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Principles from Proverbs on Gluttony

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Series: Living Lessons from Proverbs



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Principles from Proverbs on Gluttony

It has been said that the most crucial test of a man's character comes as he slides his tray through a cafeteria line. Only then does the real YOU emerge! A voice whispers to your heart of hearts, "Is your life one of discipline, or degradation? Of self-control, or self-satisfaction? Do you maintain poise under pressure, or does your wisdom evaporate over éclairs, and buckle at a blueberry cobbler? Does it crumble at cheesecake? Erode over pie alamode? Do you crater at the thought of one more 'pertater'?" Cafeterias are deadly.

It's bad enough at a sit-down restaurant. You read the menu... and though your thought processes propose endless possibilities, three things inhibit you slightly.

First, you don't actually see the food, only verbal descriptions on the menu, and the most aggravating of adjectives doesn't churn the stomach juices to send the same signals as much as literally feasting your eyes on that prime rib resting comfortably in its own juices... or that cherry cobbler topped with the mound of whipped cream that looks like a caloric cloud come down from heaven. It's better not to see it! (It's better not to hear it, either: I got just this far in preparing this lesson yesterday, and I had to lay down my pencil and head for the fridge!)

Secondly, in sit-down restaurants, you do not have as many obvious choices or as much time. You usually don't order your dessert, for instance, until after you've stuffed yourself with crispy green salad, topped with chunky bleu cheese dressing; a juicy hamburger steak, capped with a crown of onions; and a baked potato wrapped in its own protective armor of foil to contain its mound of flavorful-but-unnecessary butter, chives, sour cream, and bacon bits. By then, even the German chocolate cake seems a trifle absurd! But in the cafeteria line, it's "Buy now; stuff later!" (So we do!)

Thirdly, at least in a sit-down restaurant, you can read the prices as you go, and even without slipping out your new slim-line calculator, you can add enough to know that enough's enough!

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But in the cafeteria line, no one I know has eyes good enough to see both the food AND the prices at the same time. The prices are usually on little bitty numbers set 'way back against a pale background that makes it look like a computer readout of the telephone book. So you just keep stackin' goodies on the tray, mumble an occasional, "This is for Aunt Emma; she's already at the table," and then stand paralyzed with fear as this woman with glazed eyes and fifty fingers sets fire to a computerized adding machine at the end of the line... She then turns your ticket upside down so you can't see it, argue, or put anything back, and sticks it to the outside of your water glass. With a calculated smile, she shoves you off into a sea of tables and proceeds to set her money machine smoking again!

The Bible says that before you do anything, count the cost; but cafeterias seem to be the exceptions to the rule! Now I'm not down on cafeterias, and this is not a lesson on restaurant management, but it is as easy a way as I know of to approach the subject of gluttony, using familiar surroundings to set the stage. At least for most of us, the more choices we are given, and the fewer restraints that are placed upon us, the more we eat!! Those "all you can eat" restaurants are another example. Whenever the restraint of so-much-food-for-so-much-money is removed, we would rather die than diet. Even if we wind up too stuffed to sleep, or too full to function, we eat, and eat, and eat, and eat. So like it or not, I guess at least some of us need this lesson on gluttony.

The title is "Principles from Proverbs on Gluttony." Our outline for this lesson and the next will take this form:

- I- From Gluttony to Godliness
 - A- Gluttony defined
 - B- Gluttony deplored
 - C.-Gluttony described (practical principles from Proverbs on gluttony)
- II- From Much to Manna (the God-controlled appetite)
 - A- Problems
 - B- Principles
 - C- Parallels (from the wilderness)
- III- From Feasting to Fasting (the logical end of self-control)
 - A- Resources
 - B- Reasons
 - C- Results of fasting

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So, now that I have intentionally started the engine of your appetites churning with this detailed description of the “Koinonia Cafeteria Caper,” we must deal with those appetites properly, as we submit to “Practical Principles from Proverbs on Gluttony”!

