

What Should We Eat?

From the Series, “Life Answers in Genesis”

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Introduction

Every November, The United States celebrates Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is a uniquely American holiday. When we think of Thanksgiving, we think of lots of things. Some people think of Pilgrims. Some people think of football games and parades. I sometimes find myself dropping in on the Macy’s parade. I always do so by watching on TV from the comfort of my living room. I’m afraid I’m not one for the crowds you run in downtown New York City, much less the weather, which tends to be cold at Thanksgiving.

Now, at some point, when we think about Thanksgiving, everyone thinks about food.



Food is a big part of Thanksgiving. Having grown up in America, I look forward to Turkey. We now have people from all over the world living in America, so today, the menus may vary. But, everyone wants to be part of a special meal at Thanksgiving. Everybody loves to celebrate major events with food.

We’re in our series “Life Answers in Genesis”. Life is full of questions. It’s amazing how many answers you find by opening the Bible and reading the first book. People have questions like “Is there ultimate truth?”, “Am I important?”, or “Does life have meaning?” Those questions all have answers in Genesis, and we’ve discussed those topics in our series.

But somehow, all that question-asking takes a lot of energy. It’s hard work asking questions and seeking out answers. So, sooner or later, we wind up asking the question:

What do we have to eat?



The Bible talks about a lot of topics - One of the topics is food. So today, we're going to ask the important life question: What should we eat?

There are two reasons we want to look at this topic. First, God includes this topic in his Word, so it's important. Second, if we understand this topic, we understand a lot of things about how the world works. With those things in mind, let's see what the Book of Genesis (and what the rest of the Bible) has to say about what we should eat.

I. What the Bible Initially Tells Us About Food

Our series is based on the idea that many of the answers we ask in life are answered in Genesis. In a moment, we'll go there. Before we do that though, we need to jump ahead in the Bible to the words of our Lord, Jesus Christ. He shared something that should be the foundation of our study:

It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:4)

Here's the first and overriding principle of what the Bible says about food:

Principle #1
God doesn't want us obsessing about food.

Food is important, but our relationship with God is much more important. That's where we start. Having said that, as I mentioned a moment ago, God talks about food in his Word, the Bible. So, let's look in Genesis.

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)

We’ll look at the substance of this statement in a little bit. Right now, I want to make a point. There’s a very important word in this passage. It’s the first word: “Then”.

“Then God said...”

The point is this: God said and did a lot of things prior to this. We’ve spent several sessions talking about those things.

Before we move on, let’s remind ourselves about a summary of what we’ve learned from that study.

- God is First.
- God is in control.
- God knows what he’s doing.
- God is good.
- God cherishes me.

Let’s focus on the point, “God knows what he’s doing.” It’s a very practical statement, and very helpful when we make decisions. Today we’ll see a good example of why it’s important.



God demonstrated that he knew what he’s doing when he built our universe. It’s a fantastic display of God’s power and wisdom. We’ve spent considerable time talking about that in our series, so we won’t spend more time there right now.

After creating this fantastic universe, and after creating the animals with their fantastic variety and complexity, God created humans. Humans were the pinnacle, the highlight of his creation. After he did that, he put them into a garden full of food.

Question: When he did that, do you think God knew what he was doing?

And the answer is: Of course, he did. He designed us. He knows what's best for us.



Designers of any mechanism know the best fuel for what they design. If you have a standard American automobile, it probably needs gasoline to run. More than that, it probably needs a specific grade of gasoline:

- Regular (87 octane)
- Mid-Grade (89 octane)
- Premium (92)

If you put low-grade, regular gasoline into an expensive car that's designed to run on Premium, you'll likely run into problems. Surprisingly, if you put high-grade gas into a car designed to run on regular, you may also create problems.

Here's another thing: Many large trucks run on diesel fuel. Don't try putting diesel fuel into a vehicle designed for gasoline. You'll have big problems.

