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Elizabeth Snyder, M.A.
snyder@southern.edu

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Biblical Foundations for Nutrition and an Abundant Life

Elizabeth A. Snyder

Southern Adventist University

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to look at what the Bible says about the significance of nutrition, its effect on health, and the benefits of a Christian-worldview on nutritional wellbeing. With the help of the Holy Spirit, nutrition teachers need to connect the science with the Biblical foundation God has given us in His word. While it is crucial to remember that salvation is through Christ alone, it is wise to recognize the connection between diet and frontal lobe function, where analytical, moral decisions are made. Studying and understanding what the Bible says about the original diet, clean vs. unclean meat, not consuming blood or animal fat, Daniel's diet, the use of wine, the concept of moderation, and the enjoyment of food all help formulate practical dietary guidelines. These recommendations are valuable; however, knowing God's constant, unconditional love is the key to real happiness. Comprehending this foremost Biblical principle builds self-esteem, camaraderie, self-control, and contentment, and also helps deal with failure—all of which help avoid and/or manage eating disorders and other health problems. God's love, as shown in the Bible, provides the foundation for living a holy, healthy and happy life, helping others find it too.

Biblical Foundations for Nutrition, God's Grace, and an Abundant Life

Most human beings want to live a long, healthy, happy, meaningful and rewarding life. Millions buy into the supplement industry in hopes of improving the length and quality of living. Much is spent on the comforts of life and various luxuries available. Even those who sacrifice their lives for a cause, hope for a better life later. How can we help our students find and live an “abundant life” and make the subject we teach applicable? The purpose of this paper is to look at what the Bible says about the impact of nutrition on holiness, its effect on health, and the benefits of a Biblical-worldview on overall wellbeing.

This paper will be divided into the Biblical foundation for: Nutrition and Holiness, Nutrition and Health, and Nutrition and Happiness. The first section will discuss how holiness depends on keeping the mind open and attentive to the Holy Spirit. While recommendations to eat nutritiously, and get adequate rest are valuable, it is crucial to remember that salvation is through Jesus alone—not diet. The Bible teaches to avoid judging others' dietary habits, to help those just learning about God's love, and to use nutrition for good. The second section will talk about the Biblical guidelines for health. Topics will include: the original diet, clean vs. unclean meat, the prohibition of blood and animal fat, the use of wine, Daniel's diet, moderation and the enjoyment of food. The final part will deal with the Bible's pathway for genuine happiness. Experiencing God's love, sharing it, developing will power, dealing with failure and finding confidence in Christ will all be covered in relationship to nutrition.

Nutrition and Holiness

The Bible teaches that humans were created “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27 New International Version). With Adam and Eve’s disobedience, that image was marred. Thankfully, God sent his Son to die in our place and rescue mankind (John 3:16, 17). Although we are still imperfect reflections of His holiness and must rely on His merits for our salvation, we are to take care of our physical bodies. Under inspiration, Paul tells us, “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God. You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). This places a responsibility on Christians to prioritize keeping the body and mind strong and vibrant to receive His input and reveal His holy character, not as a means to salvation, but because we accept that we belong to God. Practicing wholesome eating patterns and a healthy lifestyle (sunlight, fresh air, exercise, water, rest, temperance and trust in divine power) help maintain a clear mind, fostering a stronger connection with the Holy Spirit, and demonstrate the immense value we place on what Christ did for us.

Eat Nutritiously

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” is an astute Biblical principle. Reflecting the character of God is the greatest way to glorify Him. This is best seen when our mind—especially the frontal lobe (analytical and moral center of the brain) is alert and receptive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. We can

help obtain peak brain function by following a healthy lifestyle. Blood is circulated better when the body is trained (exercised in fresh air and sunlight regularly), the blood is appropriately fluid, and the arteries are not clogged with plaque. While exercise can be variable and blood viscosity quickly changed, plaque build-up is not so easily altered. It takes many years to build up and is very slowly reversed. Young people need to see that what they do while they are young has an impact on their arteries and ultimately spiritual discernment. Blood vessels don't just suddenly plug up. People of all ages can slow the accumulation of plaque and enjoy clarity of frontal lobe thinking with a prudent diet and lifestyle. Even occasional indulgences have short-term effects on the brain. Fatty meals elevate chylomicrons (fat carriers in the blood) for several hours making the blood more viscous, slowing blood flow (Sepowitz, 1981, p. 89). Dehydration slows circulation as well.