Gluttony is ungodly; the Scriptures are plain on this. Eating is not ungodly, and enjoying what you eat is not ungodly; but gluttony is ungodly. So we must ask the question: What is gluttony? We must answer, first of all, from the dictionary. My dictionary (and I have set fire to this page) says that to glut is “to fill beyond capacity; to satiate; to eat excessively.” Well, I couldn’t relate to that, so I went on. A glutton, it says, is “one who eats or consumes immoderately.” (In other words, one who dines with all the grace and discretion of Miss Piggy!) Gluttony, then, my trusty word wonder goes on to say “is excess in eating or drinking.”

The Scriptural definition goes at least one step further as we shall see in a few moments, for God’s perspective of life always goes one step beyond the behavior to the motivation. So, Scripturally gluttony is “an act of rebellion to the disciplines of God, culminating in the loss of self-control.” In other words, gluttony from God’s perspective is “the stomach in control of the mind.” Now for the sake of remembering this principle, I am going to give you a somewhat childish illustration of the problem, hoping it will help you form a workable check-and-balance system in your mind.

Imagine, if you will, that your stomach is a child, a somewhat rebellious child. Imagine also that every time you have a struggle (deciding what to or what not to eat), your rebellious appetite is crying out to its parent (your mind), “Feed me! Feed me!” “Daddy, can I have that, Daddy, huh? Huh? Daddy, I want more! Daddy, gimme what she has!” Your job in controlling your eating habits, then, is exactly the same as it is in controlling your little children. Sometimes you say, “yes”; sometimes you say, “no.” It all depends not on what your stomach says (or even how loud it cries), but rather it all depends on what YOU decide is best for it.

For instance, in that infamous cafeteria line again, let’s say that you pass the blueberry cream pie with the chocolate raisins and fried peanuts on top. As you do, the little child that lives in your stomach whispers to you, “Daddy, Mommy, I need blueberry pie. I must have blueberry pie! Without blueberry pie, I may die!” Do you give this spoiled, self-centered child that lives in you, this rebellious appetite, whatever it wants? Or do you quietly answer it,

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“Sorry, son, no blueberry pie this trip. It’s not what you need. (The seven helpings of mashed potatoes will have to do.)” By saying “no,” you have acted wisely. You have spoken with authority and ended a problem, because if the Word is in control of the will (that’s self-control), then the stomach can’t call the shots, or you will have a conflict of interest.

So there you have what gluttony is, and there you have what self-control is. Let me remind you that the Scripture is very clear; God deplores gluttony. The reason is simple: it wrestles control of a key area of your life away from the Holy Spirit and exercises your will in response to an appetite. Remember, scriptural self-control is the will responding to the Word over the objections of the emotions and the appetites; and God wants to control all of man’s appetites.

It is not a new problem, though, is it? In the Garden of Eden, Eve was wrestling with a decision in God’s cafeteria line. He had instructed her, “as you go through the line, you can have anything you want, but that one item in the fruit section.” Remember? “That’s off-limits. You don’t need it; it’s harmful. You can have anything else you want.” Now that sounds like a pretty reasonable diet to me. But along comes Satan, and he sidles up alongside Eve in the line and says, “Mmmmm! Doesn’t that fruit look good? Wow! That’s what you ought to order!” “Oh, no, my flaky snake,” she replies. “I can’t have that! That’s a no-no!”

“That’s a what?,” the slimy serpent answered. “Who said so? Did God say that? God didn’t say that. If He did, He’s trying to keep the best away from you! Who’s in charge of your diet anyway, Eve,” he went on, “you or God? If you want the fruit, take the fruit. After all, you only go around once in life.” (Sound familiar? He still uses the same logic today, even in the cafeteria line.)

Well, you know the story. Eve ordered the forbidden fruit, offered a spoonful to her foolish mate, man broke his first diet, and the result has been generation after generation seeking to do its own thing, seeking to satisfy its own appetites with no restraints from God.