The people who design vehicles know what kind of fuel the vehicles need. Here's an important point: ***The designers tell us what that fuel is.*** My car has a little sticker just inside the fuel port. It tells me clearly what fuel to put in. My car has an operator's manual. It tells me clearly what fuel to put in. The designers of any vehicle have designed the vehicle for a specific fuel, and they tell us what that fuel is. If you use the correct fuel, your vehicle runs well. If you don't use that fuel, you'll run into problems.

Here's are the questions for us today: ***Has our designer, the designer of bodies, designed us to run on a specific fuel? Has he told us what that fuel is?***

Many people think that the answer to those question is "yes". But, is that what the Bible teaches? Let's find out. We'll read our opening Scripture passage again. This time we'll go further than the first word.

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)

So, God, who knows what he’s doing, puts Adam and Eve on planet earth and tells them that they should eat certain things. Let’s call those things, “God’s Food Group Number 1”. God’s food group number 1 has: All plants with seeds.

- Fruit.
- Vegetables.
- Nuts.
- Seeds.
- Grains.

From this, let me state a principle.

Principle #2
We can eat the food that God has officially given to us.

Note: Am I saying we should only eat fruits and vegetable? We’ll get to that in a little bit. Before we do that, let’s hit another important point. Right about now, someone in the crowd is saying, “Isn’t this obvious?” “Doesn’t everybody know that you can eat Fruit? Even more, aren’t we **supposed** to eat Fruit?”

Well, not so fast. Did you know that Fruit is evil?



Yes, that’s right. You’re looking at a picture of Dr. Annette Bosworth. She is one of the proponents of a low-carbohydrate diet. This image is from YouTube, and accompanies a video entitled, “Why Fruit is Evil – Sugar in Fruit is Bad for Your Health”. She thinks you should avoid fruit. You should eat only low-sugar vegetables and meat.

Dr. Bosworth isn’t alone – there are lots of people like her in bookstores and all over the Internet. Here’s an important note: ***She says that science backs her up.*** There have been

studies done to prove her ideas. *Or so she says.* She's a medical doctor; she has "M.D." after her name. So, whatever she says must be true, right?

If that's not surprising enough, there are others out there with interesting ideas about food. Did you know that grain is bad for you? You should avoid most grains, or so some say, because grain creates all kinds of problems. You should also avoid legumes; this includes beans, peas, and peanuts among other foods. Many of the people who say these things claim that science backs them up. Studies have been done, they say, that support their views.

How have we gotten to this point? This is why we started with the idea that, if we understand what the Bible has to say about food, we learn not only about food, but we learn a lot about how the world works.

Here's how we got to this point.

II. Biblical Thought is often Challenged.

We need to understand some things about science.

One of the most fundamental of truths in the Bible is that we have a Creator. This creator has unimaginable power and intelligence. To make that practical, as we've said several times now, that means God knows what he's doing. On top of that, our Creator cares about us; he cherishes us, and he talks to us.

Many people reject this. They don't believe in a creator. We've all heard the title: These folks are known as atheists.

If you're a scientist, and you reject the idea that the universe has a Creator, you have to find another explanation for this fantastic universe that we live in. The atheist explains our universe by saying that it's a product of chance.

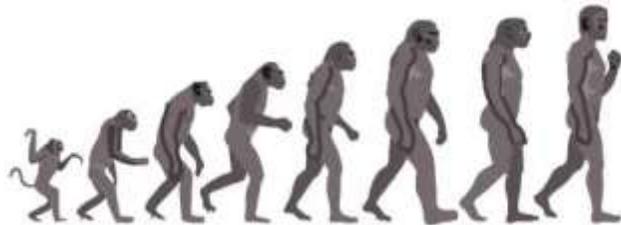


Everything, to the atheist, is random. The whole universe is just little atoms bumping into each other and producing all kinds of different things. At some point, this process, we are told, produced life. The randomly-produced life randomly became complex.

Here's an important foundational principle for people who think this way:

- The random life, we are told, ran into all different kinds of random conditions on our planet.
- The random life **adapted** to those random conditions.
- If the random life ran into plants, the life learned to eat the plants.
- Some of the random life decided to eat other life.

At some point, the random life produced primates which later become humans. You've all seen the chart:



There are a number of problems with this concept. **The biggest problem is that it's based on an assumption, not facts.** As we've said in other places in our series, many famous scientists don't hold to this notion that the universe can only be here because of chance.