Blood glucose levels that climb too high or stay up for longer than optimal periods impede brain function as well, especially in the problem-solving, decision-making, and memory areas of the brain (Vera Novak, 2011). Low blood sugars wreak havoc as well. Food choices dramatically affect this in diabetics and borderline or pre-diabetics. Children are also very vulnerable to blood sugar swings. Multiple studies have shown loss of memory (Sugar and Human Behavior, 2015), analytical ability, self-control, and positive attitude when blood sugar is not in the normal range (Sizer, 2014, p. 135). While low blood sugar can be raised to normal in about 15 minutes, the declined intellectual function can take an additional 45 to 75 minutes to recover (Nedley, 1999, p. 274). When rational aptitude is compromised, so is receptiveness to Spiritual things—they use the same part of the brain. Consumption of large amounts of sugary drinks,

typical in the American diet (like soft drinks, cola, sweet tea, and even fruit juice), or simply overeating, contribute to exaggerated blood sugar swings and increased blood and liver fats. These are correlated with increased clogging of the arteries, which over time decrease blood flow to the brain (Sizer, 2017, p. 157, 440). Students need to become aware of the connection between what they eat and the way they think now and in the future.

Get Adequate Sleep

Solomon's wisdom from God tells us "In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves" (Psalm 127:2). This basically says working too much is futile and sleep is a gift to be cherished. Jesus Himself counseled the apostles to "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" (Mark 6:31). He valued the importance of rest. Research today confirms the negative consequences of sleep deprivation. Even a one-hour sleep restriction reduces the brain capacity of children, especially on tasks that require high processing in the prefrontal cortex. (Molfese, 2013, p. 332) This is the area of the brain where analytical, moral thoughts are processed. Tantrums are common in tired children. Although adults seem to hide sleep deprivation better, any sleep loss could reduce one's capacity to see the importance of spiritual things. JT Arnedt, of Queen's University in Ontario, Canada, showed that 18.5 and 21 hours of wakefulness caused similar driving errors to those with 0.05 and 0.08% blood alcohol concentration, respectively (Arnedt, 2002). A rested mind is much quicker in making decisions that require analysis. Kuo also found that moderate sleep deprivation (17 – 19 hours without sleep) impaired performance. His results showed impairment of both cognitive and motor tests by as much or more than

when subjects had a blood alcohol content of 0.05% (considered as impaired driving). Their response speeds were as much as 50% slower. With longer sleep deprivation (up to 28 hours), performance was as poor as if they had blood alcohol levels of 0.1% (Kuo, 2001, p. 180). Legally drunk in all states is 0.08 according to the Blood Alcohol Level Chart (Web, 2016). Lack of sleep even renders the tired person unable to determine how tired they really are. Robert Strickgold, associate professor of Psychology at Harvard Medical School, said it well: “The first part of your brain that turns off with sleep deprivation is the little part that says, ‘I’m not performing so well.’” (Strickgold, 2008) Not recognizing tiredness and subsequent poor choices is a dangerous setup.

Accept Salvation Through Jesus

It is essential to remember that while nutrition can play a significant role in keeping the mind and body fit for discerning God’s will, it is not the source of, nor the qualification for salvation. “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit because anyone who serves God in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men” (Romans 14:17). Joel reassures us that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Joel 2:32)—not just those with clear frontal lobes. Paul reminds us that “it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:28). Our salvation is through Jesus Christ alone—not by how well we can control our food choices and intake. A prudent diet is simply a means to improve the quality of life here and as a result be better able to help others.

Avoid Judging

Dietary preferences should not be a reason to judge others. Jesus told us, “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye” (Matthew 7:1-3)?

Sometimes tension exists between those who are total vegetarians and those who are lacto-ovo vegetarians or meat eaters. This ought not to be. “Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else’s servant?” (Romans 14:1-4). Although this scripture was dealing with meat offered to idols, not herbivore vs. carnivore, the principle of not condemning one another is applicable.