Satan used the same tactics to tempt Jesus in the wilderness, too. “Say, Jesus,” he asked. “I’ll bet You’re hungry; You haven’t eaten in forty days. I’ve got an idea! See those rocks? Why not turn them into bread? I know it’s not what God wants You to do, but who’s in charge of what You eat anyway? You or Your Father?” Jesus answered and said, “It is written...” and that took care of

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that. God wants to control what we eat... not take the fun out of it. He wants to place one more area of our lives under HIS control. For whenever and wherever He's in control, life demonstrates self-control, and a self-controlled life brings glory to God.

So that's what gluttony is, and that's how God feels about it. But what does the Bible have to say about it? And in particular, what does the Book of Proverbs have to say about it? Let's look this morning for a few moments at the practical principles which Proverbs gives us about gluttony. We will be looking at six passages of Scripture which cover a total of ten verses. Principles from Proverbs to teach us how to eat. Let's take a look!

We will simply take them in the order they fall. We'll look first at Proverbs 13:25. There it says this:

The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul: but the belly of the wicked shall want. (Proverbs 13:25)

Berkeley translates it this way:

The wicked [man's] stomach never has enough.

Another translator words it:

The just man eats his fill; the godless craves and never has enough.

The Living Bible paraphrases it:

The good man eats to live; the evil man lives to eat.

I believe you could paraphrase it this way, though, and be accurate.

Does food rule your spirit? Do you never have enough? That's a sure sign that God's not in control of your life.

Some key principles emerge from this one verse of Scripture that ought to set the very tone of our study. Let's look at them.

Principle 1: There is a correlation between the stomach and godliness. Where food is concerned, the passage says, God's man will respond one way. The life under Satan's control will respond another. So how you respond to stuffing yourself will determine who is in control of your life at that moment.

Principle 2: Knowing when to quit is a godly characteristic.

The just man eats his fill and stops; the godless craves, but never has enough. (Proverbs 13:25)

You say, "Oh, if I only knew the will of God!" Well, you do in one

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area. You say, “What is the will of God?” Well, the will of God is to eat what you need and quit. You say, “Let’s go on.”

Principle #3: You cannot really satisfy the appetites of the flesh. The more you have, the more you want.

You see, this isn’t just true of eating, but it is true of the soul. You don’t eat until you’re satisfied; you eat until God is satisfied, because the more you have, the more you want. So just for good measure, let’s rerun Proverbs 13:25 back again in slow motion.

Does food rule your spirit? Do you never have enough? That’s a sure sign God’s not in total control of your life.

The next stop on our proverbial pilgrimage through the village of Hunger takes us to Proverbs chapter 23. Let me read you the first eight verses:

When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee:

And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite.

Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat.

Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom.

Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven. (Like your paycheck!)

Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou dainty meats:

For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee.

The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy sweet words. (Proverbs 23:1-8)

Now let me paraphrase that passage for you: listen.

If you can’t control your appetite, stay away from the table of powerful, wealthy men. You’d be better off to cut your throat than to fall into the trap of coveting their food or their lifestyle. What will happen is this: You’ll embarrass yourself by eating too much, or feel obligated to your host, or begin to wish you could afford food like that, too. Don’t long to be rich so you can eat like a king. Riches have wings! Just when you think they’re yours, they fly away like an eagle. So be careful what you eat, and who you eat with. It isn’t what a man serves you that counts; and so often they’ll wine you and dine you only to use you. And all that rich food becomes the bread of deceit and only makes you sick.

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So gluttony not only involves how much you eat, but what you eat and why you eat it. In the case of this passage, these principles emerge: If you can't control your appetite, don't accept an invitation with Daddy Warbucks or someone that's of prominence or position for three reasons. (1) You may make a fool of yourself and eat too much. (You say, "Well, not me!") (2) You may get yourself obligated. (3) You may develop a spirit of discontentment and begin to covet rich and elegant food. God says Satan will use food as leverage in your life to make a fool out of you. Unless your stomach is under the control of the mind, you may well become the fool of the year.

Proverbs 23:21 is our next stop. There we read this:

For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.

A good paraphrase might be this:

How would you like to be poor? Here's a sure-fire formula. Drunkenness will get you there; so will overeating. Both will clothe you with drowsiness, dull your senses, kill your drive, and insure you of failure.