For now, let's concentrate on a problem that relates to our topic. Along the way in all this random adapting, the animals ate different things. At one point, some random monkeys were sitting in a tree eating fruit that they found. Here we see the classic monkey with a banana.



Later, when the monkeys evolved, they came down from the trees, and they ate other vegetable matter that they found on the ground. This included vegetables, legumes and grain.

So, there are some who say evolution teaches that we should be **vegetarians**. We **should** eat fruit, vegetables, grain, and legumes because that's what we were **evolved** to eat. These people would say that humans eventually learned how to hunt, but when they did, that introduced all kinds of health issues. We are capable of eating meat, these people say, but it's not our best fuel.

These people claim they have scientific studies to back them up.

Others say that random humans eventually evolved and learned to make weapons, and they learned how to hunt.

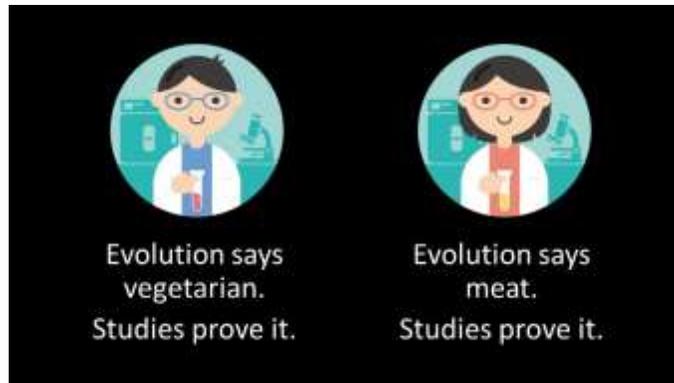


These were loosely called the “cave men”. So, some people who rely on evolutionary theory say we should eat like the cave men. Those who hold this view say we should eat mostly protein and fat. When the cavemen couldn't find meat, we are told, they ate vegetables. But not grain, and not legumes. There is some discussion about whether they ate fruit, and if so, how much. They may have eaten only at small amounts of fruit, when it was in season.

People in this camp say that humans ran into big problems when they started farming. They say that introducing grain and dairy products into their diet produced humans who were smaller, weaker, and more prone to illness. This is called the **Paleo** diet or in some related cases, the **low-carbohydrate** diet.

People who hold this view also say they have studies to back them up.

Well, right away, we see a problem.



We have at least two groups of people who say their theories on diet are the logical product of evolutionary thought. They both claim they have studies to back them up. But, they have totally different ideas about how we should eat.

How do we approach this dilemma? We have to understand science. Here are some important facts:

- Science is complex.
- Science is often imperfect.
- Scientists often disagree.
- The history of science is littered with ideas once thought to be true, but which were later disproven.

Scientists sometimes get it right. Sometimes, scientists get it wrong. Any good scientist or historian will tell you this is true. Because of this, it's OK to be skeptical when someone makes the broad statement that something can't be argued because "science" proves it.

So, when someone tells you to "eat like the cavemen" because "science proves it", it's OK to be skeptical. When someone tells you to be a vegetarian because "science proves it", again, it's OK to be skeptical.

Let's get back to our main idea. God created humans and put them on a planet full of food. ***What if he knew what he was doing?*** In that case, let's read some more about what the Bible says about us and the food we eat.

III. More about what the Bible says

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (Genesis 2:15)

Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man." Later she

gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.
(Genesis 4:1-2)

We learn something important from the first chapters of Genesis. We're told in the Scripture that the first humans were not cavemen. They were not hunter-gatherers. **They were farmers.** They grew their food. They domesticated animals.

At that time, humans were officially given plants to eat. Because they had animals on their farms, they may have consumed dairy products. There are many believers who look at this and suggest that all believers should limit their diet to plants, and maybe dairy products. There is no doubt about how the first humans ate, so there is some validity to this kind of thinking.

I've just said we need to be careful with science, but not to the point where we ignore it. Let's look at some important observations by a scientist.