In her book *Counsels On Diet and Foods*, Ellen White mirrors this biblical philosophy. “There is a real common sense in dietetic reform. The subject should be studied broadly and deeply and no one should criticize others because their practice is not, in all things, in harmony with his own. It is impossible to make an unvarying rule to regulate everyone’s habits, and no one should think himself a criterion for all. Not all can eat the same things. Foods that are palatable and wholesome to one person may be distasteful, and even harmful to another. Some cannot use milk, while others thrive on it. Some persons cannot digest peas and beans; others find them wholesome. For some the

coarser grain preparations are good food, while others cannot use them” (White, 1976, p. 198).

Help the weak

In addition to not judging, the Bible mentions multiple times that we need to help our weaker brothers who may not understand as much as we do about God’s grace. “Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating, destroy your brother for whom Christ died. . . Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin. We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves” (Romans 14:13-15:2). Again, it is likely referring to foods offered to idols, but the principle of putting the needs of others above our own appetite is invaluable. Paul discusses these same principles of not judging or being a stumbling block to others three times in 1 Corinthians alone (1 Corinthians 8:1-13; 1 Corinthians 9:19-27; 1 Corinthians 10:23-33). It must have been a real problem in Corinth where wisdom and logic permeated their culture. Are we that different in the U.S. today? Would we say, like Paul, “I will never eat meat again, so that

I will not cause my brother to fall into sin” (1 Corinthians 8:13). What a strong conviction to give up whatever it takes to help one’s neighbor!

Use Diet for Good

Paul also advised Timothy to avoid overly restrictive dietary rules. “The Spirit clearly says that in the later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the work of God and prayer” (1 Timothy 4:1-4). Forcing extreme food restrictions on others, beyond what God already forbade, is obviously not Paul’s idea of what God wants. The early Christians “ate their food with gladness and sincerity of heart” (Acts 2:46). Instead of a legalistic view of diet we should see food as a loving gift from God providing the means to help improve the enjoyment and quality of a person’s present and future life both physically and spiritually.

Nutrition and Health

Biblical values should be the foundation of any nutritional advice given by SDA Christians, especially dietitians. Many references in the Scriptures allude to dietary principles that could improve one’s health, even today. These ideologies need to be presented alongside the purpose for better health which is much more than just the absence of the Christian’s pain or poor health, but ultimately to glorify God—His wisdom, love and concern for every person on earth as demonstrated through caring and helpful Christ-like persons. The benefit of living longer in good

health goes way beyond prospects for enjoyment of life and lies in the greater opportunities to help others who are struggling in this world.

The Original Diet

Right from the beginning of this earth, God provided a plan for our dietary needs. He 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). This was before sin entered and the ground was cursed with thorns and thistles so it is hard to know which plants were originally in Eden. However, a plant-based diet was obviously ideal for the first couple and appears to have held after sin for it wasn’t until after the flood that God changed His provision to, “Everything that lives and moves will be food for you, just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it” (Genesis 9:3,4). Whether the plummeting human age after the flood was due to the addition of meat in the diet (potentially altering gene expression for multiple generations), the loss of crucial plant seeds (which promoted longevity), or some other factor is beyond our ability to know at present and reaches into speculation. It does make sense that what God planned from the beginning (plant-rich diet) is ideal for the body.

Science is discovering the wisdom of Biblical ideologies as more than ancient lore and students need to see this presented alongside the bare scientific facts. Promising relationships between diet and mortality should be looked into. Michael Orlich, et al found numerous studies that have identified dietary factors associated with mortality. “Those found to correlate with reduced mortality include nuts, fruit, cereal fiber, polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs), ω -3PUFAs, green salad, Mediterranean dietary