Now you don't get many guarantees like that in life. In other words, if you want to have an unsuccessful afternoon, pig out at lunch. You'll be miserable, you'll get sleepy, your mind will operate like a transmission that's low on fluid, and you'll never get where you're going. The principles—try these: drunkenness and gluttony have the following things in common.

- 1- Both are evidences of the loss of self-control.
- 2- They both produce drowsiness and listlessness.
(Wake up!)
- 3- They both follow a road that leads to poverty.

In other words, while your blood goes to your stomach, your head goes out to lunch. Alcohol, marijuana, gluttony, anything that dulls the senses and produces drowsiness will kill your ability to succeed. That's what it says. Verse 19 and 20 then tell us what to do. It says,

Hear, my son, and be wise; and guide thine heart in the way.

Be not among winebibbers, among riotous eaters of the flesh (loose translation). Pay attention, son; don't make friends or hang around with those who eat too much or drink too much. They'll end up on the junk pile of life, and they just might take you with them.

(Proverbs 23:19,20)

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So add one more principle: Don't make gluttons or drunkards your friends. It's a sure-fire trip to failure.

The next one says this:

Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee,
lest thou be filled therewith and vomit it. (Proverbs 25:16)

The NIV says:

If you find honey, eat just enough—too much of it, and vomit.

The Living Bible says,

Too much of it will make you sick!

Now what does it mean by honey? Honey represents the sweet delicacies of life, the things you sit around drooling over. A Baskin-Robbins double-dip cone with one watermelon pistachio and one chocolate-chip-pickle marmalade, or whatever it is you dream of. (You may be a little weird.) Or that hot fudge sundae with the double fudge and the marshmallow cream sauce on the top. Or the box of chocolates like Susie gave Jenny last Christmas with the pink gooey stuff inside. You see, the problem is moderation. We're all suckers for sweets, so we become "sugarholics" and the delicacies become destruction. One way to paraphrase chapter 25, verse 16 would be like this:

Go easy on the desserts. Too much will make you sick, and
make a fool out of you. Exercise self-control. (Proverbs 25:16)

Derek Kidner adds this note to it in his commentary—I love it. It says, "Beyond God's enough, lay not ecstasy, but nausea." So that's our next principle: Go easy on the delicacies. Too much will make you sick.

Is there a spiritual principle here? I think there is, and we'll call it the "Honey Principle." Now we don't have to use our imaginations, just go to verse 27 of Proverbs 25. It says this:

It is not good to eat too much honey. So for men to search out
their own glory is not glory. He that hath no rule over his own
spirit is like a city, broken down without walls.

(Proverbs 25:27)

The Living Bible paraphrases verse 27:

Just as it's harmful to eat too much honey, so also it is bad to
think about all the honors they deserve! (Proverbs 25:27)

Another way to put it would be:

An insatiable appetite, void of self-control demonstrates an

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insatiable ego, void of humility, and a life that is vulnerable to attack.

The principle to ponder is this: There's a parallel between gluttony and humility. The man who stuffs himself may be feeding his ego as well.

Our last passage (and I'm sure you're glad of that) is found in chapter 30, verse 21. It says:

For three things the earth is disquieted, and for four it cannot bear, A servant when he reigneth; a fool when he is filled with meat, an odious woman when she is married, and a handmaid that is heir to her mistress. (Proverbs 30:21)

The writer says, "You want to see the four repulsive wonders of the world, four things guaranteed to make you sick—here they are: a slave become a king; a fool who eats too much; a cantankerous woman that traps a man, or a slave girl that usurps her mistress's authority. They all four create the same level of disgust. So the principle is this: a glutton not only makes himself sick, he makes everyone sick who watches him, too.

So there you have a God's-eye view of the stuffed Christian. Shall we paraphrase and condense it? We shall. Here it is: don't let food control you. God's man knows when to eat and when to quit, and be extra careful if you're dining above your means. There is a wealth of pitfalls that await you when you fall prey to rich food at a rich man's table. Don't even fellowship with drunkards and gluttons. The path they lead you down heads to poverty by way of drowsiness. And don't go too heavy on the delicacies of life; they're to be used in moderation. Too many goodies will make you sick. The portrait is vivid: the man who stuffs himself is exalting himself, and both are disgusting. In fact, the man who eats too much is one of the four most sickening things in all the world. So that's what it says. So saith Proverbs about gluttony.