You're looking right now at a picture of Christina Warinner. She's an anthropologist from Harvard. In this picture, she's examining a very old skull. Anthropologists do different things, but one of the things they do is dig. Sometimes, they dig up people. This may sound a bit impolite, but it's how some science works.

Normally, when you bury people, you plan on them staying in the ground. In reality, sometimes others come along later and dig up the buried people. Now, although impolite, this isn't a problem, because all the dug-up people have something in common: **They're all dead.** Every single one. There are no records of anthropologists digging up a 10,000 year old grave and the person inside says, "Thanks - It was really stuffy in there!" The bodies certainly don't complain about being disturbed. This sounds like I'm just kidding, but please file that fact away for a few minutes.

Back to Dr. Warinner - When she digs up old bodies, she looks at their teeth. Here's why: If you ever visit a dentist, the dentist will likely give your teeth a professional cleaning. This involves scraping off calcium deposits that build up on your teeth over time. If you go often, the calcium deposits are minor. If you never go, as was the case with ancient peoples, the deposits

become notable. When Dr. Warinner looks at the calcium deposits of people who have been buried for tens of thousands of years, do you know what she finds in there? Grain. Ancient people ate a lot of grain, and some of it got stuck in their teeth. Apparently, toothpicks were invented fairly late in human history. So, Dr. Warinner claims she has debunked the idea that all ancient people were all cavemen who only ate only meat and vegetables.

As I said, scientists often disagree with each other.

So, as I said, eating plant-based foods is clearly legitimate. I don't fault anybody who wants to be a vegetarian. **But, should we only eat plants?** Let's read another passage.

Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. (Genesis 9:1-3)

God now says that he has given humankind everything that moves, along with plants. Everything. Again, our question: **Did God know what he was doing when he did this?** Again, I would say, "of course".

God gave only one limitation to this statement, that we see in verse 4.

But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. (Genesis 9:4)

Theologians have debated the meaning of this. I'm going to quickly give my opinion. God constantly makes distinctions between humans and animals. We are not animals. We are much higher. A predator, such as a lion or wolf, will catch another animal and eat it **while it's still alive**. It's not pretty. If you want to have your lunch ruined, watch a documentary about how predators conduct themselves out in the wild. We are to be different.

Blood is a sign of life. God says we may choose to eat animals, but we should allow them to live in humane ways, and when it comes time to eat them, we are to slaughter them in a humane way. Only when the animal is dead can we eat it. Otherwise, we're no different than lower animals.

We're running out of time, and we've only begun to hit on what the Bible says about food. Let's look at just a few more passages before we close.

By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,

since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return.” (Genesis 3:19)

We talked about this last week, but let’s summarize it in one sentence: ***According to the Bible, the world is broken, and we’re broken, too.*** We all die someday. The reason I joked earlier about buried people being universally dead is that I occasionally hear people say that eating the right foods could make you avoid aging forever. Sorry, no. That has never worked. No amount of right-eating will prevent our eventual demise. Understand that, whatever organism, human or otherwise that was ever dug up, they often ate the food they were “evolved” to eat. This didn’t prevent any of them from dying.

Let me make an observation: We’re all broken, and we show it in different ways at different times. This is manifested in many ways, including our health. We’re all different, so we break in different ways, at different times.

For example: Some people have allergies. There are people so allergic to common things that their lives are in danger if they make contact. Some people are allergic to peanuts. Some of those people are so allergic that consuming one peanut could kill them. Some people are allergic to gluten in grain products. They must eat special, gluten-free bread or avoid grains altogether. Otherwise, they can get very sick. Because of this, we see an obvious fact: Food that is healthy for one person can be poisonous to another.

This leads us to our next principle:

Principle #3:

Because we live in a broken world, sometimes we can’t eat things that others can. So, it’s OK to try alternate diets if they work for you.

Because of this fact, I’m not troubled when I hear that someone who struggled with illness tried a new way of eating and felt better. If there are people who can’t process peanuts, maybe there are people born who can’t process meat? If those people try a vegetarian diet, they may feel better. Other people may have trouble processing sugars and carbohydrates. Those people develop blood sugar problems.