patterns, “healthy” or “prudent” dietary patterns, plant-based diet scores, plant-based low-carbohydrate diets, and vegetarian diets. Associations with increased mortality have been found for a high glycemic load, meat, red meat, processed meat, eggs, potatoes, increased energy intake, and animal-based low-carbohydrate diets” (Orlich, 2013, p. 1230). Vegetarians tend to consume more foods on the beneficial list and fewer foods from the harmful group listed above. It would thus be probable to find that vegetarian diets have been associated with reduced risk for a number of chronic diseases. This is usually the case. Unfortunately not all vegetarians eat nutritiously from the helpful foods, but rely on a highly refined diet. We need to let our young people know that health-minded vegetarians who consume primarily whole grains, vegetables, fruits, legumes, and nuts enjoy many impressive health advantages: they live almost 10 years longer on average than non-vegetarians (Fraser, 2001, p. 1645), they have a lower risk of obesity, heart disease, hypertension, and cancer, and their diet may help prevent cataracts, diabetes, osteoporosis, diverticular disease and gallstones (Sizer, 2017, p. 234). The Physicians Committee on Responsible Medicine, in their report on “Diet and Alzheimer’s Disease”, states that vegetarians have a reduced risk of dementia and Alzheimer’s disease compared to those who consume a heavy meat diet (high in saturated fat and cholesterol, yet low in fruits, vegetables and fiber) which seems to encourage formation of beta-amyloid plaques and causes oxidative damage to neurons.

VeganHealth.org compares the largest studies on vegans from the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States in their “Disease Markers of Vegetarians” report. These total vegetarians had the lowest total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, and triglycerides, yet similar HDL cholesterol compared to lacto-ovo and non-vegetarians.

Vegans had the lowest blood pressure, body mass index, and percent body fat as well.

Not all studies have found a relationship between vegetarian dietary patterns and mortality. In the first Adventist Health Study, (34,198 California Seventh-day Adventists), “vegetarian dietary patterns were associated with reduced all-cause mortality and increased longevity.” However, the European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition–Oxford (EPIC-Oxford) cohort study (47,254 participants) found no statistical difference between British vegetarians and non-vegetarians all-cause mortality. Some have postulated that because British eat more fruits and vegetables in general, whether vegetarian or not, and consume small amounts of meat, the difference between the two groups would be much smaller.

Whole plant foods that contain tens of thousands of phytochemicals (plant chemicals that provide taste, texture, aroma and color) are showing up as potential regulators of health (Sizer, 2017, p. 62-64). Meat does not contain these. Even processed plant foods like fruit juices, white flour and its products, white rice, and cornmeal or grits, contain very few phytochemicals when compared with their whole food counterparts. The original whole plant diet was not refined like the Standard American Diet (SAD), but naturally loaded with the phytochemicals needed to keep people strong and healthy. When people decide they want to be healthier, that is the opportunity to teach them about a wholesome whole foods diet.

Clean vs. Unclean meats

Levitical laws governing the use of meat that God approved are outlined in Leviticus 11 and repeated in Deuteronomy 14:3-21. They were even mentioned just before the flood when God instructed Noah to “Take with you seven of every kind of

clean animal, a male and its mate, and two of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, and also seven of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth” (Genesis 7:2,3). Instructions on which animals could be eaten were: “You may eat any animal that has a split hoof completely divided *and* that chews the cud” (Leviticus 11:3). Also, “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). Forbidden for food are the opposite of the two categories already mentioned as well as the birds of prey, anything that moves about on the ground, and all insects except the locusts, grasshoppers, crickets and katydids. Animals that died (vs. being killed to eat) were to be given to foreigners. (Leviticus 11)

The wisdom of categorizing creatures as clean vs. unclean may well be more important today as this planet becomes more and more polluted. The concentrations of pollutants increases as one progresses up the food chain. Consuming plants greatly reduces consumption of pesticides, fungicides, herbicides, heavy metals, hormones, antibiotics, and other toxins (Sizer, 2017, p. 491-99). Consuming herbivorous creatures (“clean”) would be better than consuming carnivores (“unclean”). Birds of prey and large fish have higher concentrations of harmful substances in them, as do bottom feeders (like clams, oysters, shrimp etc.) in the rivers, lakes and oceans where heavy metals settle and they consume waste from other creatures.