Now we know what gluttony is, and we know what gluttony does. What is God trying to say spiritually to us? I believe we need to take a quick trip back into the wilderness with Israel to see the mind of God and the heart of God. We're going to take a look at one time God invoked a diet on a whole nation to see what He was after. We'll look first at Exodus chapter 16, and while you're turning there, let me remind you that gluttony and obesity are not synonyms. Some of life's toothpicks are gluttons, and some of life's pork chops are not. Some people can feed their faces into oblivion and never gain

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an ounce, and others need only to smell food and their clothes get too tight. If you're one of those Miss Twiggy's who couldn't gain weight if you bathed in concrete, please don't become the judge and jury of every big believer in town. We are to watch our weight—our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit—and obviously God's testimony is hindered by bloated, unkempt temples. And I'm going on a diet tomorrow—today! Just like some of the rest of you. But God didn't make all these temples with the same blueprints. He made some tall and thin—skyscrapers. He made some short and stocky. He made some easily expandable. He made some that seem to be compressed for life. The issue here is not obesity, but gluttony, and some of life's greatest gluttons are pharisaical beanpoles.

Now with that scathing revelation of an obvious sore spot in my life, we proceed to Exodus chapter 16, and we'll begin reading with verse 2. It has been forty-five days since their tour guide had escorted them out of Egypt with a bit of fanfare. In verse 2 of chapter 16 we read this:

The whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and they cried, "Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and when we did eat bread to the full, for you brought us forth into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." (Exodus 16:2)

In other words, they said, "We were fat, full and happy in Egypt. We had all the food we could eat. Why, why didn't God just leave us to die there? At least we would have died on a full stomach. You brought us here to watch us starve, Moses." Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you."

God put the whole nation on a diet. After it was all over, He told us why in Deuteronomy, chapter 8, if you want to turn there.

And thou shalt remember all the way the Lord thy God led thee these forty years, in order to humble you and to test you; in order to expose what was really in your hearts, whether or not you really loved the Lord.

And He humbled you, and made you get hungry. Then He fed you with manna, which you had never seen before—your parents had never seen it either; it was an all—new product—that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. (Deuteronomy 8:2,3)

Sound familiar? They are the same words Jesus quoted to

Satan in Matthew, chapter 4.

Now you've all heard of the Cambridge diet, the Atkins diet, and the Scarsdale diet; let's look quickly at the wafer diet, prescribed by Doctor Jehovah for a gluttonous Israel. I'm going to give you eight questions and eight answers about the diet.

Question 1: What was the reason for the diet?

Answer: God wanted to teach them spiritual truth, and He wanted to deal with an ungrateful spirit. So He took away their fancy food.

Question 2: What was the consistency of the diet?

Answer: Bland. They were little, inconspicuous wafers never seen before, so innocuous that they named them "manna," meaning, "What's this stuff?"

Question 3: What was the variety of the diet?

Answer: None. Manna on Monday, manna on Tuesday, manna on Wednesday. On Thursday—surprise! Manna! And on and on.

Question 4: What was the length of the diet?

Answer: Only forty years; 480 months, 14,406 days.

Question 5: What was the purpose of the diet?

Answer: That they might know that man does not live by bread alone—the physical world is not where it's at—but by every word God utters. That's man's real food.

God met their every need. Their shoes never wore out. Their manna never ceased to fall. But He gave them a bland, consistent, supernatural diet so that they would not become enamored with the satisfaction of seafood platters and ribeye dinners, and forget the Bread come down from heaven. Their physical food ceased to be demonstrably attractive, rather to call attention to the attractiveness of their God, Who never ceased to meet their needs and to call attention to the fact that the real Manna was yet to come.

Question 6: How perishable was their diet?