To complicate things a little further, some people may lose the ability to process certain foods as they age. Something you could eat as a child may not work so well as you get older. I’m one of those people. When I was young, I could eat all kinds of carbs and sugars. A few years ago, I found that I was developing blood sugar issues. I’ve been able to address that by avoiding refined flours and refined sugars, and by taking a minimal dosage of a medication that helps people in my situation. I’m able to handle small amounts of complex sugars like honey and maple syrup, but others in my situation can’t tolerate them. More about that in a minute.

So, I never criticize people for going on specialty diets. ***I just ask them to realize that what works for them may not work for others. And, if a given food works for them, it's not because they're eating what they're 'evolved' to eat - They've just found a type of food that works for them while avoiding foods that don't.***

To add to this pile, we do all kinds of things to our food that ancient people didn't do. We process our food. We pull it apart and put it back together in odd ways. We take whole wheat and we remove the bran and the wheat germ. We take sweet things and pull out everything that's not sweet, making substances like table sugar and corn syrup. There are a lot of concerns about those substances. When we refine food, we're left with products that have much less nutrition than the food that God made for us. Add to this, we irradiate our food. We genetically modify our food. We coat our food with all kinds of chemicals that do everything from keeping bugs away to making the food last a long time on store shelves. ***In other words, we act as though God didn't know what he was doing. We think we can easily improve our food by tinkering with it.***

There may be something to the notion that we should try to eat our food, whenever we can, the way God made it. This is because he knew what he was doing when he made the food. So, if you can afford organic, whole foods, give it a try.

This leads us to a fourth principle:

Principle #4
Whenever you can, eat food the way God made it.

Let's look at one more passage:

The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey... (Exodus 3:7-8)

Imagine this: God sees his chosen people suffering, so he rescues them. He then takes them to a very special place, the "Promised Land".



Question: Would God do all of this and then surround his chosen people with poison? No, he wouldn't do that because he loves his chosen people, and because he knows what he's doing. He would fill that land with food that's good to eat and good for the people who ate it.

So, what kind of food did people eat in the "promised land". Well, we just read that they had milk and honey; lots of it. So, that makes dairy OK. It makes natural sweeteners like honey OK. The people had abundant grain that they ate in different ways. They probably ate whole grains. And, they sometimes ate animals that roamed on pasture lands and were slaughtered in humane ways.

Now again, I want to be careful mentioning science and studies, but there is one study that was very interesting. It's called: **The Blue Zone Study**. The researchers who conducted this study asked three simple questions:

- Where are the people on our planet who live the longest, healthiest lives?
- What do they eat?
- How do they live (what are their activities)?

When these researchers looked around, they found five regions they called "Blue zones". These places have the most people who lived to be a hundred years old. If people don't live to a hundred, they tend to die in their sleep at a very advanced age, after a healthy life, rather than suffer from debilitating, chronic illnesses. Do you know that these people eat? **They eat all the things God gave his chosen people in the promised land.**

Important note: I'm not a doctor, so talk to your doctor before making major changes in your diet. However, many doctors will applaud if you tell them that you're cutting down on processed foods and trying to include whole foods in your diet. This is also called a "Mediterranean" diet.

Conclusion

Let's pull this all together. The Bible talks a lot about food. We've only scratched the surface.

We've learned some important principles.

Food Principle #1: God doesn't want us obsessing about food.

- Food is important, but our relationship with God is much more important.

Food Principle #2: We can eat the food that God says he gave to us.

- That includes plants ***and*** animals.

Food Principle #3: Because we live in a broken world, sometimes we can't eat things that others can.

- So, it's OK to try alternate diets if they work for you.

Food Principle #4: When you can, eat food the way God made it.

Another point we learned along the way: Science can be helpful, but it's imperfect.

- So, show reasonable skepticism when someone tells you to follow a specialty diet because "science" says so.
- In fact, it's OK to show reasonable skepticism anytime someone tells you that something cannot be argued because "science" says so.

Finally:

In all of this, and in other areas of your life, work on the assumption that God cherishes you, and he knows what he's doing.