Prohibition of Blood and Fat

Another part of the Levitical laws stated that they were not to consume the blood or fat of the animal. “Do not eat any meat with the blood still in it” (Leviticus 19:26). The Lord said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites: ‘Do not eat any of the fat of cattle, sheep or

goats. The fat of an animal found dead may be used for any other purpose, but you must not eat it. Anyone who eats the fat of an animal from which an offering by fire may be made to the Lord must be cut off from his people. And wherever you live, you must not eat the blood of any bird or animal. If any one eats blood, that person must be cut off from his people” (Leviticus 7:22-27). The consequences were severe. Cutting off could mean the whole family line would die out. (*Andrews Study Bible*, 2010 p. 135) One wonders if this could be tied to epigenetics (factors that affect gene expression). Is there some factor in the blood or animal fat that mutates genes and affects future generations as well? This is yet unknown as the field of epigenetics is just opening up. However, one of the main current recommendations for a healthy circulation without the build-up of plaque is to reduce saturated fats from meat, poultry and dairy (Youngberg, 2012, p. 141) and consume more whole plant foods. An “atherogenic diet”—one that encourages plaque buildup is one that is high in saturated fats (animal fats and tropical oils) and trans fats (solid hydrogenated vegetable oils like margarine) and low in vegetables, fruits and whole grains (Sizer, 2017, p.438).

Use of Wine

Another dietary principle suggested in the Bible is averting the woes of wine. Numerous Proverbs and other texts warn against its use. “Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise” (Proverbs 20:1). “Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags” (Proverbs 23:20-21). “Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed

wine. Do not gaze at the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper” (Proverbs 23:29). “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap” (Luke 21:34). “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:17,18). “So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet (1 Thessalonians 5:6). Alcohol is a major cause of automobile accidents, violence, family problems and immorality even in those who are not “alcoholics”. Sounds like the Biblical advice is still applicable today.

Even if total abstinence from wine was not specifically mentioned in the Bible as a requirement for the general population, any wine was prohibited for the priests when they were working in the sanctuary. The Lord told Aaron, “Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, and that you may *teach* the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them by the hand of Moses” (Leviticus 10:8-11). The *reason* for no alcohol is as important as its prohibition: a clear mind to discern spiritual matters and wisely guide others. This was not only for priests of Bible times, but also for us today because we have been called to a

“holy” and “royal” priesthood (1 Peter 2:5 & 9). As followers of God, we are all priests on active duty.

In this same line, Daniel and his friends specifically requested water instead of wine (Daniel 1:3-21) implying that the healthiest diet avoids all alcohol. Total abstinence for three years helped them excel far beyond the others. “In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanterers in his whole kingdom” (Daniel 1:30) Enchanterers can also be translated as astrologers. These were both experts in the use of supernatural powers. One wonders if these were not the scientists of their day who had insight into how things worked in the body, mind, and natural world around them giving them the ability to advise and even predict outcomes beyond the average person. They were considered the wisest in the country, yet Daniel and his friends were “very much better” (Andrews Study Bible, 2010 p. 1110). Not only did adhering to the alcohol-free regime show their loyalty to their God, but also resulted in clearer, healthier minds, helping them be more in tune with God who gave them exceptional knowledge, skill and wisdom.

Current illustrations of the effect of alcohol could also help students understand the importance of not consuming alcohol for the maintenance of higher analytical, moral thought processes. Most know about the immediate deleterious effects on the brain and behavior, but are unaware of the more permanent consequences. An alcoholic’s brain is noticeably smaller, when compared with a non-alcoholic’s. Carol Paul measured the effect of alcohol on brain size while studying at Boston University of Public Health. She found a significant negative linear relationship between alcohol consumption and brain volume. She observed this at all levels of intake and was more pronounced in females.

Students should hear this from experts who perform autopsies or those who work with cadavers and actually observe shrunken, rattling alcoholic brains for even greater effect. Hopefully it would help steer young people away from the alcohol trap.