Answer: Very. It only lasted one day at a time, so if they tried to hoard it, it spoiled (except, of course, on the day before the Sabbath.) But God said, "Real Bread is coming,

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and It and you will never perish. But you must partake of it every day, one day at a time, to be nourished.” You see, God was using food to call attention to Himself. He still does. God wanted His children to be temperate in their eating, so they would be free to feed on Him. He still does.

Question #7: What was His children’s response?

Answer: They murmured. God limited what they ate to reveal Himself as great, and here’s their response: Numbers chapter 11 and verse 4:

And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting; and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, “Who will give us flesh (meat) to eat?”

We remember the fish we did eat in Egypt, (Boy, was that good stuff!) the cucumbers, (the balanced diet we had,) the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; (No wonder they shipped them out of the country!)

But now our soul is dried up. There’s nothing to eat but manna, manna, manna! (Numbers 11:4-6)

Their response: anger, discontentment, an unhealthy desire to go back to the life from which God had already delivered them. They murmured!

Question #8: What was God’s reaction to their response?

Answer:

There went forth a wind that day, and brought forth quails from the sea (Just what they’d ordered, fresh from the ever-lovin’ ovens of Heaven.) And they fell until they were stacked three feet high for miles around. And the people gathered them and stuffed them into their mouths like fools, and at that moment God smote them with a plague, because they lusted for fancy food instead of being grateful for what a sovereign God had provided. (Numbers 11:31-33 paraphrase)

Psalms 106 describes the heart of God.

They lusted exceedingly in the wilderness; they tempted God in the desert; He gave them their request, but sent a leanness into their soul. (Psalms 106:14)

You see, my friend, there is a direct correlation between our ability to accept God’s demand for temperance in physical matters and our capacity to receive the riches of God’s spiritual blessings. There is a direct relationship between the self-control we exercise

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in the physical realm and the blessings we receive in the spiritual realm. If we allow physical lust to control us, even what we eat, we deny God's Spirit the privilege of teaching us spiritual truths—truth we can only learn under the umbrella of self-control. The intermediate step, then, is self-control in what we eat. The ultimate spiritual tool in accomplishing this purpose is fasting. Total control of the desires of the stomach to free us for greater control of the desires of the Spirit for a season. From feasting to fasting—that's the subject of our next study together, but in the meantime I'll remind you, as I remind myself, that gluttony is not pleasing to God. God wants us to eat. He wants us to enjoy it, but not to become controlled by it, because inside each of us lives that rebellious little child called "Appetite." (I wanted to call him "E.T." but that was too popular at the moment.) So let's call him "E.H.," which stands for "eternally hungry." E.H. will always want more. He'll respond to sight; he can't resist pie a la mode if he sees it. He'll respond to smell; just the odor of fresh-baked bread, and he cries out in anguish. He'll respond to taste. Once you feed him, he never knows when to stop. He'll respond to memory; just thinking about how good that last hot-fudge sundae was will drive him wild. "Daddy! Mommy!" E.H. cries. "Gimme more! Gimme more!"

But you know what? He also responds to God. You exercise self-control, and say, "No, E.H., no more. You've had enough. Because the more I feed you, the less hunger I seem to have for the real Bread that satisfies my spirit. So I'll feed you, E.H., but I'll control how much, and what, and when." That's God's way. Because it pleases God; oh, how it pleases God when the appetites and the emotions of His children are not in control, but under control. So we'll close with this quick little note to E.H.

(See poem next page.)

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DEAR REBELLIOUS APPETITE

Dear Rebellious Appetite,
Stop moving me around.
Stop driving me to gorge myself
Until my spirit's bound.

God never meant for you to tell
My spirit what to do;
God meant for me to dictate
Just what I'll feed to you!

Dear Rebellious Appetite,
You don't need that apple pie.
You don't need that extra helping.
You can skip it. You won't die.

You're just an untrained baby
That lives inside of me, and
Given too much freedom,
You'll crush what I can be.

So, dear rebellious appetite,
With your desires so grand,
By faith I'm placing your control
In God's unswerving hand.

Now I'll but feed you what you need.
We'll write a brand-new story
Entitled, "God is in control;
To Him be all the glory."

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