and gratitude not guilt. May we demonstrate love and peace rather than criticism and condemnation.

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. (Romans 15:1 NAS)

Previous Chapter: The Pergamon Altar Food War and Famine

Next Chapter: Eat for Strength Pray for Daily Bread

[Home](#)

[Why Connect with God for Strength](#)

[How to Connect with God for Strength](#)

[Sources of Strength](#)