Daniel's Diet

In addition to drink, “Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies” (Daniel 1:8). This likely referred to forbidden foods outlined in the Torah such as meat from “unclean” species of animals (Genesis 7:2, 8-9, 20; Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14) and from improper slaughter and draining of blood (Genesis 9:4, Leviticus 17:10-12). In not defiling himself, Daniel probably also meant abstinence from food and drink that may have been offered to idols (Numbers 25:2). This might have included clean meats, dairy, eggs, rich desserts, pastries or any food he was not accustomed to eating. Instead he consumed a colorful whole foods diet, rich in phytochemicals (including pigments), known to enhance skin coloration. This may have helped them look healthier.

Many men equate a vegetarian diet with scrawny, weak muscles. However, for the court chief to notice they “looked healthier and better nourished” in just 10 days demonstrated that God blessed their decision to follow a plant-based diet, helping them develop strong physiques. Young men today need to be shown the benefits of Daniel’s diet. Segments of the video “Forks over Knives”, which interview a champion boxer and a strong firefighter, both total vegetarians with moderate size, well-defined muscles, can be used to show this. Although their muscles were not huge, they were incredibly strong.

Whenever planning a total vegetarian diet, Vitamin B₁₂ supplements should be included. We do not know what plant foods were available in Bible times so,

unfortunately, we cannot extrapolate that a total vegetarian diet would be adequate today. Vitamin B₁₂ is not in any plant foods currently, so care must be taken to include a B₁₂ supplement or fortified food when excluding meats, eggs and dairy products. Although some total vegetarians have maintained health for 3 years without a B₁₂ supplement, others have not. It is better to have guidelines encouraging B₁₂ supplementation to cover everyone's needs.

Moderation

One more very important dietary principle from the Bible is moderation. Solomon discovered this piece of wisdom and shared it. "In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness. Do not be over wicked and do not be a fool—why die before your time? It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes." (Ecclesiastes 7:15-18) There will be those who eat unhealthfully and live long—perhaps from good genes or simply not stressing too much. Sometimes trying to be so particular about every ingredient on a label and worrying excessively about food can be more detrimental than the minuscule amount of something one was trying to avoid. Too much stress has a greater negative impact than tiny amounts of a food. Also, recognition of our limitations to totally figure out life and food has value. God does not expect us to know everything. Solomon pointed this out too. "When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe man's labor on earth—his eyes not seeing sleep day or night—then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover

its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it” (Ecclesiastes 8:16,17).

Moderation in how much we work, whether studying nutrition or preparing food, is important. “And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man’s envy of his neighbor this too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. The fool folds his hands and ruins himself. Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind” (Ecclesiastes 3:4-6). Too much effort can be as problematic as none. Somewhere in the middle is best.

Solomon also gave practical advice on moderation in the food we eat. “Eat honey, my son, for it is good; honey from the comb is sweet to your taste.” (Proverbs 24:13) He goes on to say, “It is not good to eat too much honey.” (Proverbs 25:27) He does not promote abstinence from sugar, but temperance. Ellen White warns of excess too. “Sugar, when largely used is more injurious than meat” (White, 1948, p. 370).

Flexibility and wisdom to know what is most important in every day living fall hand in hand with moderation. The Bible does not promote hard and fast rules regarding when to eat or sleep, occasionally even going against what we would consider healthy. When Paul was preaching to the people at Troas, and Eutychus fell asleep and tumbled to his death from a third story perch, it was after midnight. This was because Paul was leaving the next day and had much to tell them. After raising Eutychus from the dead, “he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left” (Acts 20:11). They were eating after midnight and staying up all night talking! There are times when need trumps health habits—food, sleep or other temperance principles.

Enjoyment of food

The Biblical view of food is positive, not just a bunch of difficult prohibitions or concerns. Any dietary recommendation regarding God's intended use of food is for improving one's existence. It is also one of life's simple pleasures as illustrated by this text. "They ate their food with gladness and sincerity of heart." (Acts 2:46) Jesus gave the same principle from the opposite side when he told his disciples not to worry about what they would eat or drink (Luke 12:29). Ellen White also talks about the importance of making food enjoyable and not burdensome. "In teaching health reform, as in all other gospel work, we are to meet the people where they are. Until we can teach them how to prepare health reform foods that are palatable, nourishing and yet inexpensive, we are not at liberty to present the most advanced propositions regarding health reform diet." (White, 1942a, p.134, 135)

