

How to Nourish Both Your Body and Your Spirit

Our health is a means of praise.

It's easy to say. It rolls off the tongue. But my motto is more than a line in a speech. It's more than a tweet or a Facebook status update.

Of course, our body is only one part of our overall spiritual health. But as some of you have seen (and as I have certainly experienced firsthand), without our health, we just aren't going to be as effective in all the aspects of our lives that God needs us to be active in—our churches, our families, our jobs, our communities. Good health extends our ability to make an impact for the cause of Christ. Plainly said, God doesn't need our health to get His message around the world; we do.

Let me ask you something. What if nobody saw what you looked like? Would you work as hard as you do to keep your body in shape? Would you judge yourself as harshly when you looked in the mirror? Would you still watch what you ate, and would you make an effort to exercise? For some people, the answer is an easy yes. They have learned to love exercise for heaven's sake, and they dig into a plate of healthy foods with delight and anticipation.

And then there are those who find making healthy choices a daily struggle. For many, eating well can be a challenge because they equate indulgence, fulfillment and satisfaction only with a plate of greasy, gooey decadence. But in my book *The PrayFit Diet*, I show you a different way to approach eating and food.

With the PrayFit Diet, you can learn a flexible, creative way to put together delicious, filling meals that will nourish not only your body but also your spirit. And what's more, you'll

find the resolve—and even more than that, the *will* and the *desire*—to eat foods that will help you lose weight and gain health, because you'll finally see the connection between faith and food. Just remember that the byproducts of your effort don't determine the worth of that effort. What determines the worth of our objective to eat better for ourselves, our spouses, kids and friends is the one for whom we eat.

☒ Friends, Jesus gives our lives meaning. He's the point of the story, the point of this book, and the point of our health we don't want to miss. He's *why*. For that reason alone, we place our trust in Him, and we pledge to Him our time, our money and our precious loved ones. And yes, we should also pledge to Him our health, our commitment to living a healthy life—for His glory, not ours.

The Bible reminds us that God sees only the heart. It also demands that we honor the body. That's not a contradiction. It's a priority list.

Taking care of the body through balanced eating is only *one* way to thank the Lord for seeing only our hearts. Every believer has been called to fulfill his or her purpose, but not one purpose calls for a neglect of health; not one. But if possible, forget the idea that when we're healthy, we're better at work. Try to ignore the fact that when we take care of ourselves, we're better for our families.

Block all that out for a second. Focus on this short and simple command: *Honor God with your body*. Vain, you say? Petty? Too temporary? It *would* be if it were my idea. But it isn't. It's His.

Once we realize that honoring the body is God's will, the result should be an unwavering, lifelong commitment to achieving that goal. But how to do that has proven to be problematic for so many of us.

Health Can Be a Faith Battle

Now, when I say problematic, I'm speaking from experience, because over the last few years my health has been a faith battle. In fact, a couple of years ago, I wrote this in my journal:

I never predicted such weeks like this. If I ever get up ... if I ever hope and rise and stand ... if I ever smile, truly smile and speak and write and encourage, make no mistake, it won't be because I kept fighting. It won't be because of my inner man, my deep faith or some gut-summoned passion of belief. No, I have none of that. If I ever get better, it will only be by the mercy and unbelievable, inconceivable grace of my dear God.

Indeed. See, while traveling, writing, and speaking, I was hit with two debilitating infirmities: one of the spine and the other of the colon. I came home to begin medical treatment, and over the next three years I lost 50 pounds of healthy tissue—not the good kind of weight loss. To help put it in perspective, I weighed more at age 14 than I did at 40.

For years I tried to scale the walls of my pit, hand over hand. I was the perfect patient with an impeccable health ethic. But like many of you, I let go of the rope to find myself on my back, looking up at the impossible, knowing that God's grace is the only answer. I tell you, of all the things our health exposes, our frailty is one of them; a show of hands of those who can agree.

How many of you reading this today are dealing with unforeseen health issues that you're struggling to overcome? And how many of you are dealing with preventable issues? Whoever you are and whatever your needs, are you ready to conquer them? Well, trust me when I tell you that I know you can. How do I know? Because no matter what you're facing, He stops in His tracks for us when we call.

A few hours before my third surgery in three years, my wife, Loretta, and I were reading together about the blind man sitting on the side of the road in Jericho. His name was Bartimaeus. When Bartimaeus heard it was Jesus who was walking by, he began to shout out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Over and over he yelled. Despite being rebuked by others, he continued to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And it's the reaction of Jesus that touched my heart that morning of the surgery. The Bible says that when Jesus heard him shouting, He stopped walking. Some Bible versions say that He "stood still," and other translations say He "stopped in His tracks."

Well, friends, although I'm not blind, I was begging. I didn't want the Lord to take another sweet step. Seconds before surgery, a nurse tried small talk, but I'm afraid she sounded more like the teacher in the Charlie Brown cartoons. They transferred me to the operating table, which, for all I knew, sat on the side of that old, dusty road in Jericho. When the doctor said he would see me in recovery, before the anesthesia did its work, I slowly turned my head to the side, and as tears streamed from my shut eyes, I stole a line from Bartimaeus and fell asleep.

But the fact that you're reading this article means that Jesus stopped in His tracks for me. He stood still to hear a prayer. You know, when Bartimaeus received his sight, the very first thing he did was follow Jesus along the road. I suppose he figured the best test of his new peepers was to focus on the one who had finally made them work. I planned on doing the very same thing. And helping you gain sight of your faith as it relates to food is my highest priority.

*This is the first of a three-part series. This article was adapted from The PrayFit Diet: The Revolutionary, Faith-Based Plan to Balance Your Plate and Shed Weight by **Jimmy Peña**. Copyright © 2014 by PrayFit, LLC. Reprinted by permission of Touchstone, a Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.*