Nutrition and Happiness

Experiencing God's Love

A person's worldview can also affect health and quality of life. Biblical principles are the foundation for enjoying an abundant life, "The thief comes only to steal and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10) The devil wants to portray God as the robber with His restrictive rules taking all the fun out of living, and His high expectations for perfect behavior demolishing any hope of love and acceptance. Thankfully Paul reassures us that *all* were predestined to become like His Son and absolutely *nothing* can separate us from His love (Romans 8:28-39; Ephesians 1:5; 1 Timothy 2:4). God treasures us more than any human does or ever could. These words of affirmation need to be resonated in all our thoughts and interactions. "Believing comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." (Romans

10:17) Recharging in God's word each day is vital for remembering and trusting He cares. "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31,32). Our worth comes from Christ's valuing us, not from us valuing ourselves. This means it is dependent on the constant, unchanging foundation of Christ's love, not on our feelings. What could be more liberating than to know you are loved no matter what—even if not successful, beautiful, popular or powerful by our own criteria or the world's standards. One's self-esteem is not contingent on keeping ahead of the game but founded in Christ's unconditional love. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) What confidence and joy this brings! It is the most powerful tool in setting individuals free from the grip of feelings of inadequacy and insecurity, which are the foundation of most eating disorders. It is a weight-loss diet that typically triggers eating disorders. If people know/believe they are loved and accepted by God, they do not need to try quick diets. Making gradual changes away from unhealthy eating patterns would lead to more permanent improvements in diet and overall health and protect from the almost certain regain of lost pounds and the accompanying sense of failure that quick dieting ultimately delivers.

Sharing God's Love

Paul urges Christians to "encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Helping others see their true worth is one of the most rewarding experiences possible. We can befriend the downhearted, directing them to the Bible with its descriptions of God's amazing, unstoppable devotion and guidelines for a better life. Contemplating how God, Creator of the universe, loves each and every person on this earth is a source of strength beyond explanation that needs to be expressed through loving

actions towards others. While purposeful observance of Biblical guidelines for health improve one's own quality of life, even more importantly it increases the wonderful opportunities to fulfill our responsibility to be God's stewards in helping those who need to experience God's love (based on stewardship model of 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 mentioned earlier).

Developing Will Power

Regularly connecting with God through heartfelt prayer and searching the Scriptures help faith grow. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). The more we immerse ourselves in Christ's redeeming sacrifice and His promises, the more we learn to trust and obey Him—it's not a matter of our fluctuating feelings, but faith in who God is and what He has done for us. "Submit yourselves, then to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you" (James 4:7). "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him" (1 John 5:14,15). What amazing promises! In addition, we have a "high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses...who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15-16). Could we find better assurance than that? We have a powerful advocate who has not only conquered every battle with sin, but is compassionate, wanting to help us overcome our struggles. He even gives guidelines on how to build the measure of faith all have been given. "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue—a *desire to do what is right*, to virtue knowledge—*learning what is good for us*, to knowledge self-control—*effort to do what is best*, to self-control perseverance—

prolonged effort in forming good habits, to perseverance godliness—where good habits become more natural, to godliness brotherly kindness—helping others learn to conquer their difficulties, to brotherly kindness, love—seeing things through God’s loving eyes” (1 Peter 1:5-7 italicized words added). God wants us to take these steps and “encourage one another daily” (Hebrews 3:13). Will power can be bolstered when we have a good friend who encourages us and to whom we are accountable.

Dealing With Failure

Sometimes, even with help from a friend, failure in weight management or self-control ensues. What then? Instead of heading into depression, aggravating even poorer eating habits, try turning to the One who cares supremely. Ellen White has one of the most loving, encouraging statements for such times of hopelessness. “There are those who have known the pardoning love of Christ, and who really desire to be children of God, yet they realize that their character is imperfect, that their life faulty, and they are ready to doubt whether their hearts have been renewed by the Holy Spirit. To such, I would say, do not draw back in despair. We shall often have to bow down and weep at the feet of Jesus because of our shortcomings and mistakes; but we are not to be discouraged. Even if we are overcome by the enemy, we are not cast off, not forsaken and rejected by God. No, Christ is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Said the beloved John “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, *the Righteous One*” (1 John 2:1). “And do not forget the words of Christ ‘The Father Himself loveth you’ (John 16:27). He desires to restore you to Himself, to see His own purity and holiness reflected in you. And if you will but yield yourself to Him, ‘He

that hath begun a good work in you will carry it forward to the day of Jesus Christ' (Philippians 1:6). Pray more fervently; believe more fully. As we come to distrust our own power, let us trust the power of our Redeemer, and we shall praise Him who is the health of our countenance" (White, 1977, p. 51, 52).

Encouragement can also be found by observing how Bible heroes have battled with what seemed like unfulfilled prayer requests. Paul said, "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me. . . Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." . . . Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities. . . for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Jesus, the ultimate example, prayed agonizingly, "nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).

Unfortunately, some misuse God's promises, replacing God's dependability with presumption. We should not make God out to be some sort of fairy godmother who grants our every request. Sometimes He lets us experience the results of our choices and sometimes we ask mistakenly. "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:3). Even when we think that our intentions are pure, we don't always see immediate results. God, on the other hand, sees the end from the beginning and looks out for our eternal good. Helping us explicitly as we ask may not be what is best for us. Perhaps the success that would be experienced would increase selfishness or pride—ultimately worse than any illness, eating disorder, or difficulty. In addition, confidence in God's promises should

not be limited in time, as we know it. When He says that with faith as a mustard seed we can move mountains (Matthew 17:20); those mountains could be moved in multiple ways. Most think of a miraculous immediate event; however, God could use bulldozers to move mountains as well. He is the one who made man's mind to be able to invent such equipment. The real point here is that some changes take persistence and/or help from others. Habits are not easy to change so we should encourage each other and keep asking for God's help on a frequent basis. Slow progress does not necessarily mean that faith is inadequate.

In addition, when Paul says, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13), we should read it in context. The verse before says, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want" (Philippians 4:12). What a valuable lesson about accepting God's answers to our requests for experiencing will power—contentment no matter the outcome of those appeals.

Finding Confidence from Christ

Victory over every sin is not about our ability, but about Jesus and what he has already done. Many Bible champions struggled with imperfections, yet God used them. Isaiah wailed, "Woe to Me!". . . "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, The Lord Almighty" (Isaiah 6:5). Just before the angel, Gabriel, came to Daniel to tell him he was greatly beloved and help him understand a vision, he said, "While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the Lord my

God...Gabriel...talked with me” (Daniel 9:20-22). Paul also recognized his sinfulness when he said, “Christ came to save sinners—of whom I am the worst” (1 Timothy 1:15,16), and, “Not that I have already been made perfect, but I press on . . . ” (Philippians 3:12). Paul didn’t expect perfection of others either. He wrote, “I implore Euodia and I implore Syntche to be of the same mind in the Lord. And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life (Philippians 4:3). He was already considering the women, who couldn’t get along, among those who were saved. He supported this view in Hebrews as well when he said, “by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are *being made holy*” (Hebrews 10:14). These examples help us realize we are not alone in our struggles, and that we will all be struggling with imperfections throughout our lives, freeing us to be more sympathetic with those who are also trying.

Ellen White reminds us, “We are not to look within for evidence of our acceptance of God. We shall find there nothing but that which will discourage us. Our only hope is in “looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). There is everything in Him to inspire with hope, with faith, and with courage. He is our righteousness, our consolation and rejoicing . . . As we rely upon His merits we shall find rest and peace and joy (White, 1942b, p. 199, 200).

Recognizing God’s amazing love and gift of salvation elevates our self-worth, brings peace of mind, gives us confidence in spite of hardship and motivates us to want to reach out and help others discover the reason for our joy. We do not serve a God who gives us everything we think we may need when we want it, but helps us develop

patience and discover contentment with what we have and whatever circumstances we are in. These concepts can be brought out in worship talks and inter-twined in the appropriate lectures. Words of encouragement on diet analysis projects turned in can help students feel the non-condemning grace and encouragement God wants for them. We can all live abundantly, basking together in God's love.

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